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Editorial

Jackie Rafferty, Director, SWAPItsn

In August we will have been formally in existence for a year - time to report back to you. We have facilitated discussions on learning and teaching with academics in Belfast, Bradford, Brighton, Bristol, Cambridge, Durham, Edinburgh and London (next year we hope to make it past L in the alphabet, so we would welcome invitations from Manchester, Strathclyde, Swansea, York, etc.). Visitors to our web site are growing in number and the content is developing rapidly. I can't list everything we have been doing here, but if you are interested in knowing about our activities and outputs, the annual report will soon be on our website.

One major piece of work this year for SWAPItsn staff has been to discover the learning and teaching interests and concerns of social policy and social work teachers. Thank you to all those who completed the head of department and individual academic surveys. We had an excellent response and David Colombi outlines some of the initial findings from the data on pages 8 and 9. This work will provide us with crucial information for planning our work and will be presented at the main social policy and social work conferences. It will also provide us with a baseline for evaluating our impact in terms of enhancing learning and teaching in social policy and social work.

The main theme for this newsletter follows the move this year from Funding Council 'speak' to academic activity in learning and teaching, prompted by the vocabulary of QAA, Subject Review, Benchmarking and Programme

Specifications. We take a not too serious look and are grateful to Norman Jackson and Charlie Cooper for their bravery in going 'head to head' - on pages 6 and 7.

SWAPItsn staff have also been getting up to speed on this topic prompted by the preparation for the workshop on Benchmarking, jointly organised with the Social Policy Association. Our contributions on this topic here include Sue Orton, writing on the role of learning technologies within subject review, and Hilary Burgess' 'Everything you never wanted to know about subject review'. The last newsletter featured David Gladstone on the process of producing the Social Policy Benchmarking statement; this issue features Jackie Powell on developing the Social Work Benchmarking statement. Pat Young and Sue Penna present Sue's approach to teaching a social policy course and we

finish off with our section on 'web watch' and look out for two new elearning resources, one for social policy and one for social work.



Before I finish I just want to publicly congratulate Imogen Taylor who in April moved from her long time home at the University of Bristol to take up the Chair in Social Policy and Social Care at the University of Sussex. Professor Imogen Taylor is co-director of SWAPItsn and her move does not let her off the hook as she is continuing in that role. Finally, thank you to all those who have worked with us over the last year and we look forward to meeting even more of you at the Joint Social Work Education Conference at Derby University on 9/10 July or at the Social Policy Association Conference in Belfast from 25 to 26 July.

Everything you never wanted to know about subject review



Hilary Burgess, Learning and Teaching Adviser, SWAPIts

The imminent round of the QAA's Subject Review is beginning to focus minds across the academic community. Social Policy and Social Work will be amongst the first subjects to be reviewed under the new framework; here we attempt to explain what it entails.

What is Subject Review?

Whilst the primary responsibility for standards lies with each HEI, the funding councils have a statutory responsibility to ensure that the quality of education is assessed. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) takes on this role, on behalf of the four funding councils.

'Academic Review' has been introduced in Scotland for the current academic year, and will come into effect in the rest of the UK from 2001/2. It brings together 'Institutional Review' (formerly known as 'Audit' or 'continuation Audit') with 'Subject Review' (the old QA or TQA process), thus providing both horizontal and vertical perspectives on HE.

How does Subject Review fit with other QAA initiatives?

The QAA's overall policy framework aims to make the intended and actual outcomes of learning:

- more explicit, and
- linked to appropriate institutional and external reference points.

Subject Review is central to this framework. Some other elements of the policy are shown below, along with their link to the Subject Review (SR) process

- National Qualification Frameworks** (one for Scotland, one for the rest of the UK), on which institutional awards can be positioned. In SR reviewers will judge whether the outcomes for a programme are appropriate for the award offered.
- Programme Specifications**, which describe the main learning outcomes for a programme and how these are to be achieved. Programme specifications will be central to SR, and will be attached to the self-evaluation documents
- Subject Benchmarking** information from the 42 subject benchmarking groups. These will be used as reference

points for curriculum design and assessment in subject review.

- Codes of practice** on many aspects of HE have been produced by the QAA (with others soon to arrive). Those likely to be used as a point of reference by reviewers in SR include:
 - assessment of students
 - external Examining and programme approval
 - monitoring and review.

When will it take place?

The QAA will work in cycles of six years, broken down into two periods of three years. The majority of SRs for SP & SW will take place in the first three-year period, with the exception of departments linked to Health Sciences, which will usually be in the second period.

In the year preceding each period, all institutions will complete a form to outline the subjects offered, the programmes for consideration under each subject heading, estimated numbers of FTEs for each programme and the preferred timing for the review of each subject.

The QAA is currently agreeing plans with each institution for the scope and timing of academic reviews for each institution. Where possible this will accommodate preferences for timing, and ensure that reviews coincide with scheduled internal reviews or accreditation visits by professional bodies.

What form will the review take?

The shape and intensity of subject review will vary between institutions. If, following institutional review, the QAA has confidence in an institution's ability to assure quality and standards, a lighter touch may be expected, but where 'there is no convincing evidence of robust and effective systems', greater intensity may be necessary. Additionally, a sample of SRs may be conducted at 'standard intensity'. Since in the early days few institutional reviews will have been conducted using the new format, the QAA has prepared initial institutional profiles, and is discussing with each institution the overall approach to the intensity of review.

The review team, composed of selected and trained peer reviewers, may compress its energies into a single visit, or spread the visits over a period of time (e.g. 6-12 months). As yet, there is little information about how this is being approached and the relative merits of different methods.

The review team will:

- consider the Self-Evaluation Document
- hold meetings with staff and students (and potentially external examiners)
- observe key meetings (eg programme reviews, validation events)
- sample assessed student work

Whilst they have the right to observe teaching, this may not be necessary if the institution can demonstrate that effective mechanisms are in place to assure the quality of teaching, and that student feedback indicates there are no significant deficiencies.

How will the coming SR relate to previous TQA/QAA methods and outcomes?

