UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

LEARNING AND TEACHING COMMITTEE
18 June 2014

UNIVERSITIES UK: REFORMING THE EDUCATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS: PART 2

This report summarises the key themes arising from the Narey and Croisdale-Appleby reports on reforms proposed for social work in England. An overview report completed by Professor Patricia Higham, External Assessor for the Northern Ireland Post Qualifying Partnership has been incorporated in the first section to provide an overview for members of the Learning and Teaching Committee. Part Two of the paper deals with the implications of the reforms for Northern Ireland and in particular addresses the extent to which reforms in Northern Ireland already respond to the challenges posed by both reports. Part Three identifies the key issues for Social Work at Ulster.

Part One

Social Work Reform in England: Overview of the Narey and Croisdale-Appleby Reports

1. Social work reform in England

During the last few years, social work education in England experienced major reforms, prompted by concerns about social workers’ quality and effectiveness. Previous governments set up the Social Work Task Force and the Social Work Reform Board to investigate, make recommendations, and initially lead the process of enacting the reforms. Aftermaths of the reforms include:

- raising the entry standards for social work degrees;
- closure of the General Social Care Council, and the transfer of regulation to the renamed Health and Care Professions Council, and the introduction of HCPC’s Standards of Proficiency for Social Work and Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics;
- establishing The College of Social Work, as a professional body for social work – but not as a regulator;
- introduction of the Professional Capabilities Framework (nine capabilities expressed in levels ranging from a beginning student, to a newly qualified social worker, to an experienced social worker) to underpin social work qualifications and subsequent career progression, ‘owned’ and promoted by The College of Social Work;
- revalidation of all social work degrees to ensure they meet the HCPC requirements, with The College of Social Work offering endorsement of programmes’ quality;
- bursaries for qualifying programmes offered for postgraduate programmes, but only for years 2 and 3 of social work undergraduate degrees
- higher standards for practice educators;
• introduction of postgraduate ‘fast track’ routes to qualification (Step Up and Front Line);
• introduction of a non-compulsory Assessed and Supported Year in Employment,
• abolishing the GSCC PQ Awards, and introducing HCPC’s CPD requirements for a range of CPD activities, and an audit 2.5% of registrants’ CPD records at the time of re-registration of social workers (beginning in December 2014).

Notwithstanding these substantial reforms, the current government commissioned two further investigations into social work education in England - the Narey Report on social work education for working with children, and the Croisdale-Appleby report on social work education from a generic perspective.

2. The Narey Report

Sir Martin Narey’s report (Making the education of social workers consistently effective – an independent review of the education of children’s social workers) was published by the Department for Education in January 2014, and does not discuss continuing professional development. Narey recommends, inter alia, that

• the Health and Care Professions Council’s regulatory duties for social work be transferred to The College of Social Work;
• the College of Social Work should publish a single document defining and explaining the requirements for social work with children;
• the College of Social Work introduces a compulsory and more stringent endorsement process for social work degrees;
• a raised entry standard to social work degrees;
• retention of the postgraduate ‘fast track’ routes to qualification;
• more funding be provided for better placements;
• higher education institutions consider introducing a specialist qualifying degree in children’s social work,
• introducing a work based non-graduate qualification for working with children as part of a social work team.

3. The Croisdale-Appleby Report

Re-visioning Social Work Education - An Independent Review by Professor David Croisdale-Appleby, published in February 2014, asked whether the recent reforms (Task Force and Reform Board) left social work education ‘ideally structured to best serve the profession’. Croisdale-Appleby recommends, inter alia,

• a single regulatory regime for social work that brings together The College of Social Work endorsement and Health and Care Profession regulation
• reduction in the number of qualified social workers
• introducing more rigorous entry standards to qualifying programmes
• rebalancing social work education towards post graduate qualifications
• better standards for placements
• social work qualifying education and continuing professional development to play a greater role in major transformational developments, such as the integration of health and social care
• ensuring that all qualifying programmes equip social workers to undertake research
• retaining a variety of generic routes towards qualification, including ‘fast track’

