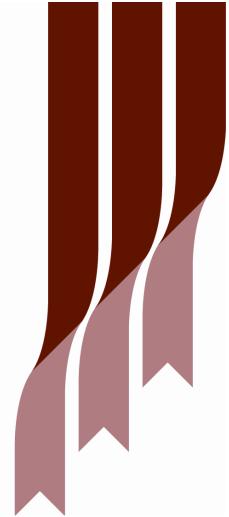


SCOTTISH INSTITUTE
FOR EXCELLENCE IN
SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION



INTEGRATED ASSESSMENT

Involvement of users and carers

Executive summary of the practice audit
March 2004

Summarised by Patricia Rouland
SIESWE

Introduction

This project is part of the series of Integrated Assessment Projects that aim to develop innovative, flexible and aligned assessment methods to promote deep learning for effective and ethical practice within the new social work degree. The project has a clear focus on service users and carers.

As part of the project, a practice audit of current, recent and planned arrangements for enhancing the contribution of service users, carers and employers to the assessment of social work students was conducted across Scotland.

Findings of the audit

Current and suggested arrangements – service user and carer perspective

a) On social workers, their training and assessment

- Social workers should be honest, respectful, good listeners and communicators.
- Although it is often difficult to build and maintain relationships with social workers; the importance of such relationships is valued.
- Social workers should extend their knowledge base, e.g. work on medical issues, etc.
- There are not enough male and older social workers.
- Service users and carers do acknowledge that the lack of resources does not facilitate the job of social workers.

b) On their involvement in assessing students

- The current level of involvement of service users and carers is very low.
- Service users and carers could give guidance to students without being formally involved in their assessment, or meet face to face with them to talk about their experiences.

Current and suggested arrangements – HEIs, practice teachers and students

a) Current and potential for involvement in governance

- With the exception of the Open University's School of Health and Social Welfare, there is currently no participation of service users and carers on boards or committees within HEIs in Scotland.
- Practice teachers see the scope for service users and carers to be involved in the assessment of students in the future, mainly focusing on university-based processes e.g. recruitment and selection of students, teaching, course planning.

- HEIs in their planning for the new degree are indicating a range of opportunities for involvement.

b) Practice learning: current practice and future intentions

- Most practice teachers seek the views of service users and carers in assessing students on placement. A whole range of methods are used for getting feedback. Different communication strategies are also developed, taking into account language and cultural issues, and developmental stages of levels of literacy.
- A range of ideas in relation to the format for getting feedback was suggested by practice teachers and students. Work is needed to identify or design and evaluate the appropriate methods.
- Students assessments could be placed in a wider context, e.g. at an organisational level in the context of the 'whole' service.

c) User and carer involvement in teaching

- All HEIs report that service users and carers are involved in teaching, usually in 'some modules'. However they are not involved in any other aspects of university-based assessment.
- Students stressed the important role of service users and carers in the teaching process. Practice teachers saw potential for involvement of service users and carers in teaching both to students and to lecturers, and in preparing teaching materials.
- Service users and carers could contribute in many ways to the assessment of social work students, for example in carers group and service users fora, which could review learning objectives and highlight learning needs for students and qualified social workers.

Issues and challenges in involving service users and carers in the assessment of social work students

a) Nature and value of feedback

- Involvement of service users and carers is deemed essential for quality assessments.
- Feedback should be sensitively managed, and there is a need for developing giving and receiving feedback skills.
- Very few practice teachers made the distinction between service users and carers.

c) When no feedback is sought

- The small number of practice teachers not seeking feedback raised their concerns about its validity and utility.
- Some service users and carers may consider this exercise as a burden.

c) Difficulties experienced or anticipated

- Methods of getting feedback
- Accessing feedback
- Time constraints
- Empowering service users and carers
- Confidentiality
- Service issues

Enabling service users and carers to be involved

The following areas need to be developed:

- Clarifications of the expectations, roles and benefits for service users and carers;
- Training of service users and carers;
- Expense reimbursement;
- Inclusion of diverse and marginalised perspectives, such as those of black and minority ethnic groups;
- Avoiding consultation overload.

The full report is available on the SIESWE website www.sieswe.org, or directly from Patricia Rouland, Institute Projects Administrator, on 01382 464419 or by email p.rouland@dundee.ac.uk