The new system replaces two previous methods using for assessing quality. Those who have been in HE long enough will recall the 1994-5 exercise in SW and SP, in which departments were rated 'excellent', 'satisfactory' or 'unsatisfactory'. Not all departments had the pleasure of a visit, as some were reviewed only by the self-evaluation document. This system was replaced by the (in)famous 24 point scale, in which departments submitted a SED, had a 3-day visit and were then rated out of 4 in relation to six aspects of provision

- Curriculum Design, Content and Organisation
 - Teaching, Learning and Assessment
 - Student Progression and Achievement
 - Student Support and Guidance
 - Learning Resources
 - Quality Management and Enhancement
- Provided that each aspect was graded 2 or better, the quality of the education was approved.

In a recent statement ('Delivering Lightness of Touch'), the Secretary of State has announced a further change to the process outlined by the QAA, in which the move towards lessening the burden of review has

been taken a step further. The new approach suggests that external review will take place in all departments or schools that achieved a rating of less than 21 points (3x4's plus 3x3's) in the last system, and those not achieving excellent rating in the pre-1995 assessment. However, only a sample of departments that achieved a rating of 21 or over (1995-2001 methodology) or an excellent rating (pre-1995 methodology) will be externally reviewed. This sample may be about 25% of eligible departments in a given institution. All departments will still be expected to produce a full self-evaluation document for the QAA, with a summary for publication. It seems that there are many details of this most recent development to be worked out; we will post information on our web-site as it becomes available.

What goes into the Self-Evaluation Document?

SEDs again form the basis of subject review, and must demonstrate that a subject provider has evaluated:

- the appropriateness of the academic standards set for its programmes
- the effectiveness of the curriculum in delivering the intended outcomes of the programmes
- the effectiveness of the assessment in measuring attainment of the intended outcomes
- the extent to which the intended standards and outcomes are achieved by students
- the quality of learning opportunities provided for the students

Reference should also be made to any relevant QAA Codes of Practice.

The structure for the SED is given in Annex C of the Handbook for Academic Review (see QAA web-site). Peer reviewers test the statements made and make judgements about the appropriateness and effectiveness of the provision. The intended outcomes will be considered in relation to the relevant Benchmarking Statement, and Programme Specifications will be important in clarifying what is taught.

What judgements will be made?

In relation to standards, a single threshold judgement will be made. Reviewers will either

- have *confidence* that the standards are satisfactory and that they will be maintained; or
- have *limited confidence* that standards can be maintained

In the latter case, reviewers will identify areas where improvement is needed, the provider will prepare an improvement strategy, the implementation of which will be monitored by the QAA, followed in some cases by a further review within a calendar year. If standards continue not to be achieved, funding is potentially at risk.

In relation to the **quality of learning opportunities**, separate judgements will be given for

- teaching and learning
- student progression
- learning resources

Each of these will be judged as '*failing*', '*approved*' or '*commendable*', with a narrative identifying strengths and weaknesses. If provision is found to be failing in any one area, provision overall will be designated as failing, and another visit will take place within a year. In the commendable category, reviewers may also identify '*exemplary*' provision, which represents sector-leading practice, is worthy of dissemination to and emulation by other providers and makes a significant contribution to the success of the provision.

What can be done in the way of preparation?

- familiarise yourselves with the relevant benchmarking statement or statements, and consider where your programmes sit in relation to these
- read the subject overview reports from the previous review of social policy and social work
- consult your institution about their plans for timing and formats of reviews
- prepare programme specifications for each programme (your institution may be evolving a standard format)
- review your own mechanisms for quality review: how could these be enhanced?
- think about setting up peer observation of teaching
- consider your departmental teaching and learning strategy and assessment strategy
- think about which of the QAA codes of practice may be relevant to your department
- attend relevant training organised by your institution, SWAP or other bodies
- don't panic!

For further information consult the QAA web-site: www.qaa.ac.uk
SWAP's web-site includes examples of programme specifications for Social Policy and a range of other materials relevant to QAA and Subject Review. www.swap.ac.uk

Impact of SWAPIts



Joan Orme, Chair of the Joint University Council – Social Work Education Committee (JUC-SWEC)

In the fast moving world of social work education it has been a relief to have a facility for easy access to up to date information. In my role as Chair of JUC SWEC I am immensely reliant on the SWAP web pages. Of course I have them book-marked and use them as a gateway to many sources of information. It is useful to have a resumée of news and events brought to my PC at regular intervals. More importantly I know I can depend upon SWAP to broadcast information which is relevant to the social work academic community. Policy briefings, newspaper reports and DoH documents can all be forwarded and they are headlined on the SWAP pages.

The best example of the communication function of SWAP was the announcement of the qualifying training for social work. SWAP informed us all within hours of the announcement and we were able to lobby effectively, ensuring the voice of social work academics was heard.

SWAP has also provided useful bridges between social work and social policy. The documentation on the Benchmark standards for social policy was a useful source of information for social work too. Such collaboration can strengthen the links between the subjects while allowing us to maintain our own identities.

However SWAP is about more than communication. On many occasions I have been able to call upon the expertise of SWAP to inform discussion about developments in learning and teaching. Most notable have been the discussions about research training. Early discussions about web-based material have been enhanced by the knowledge that SWAP could assist us in developing a collaborative approach with the aim of social work courses recruiting doctoral students and ensuring that they have access to high quality teaching materials. This is one example of the ways that SWAP can help improve the quality of learning and teaching in social work, but I am sure that there will be many more and SWEC is pleased to be able to develop its relationship with SWAP.

Social Work Benchmarking – an insider's view

Jackie Powell, Department of Social Work, University of Southampton

It is almost exactly a year ago since the QAA subject benchmarking statements for Social Policy and Social Work were published in April 2000. Reflecting on my involvement as a member of the Social Work group, a number of impressions of that six month period remain clear.

Social work representation for the panel, which was co-ordinated by JUC SWEC, met the QAA's criteria for a reasonable balance in relation to gender, 'old' and 'new' universities, and geographical spread across the UK. This constituted a wide spread of experience in the provision of social work education at sub-degree, degree and masters levels.

The QAA subject benchmarking group for Social Policy and Administration and Social Work held their first meeting in early September 1999 to discuss procedural and planning issues. From then on, members of the two subject groupings meet separately to work on the form and content of their specific statements. This was a unanimously agreed decision and was welcomed by the social work members as a valuable opportunity to specifically focus on social work at a time of considerable change and challenge to its status and regulation across the UK.