Croisdale-Appleby’s Chapter 13 discusses continuing professional development, including the ASYE, and recommends;

• introducing a requirement for a ‘license to practice’ (initially recommended by the Social Work Reform Board) following a formal probation period after graduation
• establishing a national AYSE standard by introducing a more rigorous and auditable assessment process at the end of ASYE
• a more stringent regulatory regime including formal ‘revalidation’ of social workers every five years, requiring them to demonstrate their continuing fitness to practise as practitioners, as professionals, and as social scientists, using the Professional Capabilities Framework as core guidance
• basing CPD for social workers on the General Medical Council’s Continuing Professional Development: guidance for all doctors (GMC 2012)
• more support for formal post qualifying programmes to help social workers to evidence their continuing fitness to practice.

4. Summary: more changes ahead in England?

Other countries of the United Kingdom may wish to consider the merit and feasibility of the most recent recommendations for England. More changes are likely for social work education in England. However, the potential cost of Narey’s and Croisby-Appleby’s recommendations may deter their full implementation.

Progress has been made on the previous reforms, but the full impact will take five years of implementation. The Professional Capabilities Framework is becoming the backbone of qualifying education and social workers’ career structures; The College of Social Work is gaining support; social work degrees are raising their entry standards; and practice educators are now required to meet higher standards of preparation for their roles.

Both Narey and Croisdale-Appleby recommend more regulation of social workers, and fail to understand the role of The College of Social Work as a professional body. They both criticise the Health and Care Professions Council not being sufficiently regulatory. However, some initial feedback from social work academics indicates that they have begun to value HCPC’s approach to working in partnership with a professional body, and how HCPC enables social workers’ contributions to the design of the Standards of Proficiency for Social Workers, and their participation in HCPC regulatory visits to universities.

Continuing professional development arguably deserves more attention than given by these reports. The forthcoming HCPC audit of social workers’ CPD activities prior
to starting the re-registration in December 2014 is likely to focus attention in England on the importance of CPD.

Professor Patricia Higham
External Assessor
Northern Ireland Post Qualifying Education & Training Partnership

