

**Social Work Education in Scotland  
Briefing Paper for External Examiners' Event**

**London, 5 March 2010**

**1. Social Work Courses in Scotland**

There are 17 social work degree courses in Scotland offered by eight HEIs, of which 11 are undergraduate courses and six postgraduate. Undergraduate courses are mostly delivered full-time over a period of four years. The exceptions are the OU employment based route and two Robert Gordon University courses delivered on a distance learning basis, one of which is their residential child care course which is funded by the Scottish Government through the Scottish Institute for Residential Child Care (SIRRC). The other residential child care route funded by SIRCC is delivered by Glasgow School of Social Work. The Key Capabilities in Child Care and Protection have now been fully embedded in all social work programmes.

This summer will see the third Scottish event for External Examiners. This is an opportunity for SSSC to highlight issues from the previous reporting year and to give Externals an opportunity to discuss their own issues. The External Examiner's Annual Report forms a key contribution to our quality assurance of the degree and we hope at the next Scottish event to spend some time discussing the quantity and quality of information it contains, as this is currently variable.

**2. Cohort numbers**

Our Annual Review of Trends in Qualifying Social Work Training in Scotland 2007/08 (soon to be published) shows that in that year 721 students were admitted onto social work degree courses. This is a slight increase in numbers from the previous year, as has been the trend since the degree started in 2004. There was an increase in applications to PG courses and a decrease in applications to UG courses. Returns for 2008/09 show that 622 students were admitted, which was the target number. We are also seeing an increase in the number of admissions in the 16-24 year age band, while the number of 25-34 year olds being admitted is decreasing. In 2008/09 a total of 1984 students were undertaking social work training in Scotland. Progression rates remain good across all programmes, with an increase in the number of students who have withdrawn from studies returning at a later date. The majority

of withdrawals are due to personal reasons or ill health. In 2008/09 13 students had their studies terminated.

### **3. Widening Participation**

A Widening Participation event was held in September last year in partnership with the OU. In 2007/08 81% of admissions were female and 19% male. The number of men admitted to courses has increased slightly since 2004. 5% of students have a black or minority ethnic background, though a significant number of these are international rather than Scottish students. This figure has remained relatively consistent since the degree was introduced in 2004. It is difficult to put a precise figure on the number of disabled students as many do not disclose disability or do so at a later stage. 4% of students admitted in 2007/08 disclosed that they had a disability. SSSC is currently working with the General Teaching Council of Scotland to produce Guidance for supporting disabled students. An impact assessment for the Framework for Social Work Education in Scotland (2003) in respect of disability equality, establishing genuine competence standards and providing proposals for the revision of the document is also currently underway.

### **4. Renewals of Approval**

All HEIs have now had their SSSC 5 year approval renewed, except for the OU, which is due to take place later this year. The process has been different for each HEI, some renewal events having been tailored to coincide with HEI internal subject or school reviews and some being SSSC-led. A wide range of stakeholders was involved at all renewal events, including external examiners, students, people who use services and employers.

### **5. Annual Monitoring**

Each HEI is linked with an SSSC Education and Workforce Development Adviser for purposes of annual monitoring and developmental support. Last year we introduced a new system for annual monitoring returns (AMR). Rather than having to complete a lengthy AMR proforma we asked the HEIs to complete a spreadsheet for quantitative data and provided them with a check list of documents to submit from their own internal QA processes. The external examiner's report is included in this and is seen as crucial.

## **6. Engagement and Enhancement**

SSSC operates a quality enhancement model in its work with providers. This focuses on particular themes and a two day event was held in October 2009 to review the current themes and identify new ones. The event involved a wide range of stakeholders, including HEIs, employers, people who use services, carers, students and newly qualified social workers. A number of issues were identified for further consultation and prioritisation. These broadly related to partnership, access and admission, curriculum, practice learning, assessment, and transition into employment.

## **7. Practice Learning**

The supply of practice learning opportunities continues to be problematic in most parts of the country despite a range of innovative approaches being developed by HEIs and their partners.

Last year SSSC and Scottish Government held a series of meetings with key stakeholders to reflect on the aims and success of Confidence in Practice Learning (2004) as a framework for practice learning in the degree. While stakeholders generally agreed it was still a useful document there was consensus that some changes were required. These included issues relating to the daily fee, engagement of employers in practice learning, clarification of expectations of statutory practice learning opportunities, and the level of PLQ(SS) required for practice teachers. SSSC will have further discussions with Scottish Government based on this feedback.

A project is currently underway to benchmark the Standards in Social Work Education (SiSWE) against the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). The project report will be available in April. The outcomes of this project will be a language and materials through which to assess applied knowledge in practice at different SCQF levels, and a pilot to test the materials and language in practice with feedback from stakeholders about the usefulness of the approach.

Approved programmes leading to the Practice Learning Qualifications (Social Services) (PLQ(SS)) at SCQF levels 9, 10 and 11 have become established across the country. All HEIs have an expectation that practice teachers will be qualified, but there is currently some debate about whether SCQF level 9 or 10 is the appropriate level.

## **8. Funding to support the involvement of service users and carers in SW Education.**

For the past two years Scottish Government has granted £5K to each HEI to support service user and carer involvement in the degree. The grant is disbursed by SSSC and HEIs are about to report back on how they have used the grant this year. We are waiting to hear if the grant has been agreed again in next year's budget.

## **9. Evaluation of the degree in social work**

A specification has been developed with Scottish Government for evaluating the extent to which the degree has met its required learning outcomes. The evaluation will include personalisation and leadership, bringing in employer/HEI enhancement themes and will draw on a number of parallel studies, including an analysis of NQSW PRTL Records of Achievement. The principal respondents will be students and recent graduates, employers, service users and carers and HEIs.

## **10. Post Registration Training and Learning (PRTL) for Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSW)**

SSSC Advisers continue to appraise the PRTL records of all NQSWs within the first 18 months of their registration. We have been meeting with final year students in HEIs and with NQSWs and their employers across the country to try to improve understanding of the PRTL requirements and are now seeing a reduction in the percentage of PRTLs that have to be returned for resubmission.

A research project has been commissioned to evaluate the PRTL submissions of NQSWs to identify whether submissions show evidence of reflection on practice, the types of learning utilised, levels of support offered and unmet support needs, to begin to seek evidence on the extent to which the user and carer experience influences practice and to identify the use of research based evidence informing NQSWs practice.

## **11. Continuous Learning Framework (CLF)**

This framework for professional development has been rolled out across the country and is now being used by an increasing number of agencies to support staff learning and development. Social work students and NQSWs are becoming more aware of CLF and using it as a tool for reflection and evaluation.