Early on in its deliberations, the group agreed that practice (as outlined under paragraph 2.3) should form an important and essential component of learning and assessment. At the same time, it sought to make clear the distinction between social work as an applied academic discipline at honours level and the professional social work qualification. The group was unanimous in seeing its task as complementary to the process of defining professional competence at qualifying level, although it was acutely aware of the possibility of convergence between the two awards.

The mid-December deadline for the production of a draft statement for wider consultation meant that the group had to quickly allocate responsibilities for drafting different sections of the document and establish a clear time scale for circulation and comment on material, redrafting and ultimate agreement. This was achieved through some very effective chairing on the occasions when we did meet up for wider discussion, and via email discussion of various drafts, which sometimes involved quite specific and detailed comment on the subject matter under scrutiny. A somewhat ragged first draft was achieved early in November and this was rapidly modified and redrafted several times as both new and amended text was produced. A final meeting in early December resulted in the production of Draft Seven a few days later and was quickly followed by the draft Benchmarking Statement itself.

After this rapid build up of activity over a couple of months or more, the pressure of constantly checking our emails and the sending and receiving of attachments retreated. However, the consultation process began in earnest early in the New Year. Although the period itself was limited, the number of bodies and institutions invited to comment was extensive. An analysis of the main feedback was undertaken by QAA personnel, and the complete data were made available to all members of the group. Initially a small editorial subgroup met to consider any necessary revisions to the draft statement. Except for matters of clarification, the only changes made were those where more than one response suggested the change. This revised document was then circulated to the wider group who then met for the last time to agree the final statement. This last meeting, like the previous ones, was demanding but productive in achieving its task.

Not surprisingly, the discussions we had throughout this period were wide ranging and differences of view were identified and shared. More often than not this process brought greater clarity to our thinking and contributed to a strong sense of ownership of the final statement. Sometimes drafting via the committee process can be a dissatisfying experience leading to a somewhat disjointed compromise output. Thankfully, this was not the case here. We shared a common sense of purpose and undoubtedly benefited from the good humour, clear thinking and unflagging effort of an excellent Chair. Recognising the opportunity to define, possibly for the first time, the nature and core components of Social Work as an applied discipline, we approached the task with cautious optimism. What has been achieved is a Statement, which confirms our status in higher education and is crucial to our survival there. At the same time it establishes a firm foundation for what constitutes social work as both 'discipline and profession'.

The recent announcement that the qualifying level for social workers in England will be a three-year undergraduate degree has been widely welcomed as a recognition of the complexity of the social work task. In setting out clear standards of achievement, the Benchmark Statement, with its distinctive focus on practice as an integral part of the academic curriculum, provides an obvious starting point for discussions about the content of this degree-level qualification planned for 2003.

How will learning technologies fit into your subject review?

Sue Orton, Learning and Teaching Adviser, SWAPIts

Sue Orton looks at the benchmarking statements and suggests how to integrate learning technologies into your plans for subject review.

Benchmark statements

First, what are the targets for learning technology skills set out in the benchmark statements? Social Work and Social Policy statements both indicate a need to increase the skill level of students (and by definition, staff) in the use of learning technologies.

The Social Policy statement suggests that graduates will:

"...be able to use current information technology and software to word process, to store, retrieve and analyse data and conduct simple forms of computer-based analysis. They will know how to communicate by e-mail, conduct basic on-line electronic database searches and to obtain information relevant to their studies from the internet."

Social Work on the other hand states that graduates will:

"use C&IT methods and techniques for a variety of purposes including professional communications, data storage and retrieval and information searchingincluding electronic searches using the Internet"

There is also an intention for departments to develop skills (I assume of both staff and students) to use a range of approaches to learning, which will include technology.

"...skills, learning assisted by CCTV and video-recording, seminars, presentation of practice studies; the use of communication and information technology systems for accessing data, literature, resources, and contacts."

In the QAA reports, learning technologies fall within the more general provision of Learning Resources. The purchase of and increased pressure to utilise Course Management Systems such as Blackboard (Courseinfo), Lotus LearningSpace and WEB CT (the three market leaders) by institutions, is changing the nature of engagement with learning technologies for academics from optional interest to mandatory. This pressure clearly warrants special consideration. It needs to be

addressed within the context of infrastructure planning, the provision of different learning spaces, staff development needs and team working, so that a department identifies a clear strategy for the development, co-ordination and use of learning technologies within the overall provision of Learning Resources.

Where to start

Establish the level of skill and resources in using learning technologies already within your department. My experience suggests that you will find more expertise in the department than you expect, and that the process of mapping will encourage you, and form part of your subject review.

Staff development – a priority

Out of office courses only provide one element of staff development. Staff need an accessible learning technology mentor, capable of providing support on a daily 'when you need it' basis. One example is at the University of Southampton - where the Faculty of Social Sciences employed someone to design and develop an internal website, with course folders available for each module. In cajoling, encouraging, and supporting staff to develop expertise in using the web for administration and course delivery, the myth that 'it takes ages and I have to know about HTML' was dispelled. Confidence and skill levels are growing rapidly within the Faculty. The appointment of more Learning Technologists is helping here.

Infrastructure planning

Top marks in subject review were gained when infrastructure planning linked to staff development needs was a primary question for university management, rather than an afterthought. Management boards need to take decisive steps to invest here, linking this to educational aims, e.g. to develop lifelong learners or value students' individual learning needs.

Learning spaces

All types of learning spaces are needed. Different spaces offer different learning experiences. Introducing web-based resources can be difficult. Computer labs are not conducive for collaborative discussion or group work and seminar rooms often do not have data points or

equipment. High scores were obtained by institutions offering multi-purpose classrooms, available for formal and informal teaching and for use by large and small groups. Rooms were provided with minimum equipment specifications - TV and video player, overhead projector, telephone/data points, flip chart and white board - as standard. Portable projection equipment and lap top computers were also available for slides and computer-based media software.

Willingness to collaborate

Departments need to put time aside to collaborate and problem solve across disciplines and to develop answers to the question: 'what resources are we going to need to deliver this module/course most effectively to all our potential students?'. This is more likely to generate realistic outcome planning and a successful start to the planning process of subject review.