Part Two

NAREY & CROISDALE-APPLEBY REPORTS & NISCC ARRANGEMENTS

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<th>RECOMMENDATION</th>
<th>NAREY</th>
<th>CROISDALE-APPLEBY</th>
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<td>Selection</td>
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<td>Recommendation 2: The selection of students for qualifying courses needs to be more consistent nationally, using methodologies similar to the Graduate Management Admissions Test (GMAT) used in selecting entry to Business Schools, which measure attributes such as analytic ability, critical reasoning and quantitative skills.</td>
<td>A regional admissions system is in place in NI which is contributed to by service users &amp; carers. All candidates submit a 600 essay on why they have applied for social work and, if shortlisted, there is an individual interview for each applicant.</td>
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<td>Selection</td>
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<td>Recommendation 3: Individual HEI’s entry selection processes need to be more rigorous and based on assessing candidates’ qualities in relation to a new framework of the social worker as a practitioner, the social worker as a professional, and the social worker as a social scientist, and to the domains in the PCF. Attributes such as values, resilience, dealing with uncertainty and conflict should also be assessed for selection for entry.</td>
<td>A regional admissions system is in place in NI which is contributed to by service users &amp; carers. All candidates submit a 600 essay on why they have applied for social work and, if shortlisted, there is an individual interview for each applicant. Interview panels consist of a social work lecturer and an agency social worker. A bank of interview questions is used and these cover motivation, values, role of the social worker, flexibility and openness. Dealing with uncertainty and conflict are not covered explicitly. Consideration is being given to a more...</td>
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<td>Selection</td>
<td><strong>Recommendation 2.</strong> Agreement needs to be reached with universities to ensure that the minimum UCAS requirement of 240 points for A-level students is not breached save in exceptional circumstances.</td>
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<td><strong>Recommendation 3.</strong></td>
<td>The calibre of students entering through Access courses and with qualifications other than A levels needs to be audited at individual Institution level.</td>
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<td><strong>Recommendation 4:</strong></td>
<td>Excellent social work demands high quality social workers, so entry standards to the profession should be raised significantly. Minimum entry level at undergraduate level should be 300 UCAS points</td>
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<td>Course providers in NI currently select on a minimum of 300 UCAS points.</td>
<td>Equivalencies to A level qualifications are determined by the Admissions Offices at the F/HEIs in NI.</td>
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<td><strong>Recommendation 6:</strong></td>
<td>The greatest opportunity to improve the quality of</td>
<td><strong>Recommendation 7:</strong> Stakeholders such as employers providing placements, service-users and carers, practice educators and representatives of newly-emerging organisations key to the future landscape to which social workers will contribute, such as Clinical Commissioning Groups and Health and Wellbeing Boards, should be encouraged to play a greater part in the selection of students and the design and delivery of education.</td>
<td>In NI a regional approach is taken to the admissions process. An academic and an agency representative sit on the interview panels and an agreed bank of questions is used. This bank of questions is contributed to by service users &amp; carers. Within partnership arrangements, employers are involved at strategic and operational level in the design, delivery and evaluation of education &amp; training courses. Service users and carers also contribute to the delivery and evaluation of education &amp; training courses.</td>
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<td><strong>Recommendation 7:</strong></td>
<td>The endorsement</td>
<td><strong>Recommendation 6:</strong></td>
<td>Approximately 545 PLOs are provided each year in NI across the statutory</td>
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<td><strong>Generic Curriculum</strong></td>
<td><strong>Recommendation 17</strong>: The requirement that social workers have placements in contrasting service settings (typically, one with children and one with adults) should be relaxed to allow those intent on a career in children’s social work to spend all 170 days of placement in a children’s setting.</td>
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<td><strong>Recommendation 9</strong>: All educational routes to qualification must demonstrate authentic pedagogical evidence that they will provide an in-depth knowledge of the fundamental conceptual frameworks for social work, to ensure that they equip students with the basis for a career in social work with all service user groups and in whatever settings they choose to work.</td>
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<td><strong>Recommendation 10</strong>: All qualifying education should equip newly qualified social workers with the capability to engage in research throughout their career, inculcating an understanding that the ability to carry out research is an essential component in their future professional capability in practice.</td>
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<td><strong>Recommendation 11</strong>: The current Practice Educator Professional Standards (PEPS) should be strengthened, and voluntary sectors which includes PLOs in residential, day care, fieldwork and other settings. PLOs are provided in Children’s and Adults services and each social work student in NI receives a PLO in Children’s and Adults services. All PLO providers are approved by NISCC under a Designated Practice Learning Provider Scheme, (DPLP).</td>
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<td><strong>NQSWs &amp; Research</strong></td>
<td><strong>Recommendation 10</strong>: As part of the review of the degree, NISCC has reviewed the entire curriculum. The capability of students to engage in research will be examined in this context and action taken as necessary.</td>
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<td><strong>Recommendation 11</strong>: All Practice teachers in NI are qualified as social workers for at least 2 years and have completed the NI</td>
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and all practice educators and practice supervisors should have formal qualifications as educators, and in the case of practice educators as formal assessors: the formal training for which should be sited in the proposed new comprehensive continuing professional development (CPD) framework. Practice Teacher Training Programme, or are in the process of doing so. This programme is an integral part of the NI PQ Framework. Refresher training and standardisation events are provided to Practice Teachers by all DPLPs.