Case studies

I am gathering case studies and developing a Blackboard 'course' to facilitate exchange, support and dialogue in this area, access through www.swap.ac.uk If you are developing content and would like to be part of this collaboration please contact me.

STOP PRESS

A regional workshop is planned in January 2002 at the University of West of England, Bristol, aimed at colleagues who are thinking about or just starting to teach online. Further workshops will be held in Scotland, the Midlands, Northern Ireland, London and South-east England. More information to follow.

For further information on all these developments, please contact me on s.orton@swap.ac.uk

References:

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education Benchmark Statements: *Social Policy and Administration and Social Work*, 7, <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/crntwork/benchmark/socialwork.pdf>

Web Based Learning Resources Library: website developed by Robert H. Jackson at University of Tennessee <http://www.outreach.utk.edu/weblearning>

Head to head: Programme Specifications, friend or foe?

Norman Jackson and Charlie Cooper



Norman Jackson is a Senior Adviser in the Generic Centre of the Learning and Teaching Support Network and a Senior Researcher in the Centre for Policy and Change in Higher Education, at the University of Surrey.



Charlie Cooper is a Principal Lecturer in the Policy Studies department at the University of Lincolnshire and Humberside.

In an exchange of e-mails, Charlie and Norman debate the merits of programme specifications in improving higher education (and Sheffield United!)

HEALTH WARNING The views expressed are the personal opinions of the authors and do not represent the views of the LTSN or the University of Lincolnshire and Humberside

1. Programme Specifications - what's it all about?

Hi Charlie... My understanding is that QAA has decided that because there are now over 50,000 courses/programmes leading to an undergraduate degree that its about time we had a way of describing them in a reasonably consistent way so that people who are searching for a course in a subject can make some comparisons.

2. But 'Let a hundred flowers bloom'

Hello Norm... We applaud the need to clarify student expectations of subjects/courses. It is clearly sensible that people searching for a course can make informed choices. However, it is difficult to see how the introduction of programme specifications (PSs) aids this process. We already provide detailed information about our courses in various ways - definitive course documents, prospectuses, open days, face-to-face interviews, etc. Moreover, informed choice is best achieved through a process of pre-entry guidance which explores what students are interested in and why and the 'diverse' ways these interests can be pursued.

Neither does it follow that comparison requires uniformity or even 'reasonable consistency' - for example, our Criminology programme is distinctive and students can and do compare it with different renditions of the criminological project. It is information and guidance that is crucial - not comparison to some grander scheme.

3. 'Blooming flowers'

Yes Charlie I couldn't agree more with what

you are saying. There's no comparison between our glossy prospectus which really gives a flavour of what a student might expect if they come here, and the boring looking PS we've produced. But I don't think that the PS is about selling the course (or should I say the fourteen ways to get a degree in our department). It is much more about trying to explain what they will learn and what they will be able to do at the end of their degree and how we will enable them to achieve this. And yes we feel that what we do is distinctive... yeah unique... but oddly when we had produced our PS we realised that we were actually doing more or less the same thing in all fourteen pathways to a degree! We haven't abandoned our prospectus - we now simply say in it: 'if you'd like to know more about what you will learn and how you will learn it check out the PS on our web site'.

And I couldn't agree more that its only when you talk to students that you can really explain to them what its all about. But we found that we could use some of the things in our PS to help us explain why we were teaching in certain ways. We didn't give them a PS... just took out the most relevant information to facilitate the discussion.

As for definitive course documents... which our students never see anyway... our PVC reckons we can replace much of the verbiage in these with the PS.

Hope you are well, Norm

4. Encouraging innovation

Yes Norm... but how do PSs encourage the course development process? This process should be reflective, continually mediated through the involvement of diverse interests - students, academics, local interests (employers, public and voluntary sector agencies, community groups, etc.) - and responsive to change. The fact that the QAA expect subject benchmark statements to act as a 'starting point' in designing PSs introduces prescription, instrumentalism, uniformity and compliance into the course development process. A dynamic education system cannot be built on some grand master plan promulgated from the top down. It has to build on continual dialogue and interaction between interested parties, and be responsive to changing local, national and international contexts. It requires the dissemination of past practices, and encouragement to experiment with new ideas and ways of improving the learning experience. In other words, we need a quality framework for HE that provides the resources and protection for innovation and a diversity of academic programmes.

Regards, Charlie

5. PSs make you think

Hey Charlie... you know I'm as skeptical as you are about all this, but we're pretty good at making things work in the way we want them to work, aren't we? I have to say I was impressed by how much the PS made us think about what we were really trying to do and how we were trying to do it. It wasn't so much the PS as the process we had to go through to show ourselves that the learning we wanted to promote was indeed within the course. I must admit we found quite a few gaps in our assessment and we're going to have to make some changes to get a better fit with what we want students to achieve. It also made us think about our teaching and a few colleagues got a bit uperty when it was suggested that there might be better ways of helping their students develop some of the skills they were claiming. So I suppose that anything that can get us round a table to talk about what we do to help our students learn can't be all bad, can it?

As for the benchmarking stuff. It wasn't as bad as we thought it would be. Most of it is pretty generic and we were already doing most of it in our fourteen degree programmes. Where we differed, we are confident we can justify our reasons to anyone. In fact in many ways these differences are what make our courses distinctive! We did think we should give more consideration to encouraging our own students to be more reflective, and this will require quite a few changes in the way we teach. But I don't think its going to stop us doing what we believe is important and it certainly won't stop us talking to our students, other academics, local interests (employers, public and voluntary sector agencies, community groups, etc.). Indeed the PS provides a pretty good starting point for such conversations. We even used part of our PS to gain feedback from our third years on whether they felt they had developed the skills we said we were trying to develop. We came out pretty well, though one or two bright sparks felt we weren't doing enough to develop their IT skills.

Must dash... got to go to a course committee meeting to discuss our IT skills strategy!

Regards, Norm

6. Blooming youth

Hi Norm. PSs certainly do make you think, and we have no problem with the need to constantly review and reflect on what we do. Public funds must be protected, and it is important that academic staff are held accountable for their work. This does not

mean, however, that PSs built on benchmarks are the best way of achieving this. Indeed, many commentators have expressed their concern that benchmarking is the thin end of the HE National Curriculum wedge. The inhibiting impact of the National Curriculum on secondary education has been well documented.

While benchmarking may appear to be a useful tool for supporting curriculum design, the reality is, of course, benchmarking is a standard point of reference for demonstrating that measurable 'outcomes' have been achieved. In other words, it is about compliance with nationally determined uniform standards of attainment. This intensified central regulation of HE is in danger of standardizing the curriculum in accord with established normative values. This is inherently suffocating and authoritarian, and a threat to more liberating, dialogical education processes.

Lastly, benchmarking is about measuring 'the measurable', even though certain attributes gained from a university education - for example, empathy, reflectivity and active critical engagement - are not so readily quantifiable.

Charlie

7. Saturday lunchtime

Hi Charlie... I admire your stamina. Sorry about my laggardly response but its funny you should mention reflection. I've just come back from a conference at Warwick where nearly 60 academic types were talking about the very thing... or rather Personal Development Planning PDP... apparently its something else we're going to have to do!! But I was struck by their enthusiasm and commitment to what they see as a real enhancement to student learning... came away feeling quite inspired.

Oh well, back to the QAA bone you've been worrying on. I must admit I find it hard to argue with you on the points you raise but perhaps I can put a different perspective on what you say. I agree that PS built on subject benchmarks aren't a particularly robust way of protecting public funds. This has to come from us always trying to do our best and all the checks and balances we have in our department and university. All PS and benchmarks do is encourage us to make what we are setting out to do a bit clearer. Like you I'm a passionate believer in developing students in the way that we believe is right. All the PS did was make us sit down and agree and then challenge us to prove to ourselves that we were actually doing it. As for the benchmark statement... we were doing most of it anyway though we don't use the same words... and we can justify the things we weren't doing. Indeed, we decided that where we departed significantly from the statement was what made us distinctive. I'm sure its not

the intention of QAA to make us abandon our distinctiveness.

As it happens I noticed the other day that the SAP website had a piece on it by Mike Laugharne, the QAA bod responsible for benchmarking. He says, and I quote, 'I do get concerned when its suggested that reviewers will utilise benchmark statements as a checklist and make judgements about the nature and standards of awards in a very mechanistic manner... My overarching concern is the potential danger for the emergence of a compliance culture... Clearly the QAA would not wish to preside over such an outcome.' So this is a message of hope and we've just got to hold them to it.

And how right you are that higher education is so much more than stuffing students full of knowledge and teaching them how to use it. We do aspire to produce well rounded, self aware, reflective, independent-minded human beings which brings me nicely back to that PDP Conference. PDP is all about doing this and showing students the real value of what we are trying to do. Well that's enough for one Saturday morning and I'm off to watch the footie.

Stay cool, Norm.

8. Lazing on a Sunday afternoon

Hi Norm. Hope your team did better than mine yesterday (1-2 at home to Barnsley which, I guess, puts paid to our play-off chances. If anyone needs a programme specification its Sheffield United!). I've just finished reading Noreena Hertz's article in today's Observer and I think that her comments reflect our fundamental concerns about standardizing education practice. At the same time we are debating this, the World Trade Organisation is debating ways of expanding investment opportunities for private corporations in the global market. Inter alia, they wish to expand the role of the private sector in health and education. Already in the US the Channel One Network provide American schools with money and other resources in exchange for broadcasting their commercials directly into the classroom. New Labour's attempt to encourage commercial involvement in regenerating run-down schools - the Education Action Zone initiative - has resulted in the curious case of North Somerset EAZ where McDonalds, the global junk-food peddler, became a major partner. McDonald's contribution to the advancement of educational standards in North Somerset has included offering teachers 'resource packs' which include advice on teaching local history (getting children to explore the changes in use of the local McDonald's site), music (getting children to make up lyrics for 'Old McDonald had a store' to the tune of 'Old McDonald had a farm') and English (suggesting children conduct such literary tasks as identifying and conjugating 'Chicken' and 'McNuggets').

Already in British HE, Nottingham University has accepted £3.8m from British American Tobacco to set up a school of (wait for it) corporate responsibility. Now I smoke like a steam train, but do we want our education system entrusted to the shareholders of private companies? And once this happens in HE - and there is no doubt, despite the government's "spin", it is happening - what will benchmarks look like then? As Noreena Hertz warns, "We must... ask ourselves whether a price will be exacted for acts of corporate benevolence. Today Microsoft puts computers in our schools"; tomorrow, "will it determine what our children learn?". Ditto HE.

Charlie

9. Industrial benchmarks

Yo Charlie... my commiserations for the disappointing performance of your football team. I doubt if a programme specification would have helped them. Guess it illustrates well that its all the things that underlie the PS that really matter - resources, curriculum design, quality of teaching and support for learning and student input... But if its any consolation my team Man U failed dismally in Europe last week and its back to the drawing board for them too.

And wow you really stretch my imagination with your provocative glimpse of an education system that is controlled by corporate interests... and here am I naively thinking that the subject benchmarks were all about defending the traditional values and interests of subject communities. Joking apart - Microsoft's courses are themselves the benchmarks, and the education system just can't afford to ignore the fact that many employers require their employees to complete Microsoft courses. What higher education is able to do is put such industry standards into a broader educational and learning context that adds significantly to their value. Indeed, I know at least one university degree course that does exactly this. But the wider issue you raise... who defines the knowledge base on which standards are based? is well made. And I guess we could have a whole new debate about this...

Well I've got to dash and you really aren't going to believe this, but I've got to begin preparing a blooming QAA self-evaluation document tomorrow as our Combined Studies programme is going to be reviewed.

Its been fun talking to you, Norm

PS from the Editor - Charlie and Norman have written their respective programme specifications. If you're still struggling with yours, there is help available on the SWAP website - www.swap.ac.uk

And when you've done it, how about putting it on the site as a resource for others?

Surveying the scene

A key part of our work is to identify the learning and teaching concerns of academics in social policy and social work, in order to prioritise and focus our activities. To this end, following on from our Heads of Department survey in 2000, we undertook a survey of HE teaching staff in social policy and social work. This page shows a few highlights from this second survey.