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<th>Licence to Practise &amp; AYE</th>
<th>Recommendation 16: Whilst the profession moves towards embracing a Licence to Practise, the current ASYE programme should be extended in scope to include all NQSWs entering practice. The requirements asked of employers engaged in the ASYE programme should be subject to a much more exacting and auditable process than is presently the case. Its assessment methodology should be strengthened and made more open to independent validation.</th>
<th>NISCC has an Assessed Year in Employment scheme which has been in place since the first NQSWs graduated in 2006. The AYE guidance has been reviewed by NISCC and new guidance will be introduced in June 2014.</th>
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<td>Quality of PLOs</td>
<td>Recommendation 17: The overall quality of the educational experience in practice placements must be improved, through the imposition of a much more rigorous audit as a requirement of eligibility for receipt of future ESG payment. Whilst this should use the Quality Assurance in Practice Learning, QAPL, methodology, the QAPL processes should be made more rigorous.</td>
<td>NISCC operates a Designated Practice Learning Provider Scheme based on the NISCC Practice Learning Standards. DPLPs are required to complete an annual monitoring form and are followed up with a site visit or formal contact.</td>
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<td>Employers &amp; PLOs</td>
<td>Recommendation 19: Priority should be given The Preparation for Practice Learning</td>
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to increase significantly the ESG funding support to employers to ensure the provision of high quality placements. This funding should include support for the 30 day Developing Skills for Practice module; the involvement of service users and carers in all aspects of educational provision; and the training of practice educators and practice supervisors. As a condition of this financial support, inspection of placements must be much more comprehensive and rigorous than at present, including inspection visits to placements, as well as inspection of the quality assurance processes.

NISCC operates a Designated Practice Learning Provider scheme based on the NISCC Practice Learning Standards. DPLPs are required to complete an annual monitoring form and are followed up with a site visit or formal contact.

### Part Three: Implications for Social Work at Ulster

Social Work at Ulster is awaiting dissemination of the Five Year Review of the Social Work degree which was undertaken during 2013/14. The Northern Ireland Social Care Council has indicated that the draft report will be circulated for factual accuracy within the next two weeks pending submission of the final report to the full Council in July 2014. Based on early indications, we anticipate that several areas will be identified for attention and as the course team is currently engaged in the re-evaluation process of all three Social Work degrees, recommendations can be incorporated into this process. However there are two core areas can be identified for consideration.

- **Selection processes** such as introducing tests to measure analytic ability, critical reasoning and quantitative skills at the point of selection. In addition consideration is being given to a more rigorous approach to assessing resilience. These developments will be taken forward on a regional basis. Professor Mc Colgan already chairs the Regional Social Work Admissions Group and is aware that any proposals are likely to have implications for the existing Admissions Policy at Ulster. Until there is further clarity about recommendations for the selection process, it is not possible to progress this work or predict what selection requirements will need to be in place.
- **Capability of social work students to engage in research.** Since the introduction of the revised Social Work degrees in 2004 and 2009, none of the F/HEI’s has provided modules related to developing students’ capacity to
engage in research as this was not required in relation to the Northern Ireland Framework specification developed by NISCC for the delivery of the degree. Rather the Social Work programs have focused on introducing students to evidence based practice research and developing their research appraisal skills with a view to inculcating research informed practice knowledge. Modules delivered at levels 4, 5 and 6 have been underpinned by research led teaching in addition to a specific emphasis on developing students’ capacity to evaluate research highlighted in a final year module on Evidence Based Practice. Assessment of practice learning includes a final Case Project which combines research searching and critical appraisal. Social Work at Ulster has been involved in an ESCR pilot project to develop the research knowledge and skills of undergraduate social workers and in preparation for the forthcoming re-evaluation, the curriculum will embed a phased approach to research training across levels 4-6. Again, it is not possible to indicate the future requirements for research training until the Review is published.

In summary, although it is evident that the recommendations of both Narey and Crosdaile Appleby reports have implications for Social Work Education across all four nations, there is a clear sense that Northern Ireland Social Work Education is already meeting and exceeding many of the areas identified for action. Future work will be highlighted in the forthcoming Five Year Review of Social Work and those recommendations are likely to be incorporated into the ongoing course planning for the re-evaluation in March 2015.

Professor Mary McColgan
6th June 2014