		Responses
Stage 2	Learning and teaching issues	220
	Information exchange	195
	Staff profile (anonymous)	186

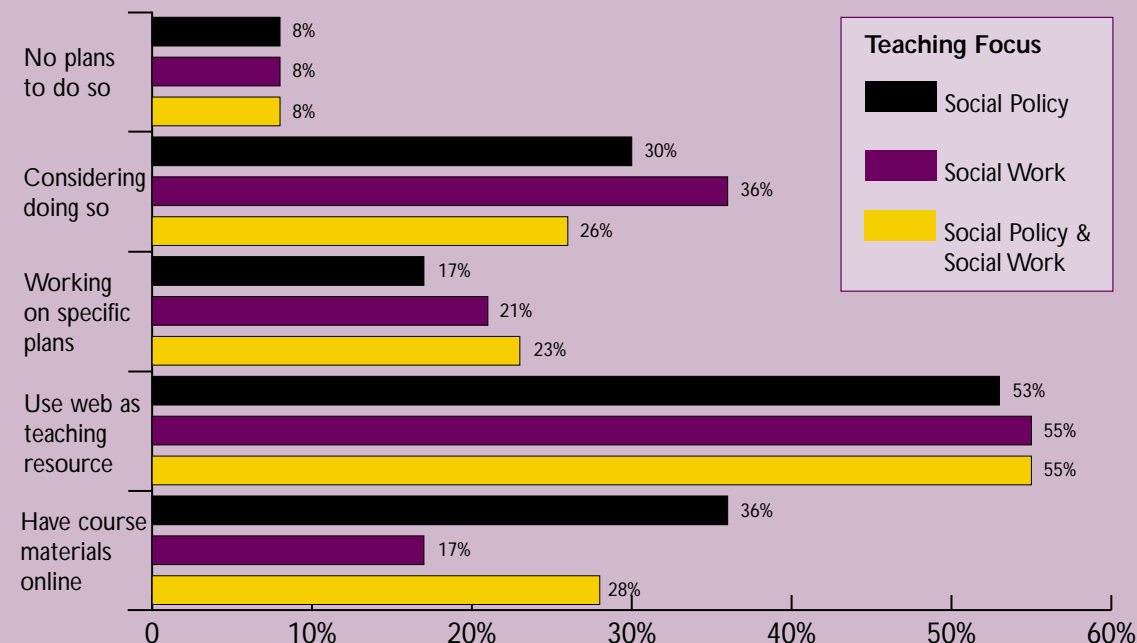
Why did we do this survey?

- Firstly, we needed to find out who you are and your expertise and interests in learning and teaching in social work and social policy.
- Second, in order to identify areas in which we can support you, we need to know what your needs are.
- Finally, we have a unique chance to analyse the profile of staff teaching social work and social policy.

Learning and teaching

220 teachers of social policy, social work or both responded to our questions on their teaching specialism, experience, concerns and other issues. These are their responses when we asked where they are at in their use of learning technologies.

And below are just a few of the 531 issues identified of current concern...



Teach social policy

- Apparently declining intellectual standards of the students we receive
- Availability of good case studies for exercises
- Availability of up-to-date material on policy making
- Basic study skills of students, including writing skills
- Casualisation of workforce
- Competence of teaching staff
- Danger that modular curriculum becomes very fragmented
- Declining resources/students
- Developing explicit skills framework/assessment
- Developing methods of delivery / web based learning
- Difficulty of convincing social policy students of relevance and importance of theory
- Falling student numbers due to student fees and restrictions on the numbers offers are allowed to be made to, meaning that prospective students from low income groups have much less chance of being able to study social policy at all
- Get students to use media for current debates
- Getting the pace right
- How to help students to learn more effectively and more enjoyably
- How to structure one-hour sessions of group
- Increasing diversity of level and extent of previous knowledge/study skills
- Instrumental approach by students rather than enthusiasm for the subject
- Integrating theory/concepts with information- balancing specific conceptual material

Teach social work

- Financial stress on students
- Future of social work and qualifying level
- Has become very mechanistic (perhaps due to modernisation) - little space to explore
- High percentage of students come through clearing with only moderate to nil interest in programme (or society)
- Increasing litigation/complaint culture
- Insufficient placements for social work students
- Insufficient time to do justice to the subject
- Integrating European perspective within curriculum
- Integrating ICT within Teaching & Learning
- Keeping up with pace of change policy/practice issues (modernising agendas etc) and teaching this effectively
- Lack of funding to extend available opportunities to students
- Lack of good quality practice teachers
- Lack of student desire to place learning in wider context of service provisions
- Linked funding for post qualifying education/research in social care
- Linking theory and practice
- Links between HE curriculum and competence based vocational qualifications
- Maintenance of radical innovative methods
- Making young applicants aware of the work they will be involved in
- Motivation of students as consequence of poverty and concerns over debt
- Non-SW staff in the school
- Over-emphasis on research and publications

Network exchange

We invited people to join our network exchange and asked what issue they would like to discuss and what expertise they had to offer in three areas of course development. Here are some of the 90 or so offers of expertise areas in course content development, although some of the responses are more wide ranging. We will be using the information in full to develop our network exchange on our web site.

Teach social policy

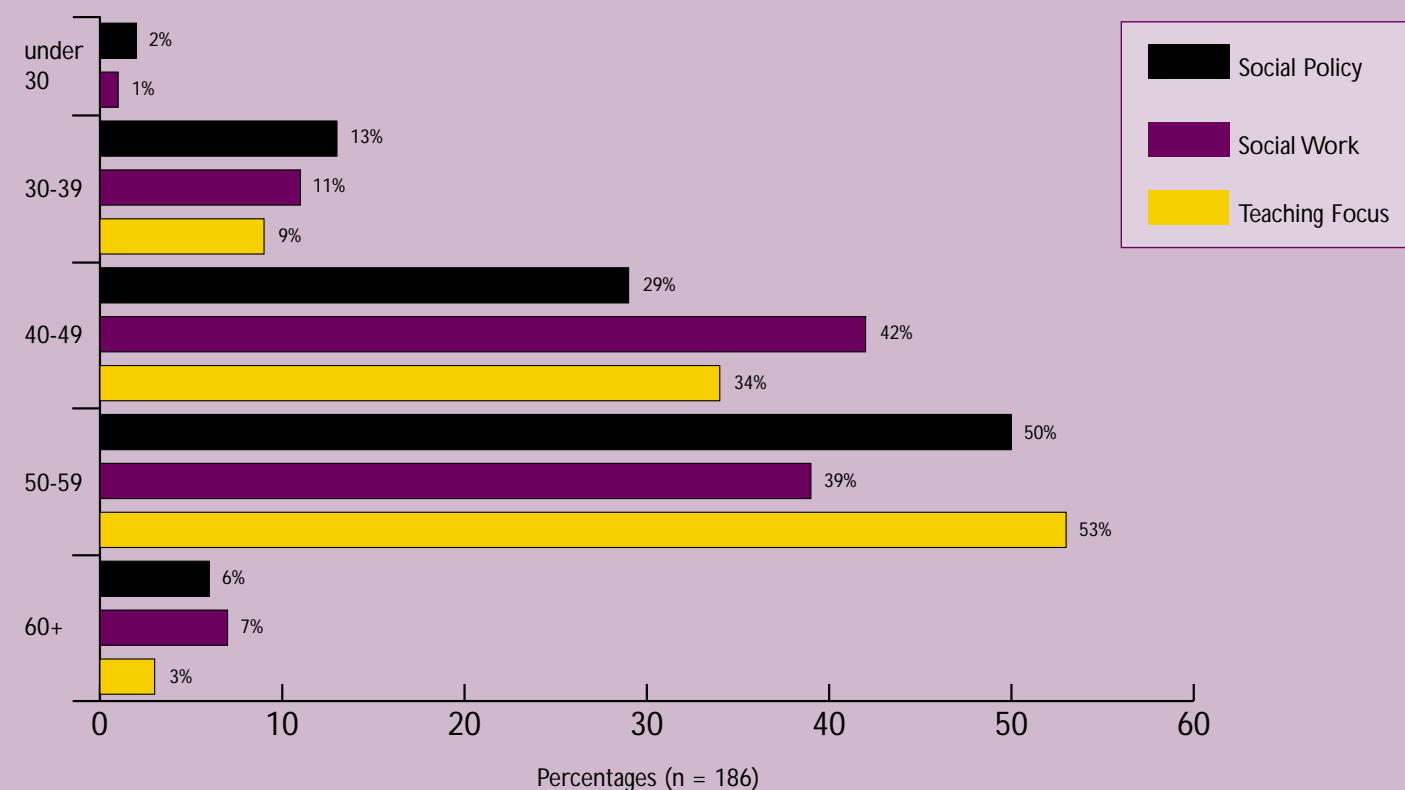
- CAL development - delivery
- Design of internationally delivered masters modules
- I recently launched a new MSc Programme in Policy Research for part-time mature students with relevant experience
- New programme proposals
- Possibly - especially in relation to social policy theory
- Possibly around - poverty, inequality, exclusion, welfare rights and citizenship
- Pre-modernist research methods
- Socio-economic context for social policy, political economy of social policy
- Some experience of developing content and structure of units as part of module programme
- Student-led seminars and group project
- Students central learning, use of video/interaction media in teaching and learning

Teach social work

- Adult care law
- Beginning to think about integrated models of learning/reflective practice
- Community awareness/profiling
- Critical thinking
- Evidence based approach
- Curriculum development of a family child care module
- PQ/AA mentoring and assessment
- Developing Master's courses involving social work empirical research
- Development of distance learning modules
- Child protection/welfare
- Development of video conferencing to support students on placements
- Distance learning approaches
- Evidence based practice in children and families social work
- Learning as a form of change and teach learning and motivating learning styles, concepts of learning and assertive practice

Staff profiles

We asked social policy and social work academics to complete a separate anonymous questionnaire to enable us to create a profile in terms of their gender, age, ethnicity, disability, job titles, type of institution and other variables. Here are the results for Age.



SWAPPING IDEAS



Sue Penna and Pat Young - Teaching Globalisation, Social Change and Social Protection in the European Union

Sue Penna teaches Social Policy in Lancaster University's Department of Applied Social Policy. She gained her PhD in Sociology as a mature student and single parent, and has also qualified as a social worker. The department has Grade 5 research rating from the last RAE; Social Work and Social Policy teaching were graded 'excellent' in TQA. Pat Young is a Learning and Teaching Adviser, SWAPItsn.

Repackaging Social Policy

In conversation with SWAPItsn Learning and Teaching Adviser Pat Young, Sue describes how she repackaged her Social Policy teaching, incorporates variety, and uses her understanding of students' learning in course design.

'Globalisation, Social Change and Social Protection' is taught in the second year of an inter-disciplinary undergraduate programme. It appeared in its first incarnation, as 'Theories of the Welfare State'. The module was popular and accompanied by Sue's successful textbook, co-written with Martin O'Brien but the title was considered unattractive in the competitive market for students, and axed. The new title is deliberately wide-ranging, to attract students from a range of programmes.

The 20 week course covers the impact of contemporary changes in economic and political processes and the changing role of women on the development of policy in the EU. The module is taught to around twenty students, with two-hour teaching sessions for the first five weeks. Students then meet, before the lectures, in two separate seminar groups.

Organising reading through questions

A seminar pack containing readings for each week, plus 2 or 3 questions per item, is distributed at the beginning of the course. The readings might be a whole article or book chapter, a couple of short extracts from different texts for 'compare & contrast' purposes, or policy documents. Part of the criteria for choosing readings is cost of copyright. Some materials are much more expensive than others.

Sue describes her planning over the first five weeks.

Lectures which build on group work

'I always start a session with work in small groups for 20 minutes, then feedback and then give the lecture. I find the students engage more with the lecture if they have read something in advance and discussed the issues in groups before I begin to lecture. They pay attention to the lecture because they are already trying to work through the ideas.

Learning with video

I begin by introducing the course as a whole and reminding students of the political, economic and social assumptions underpinning the post-war welfare state. The students have grown up in a video age and like to learn by relating visual images to academic material. Here I use a 20 minute video in which Professor Alvin Toffler describes contemporary social change. I ask students to pick out the major changes referred to by Toffler and to get into small groups and think about how change affects welfare states. We then have a general discussion about the implications of these changes for welfare – pensions, care of older people etc.

Making learning goals explicit

In week two I start on globalisation. The students are given reading material in advance, and questions to answer. We watch 'The Hollow State' – a video which provides the visual images to connect to the reading. In a short lecture I point out that both of these sources adopt a particular position: the 'strong globalisation' thesis.

It is important to be clear and explicit about what you want the students to take from each week. Here I aim to get the students to understand that there are many different definitions and positions. I explain (again) that the point of being at university is to sort out the adequacy of these positions and I offer a checklist of four questions:

1. What is the author arguing?
2. What is the evidence base?
3. What are the key concepts?
4. How adequate is the argument?

I illustrate this with opposing arguments about the merits of the expansion of higher education, which often use the same evidence on achievement of degree classifications.

Introducing Concepts

Week three develops students' understanding of concepts and evidence. The students read two short pieces on globalisation. These are quite easy readings – taken from 'A' level textbooks – to give the students a basic understanding of quite complex arguments. The students begin the session working in three groups, evaluating the two extracts, using the questions from last week'.

Evidence and argument

'Week four becomes harder. Students prepare by reading Held et al (1999) on 'the globalisation debate'. This identifies three main positions, with differences in: conceptualisation; causation; periodisation; impacts; and trajectories. This week we focus on

- 1) how different areas of research lead to different arguments about globalisation – obviously no-one can research all global markets, economic processes etc, so the area examined often leads to a particular position; and
- 2) models of change underpinning different accounts of globalisation.

During the groupwork part students really struggle with this, but I keep the lecture very 'uncluttered' and to the point, so that they leave knowing what they were supposed to get from the session'.

Engaging imaginations ...

'By this time students have come across quite a lot in the readings about whether the nation-state has any power or not. In the following sessions I want to do two things:

- 1) to get them to understand the arguments of the 'pro-globalisers' in the policy community, as well as the critique of this position from a range of groups; and
- 2) to introduce them to concepts of 'multilayered governance' and 'network state' in order to consider the role of the nation-state as an actor in processes of globalisation.

After the heavy session last week, I try and do something to bring all this to life a bit. Lecturers have to engage the imaginations of their students and make the subject intellectually exciting, otherwise the students will switch off or produce pedestrian work.

... with role-play

In week five the students work in four groups, representing:

- the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (pro-globalisation)
- a quasi-academic, one of Tony Blair's advisers, who pushes a pro-globalisation line
- down-trodden women workers in Asia (anti-globalisation)
- an anti-globalisation revolutionary group in Mexico.

We pretend to be a meeting of an organisation called GOSP (Global Organisation for Social Progress) and each group is a delegate to a meeting to decide what broad social policies GOSP will propose. The pro-globalisers are asked to explain the need for modernisation and make a case for proposed IMF policies. The anti-globalisers critique the case and make their own proposals. I chair the meeting. It was good fun this year – I keep it light. I follow this

up with a film from Seattle and the anti-globalisation demonstration.'

The idea of the course is that each week builds on the one before. By the time we get to week eight, the students are ready to look at the European Union and the modernisation programme.

Access SWAP's web-site at www.swap.ac.uk for more details of Sue's module. If you would like to contribute to pooling ideas for teaching, please e-mail p.young@swap.ac.uk

Reference

Held, D, McGrew, A., Goldblatt, D & Perraton, J. (1999) *Global Transformations*, Cambridge, Polity Press

Anti-discrimination duties on universities

Hilary Burgess, Learning and Teaching Adviser, SWAPItsn

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill (now an Act) was given Royal Assent on 11 May 2001. Part two of this Act removes the exemption of education from the Disability Discrimination Act (1995), placing new anti-discrimination duties on schools, colleges, universities and providers of adult education.

With two exceptions, the new legislation will be in force by 1 September 2002. The exceptions are reasonable adjustments involving the provision of auxiliary aids and services (such as interpreters etc) which comes into force on 1 September 2003 and the requirement to make physical adjustments which is to be implemented on 1 September 2005.

For more information

The National Disability Team: www.natdisteam.ac.uk

TechDis aims to enhance accessibility for students with disabilities through technology: www.techdis.ac.uk

Join our discussion lists...

social-policy-ltsn@jiscmail.ac.uk
social-work-ltsn@jiscmail.ac.uk

These work to:

- assist in the promotion of innovation in learning, teaching and assessment
- collate and disseminate information on good practice, increase awareness of developments in learning and teaching
- share information on pedagogical approaches
- exchange ideas on learning technologies
- inform the community regarding relevant events.

Web watch

Recording Achievement in Higher Education
<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/heqe/roaim.htm>

Personal Development Planning in
Higher Education (Scotland)
<http://www.eds.napier.ac.uk/PDP/>

Programme Specifications
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/crntwork/progspec/contents.htm>

Hertfordshire Integrated Learning Project
<http://www.herts.ac.uk/envstrat/HILP/home/home.htm>

National Disability Team
<http://www.natdisteam.ac.uk/>

Visit our website at <http://www.swap.ac.uk>

New elearning resources

The Virtual Training Suite is a set of online tutorials designed to help students, lecturers and researchers improve their Internet information skills. The tutorials offer self-directed learning, take around an hour each to complete, and include quizzes and interactive exercises to lighten the learning experience. The whole suite includes Internet for Social Research Methods, Internet for Women's Studies and Internet Social Worker as well as the newly launched tutorial for Social Policy. The full range is available at <http://www.vts.rdn.ac.uk>

Internet for Social Policy at <http://www.sosig.ac.uk/vts/social-policy/>

A new "teach yourself" tutorial on Internet information skills for social policy students from the Virtual Training Suite, developed by NISW for the Social Science Information Gateway (SOSIG). "Tour some key Internet sites; discover tools and techniques to improve Internet searching, review the critical thinking required when using the Internet and reflect on how to use it for studying, teaching or research"

Research Mindedness for Social Work and Social Care

<http://www.sws.soton.ac.uk/rminded/>

'Research Mindedness', funded by the Department of Health, to help social care and social work practitioners and students make greater and more effective use of research in their work... It is a learning resource rather than a programmed course and was developed by the Centre for Human Service Technology at the University of Southampton.

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See www.swap.ac.uk for an up-to-date calendar of events and breaking news