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**Service User and Carer Involvement in
Social Work Education:
Good Practice Guidelines
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Service User and Carer Involvement in Social Work Education: Good Practice Guidelines

Introduction

These guidelines have been prepared by Project 3.3, 'Involvement of Service Users and Carers', a project of the University of Dundee, University of Stirling and the Open University in Scotland, funded by the Scottish Institute for Excellence in Social Work Education.

The document provides guidance for those involved in higher education to promote the involvement of service users and carers in the education of social work students. It draws on work undertaken by the project as well as making links with other institutions and research findings in the UK. It is based on the learning experience that has evolved from the project, including pilot studies, a demonstration project and development work towards a national group.

The document offers a framework for good practice which, in following SiSWE requirements, seeks to set out 'policies and procedures for assessment (which must include effective and appropriate ways of meeting the requirements of key stakeholders in social services...Key stakeholders include people who use services, carers and employers' (Framework for Social Work Education in Scotland 2003:15). Each section includes a statement, a set of practice points, an example and is linked to further information in a numbered reference section.

It is envisaged that this guidance will evolve as the new social work degree unfolds. Scottish Voices, the proposed national influence group of service users and carers, would play a key role in developing this framework, thereby 'support(ing) social work educators in meeting and sharing good practice standards in the involvement of service users and carers' (Scottish Voices: Short Life Working Group 2005 – recommendations for a national group of influence). It is hoped that the involvement of service users and carers will be integrated in all aspects of social work practice – that social work practitioners and social work organisations would model service user and carer involvement in their work, just as social work students experience this in the course of their learning.

The framework includes:

1. Principles of involvement
2. Participation
3. Teaching and learning in universities
4. Practice learning
5. Student assessment
6. Governance
7. Payment for involvement

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1. Principles Of Involvement

The participation of service users and carers should be based on agreed values and principles of involvement. Such involvement should go beyond tokenism in developing working relationships

Practice points

Each university should work with service users and carers to develop a written set of values, principles and practices [1, 2, 5].*

‘Seeing change from consultation’, a key motivation for service user and carers being involved in social work education, can be measured and evaluated. It should be made clear what is open to negotiation and what is not [2].

Service users and carers determine the pace and scope of their involvement [3].

Service users and carers are respected as ‘key partners’ alongside educators, practitioners, employers and students [1, 4].

Service users and carers are offered support and training opportunities to promote their involvement in social work education. Information should be available in accessible formats [1, 5].

Examples

The University of Dundee Service User and Carer Group has a Statement of Intent which includes the following principles: Plain English, fair funding, ‘bottom-up’ networks, no tokenism, seeing change from consultation, encouraging all groups to have a voice [2].

The short life working group making recommendations about Scottish Voices, the national group of service users and carers, compiled groundrules to guide the group’s work [30].

2. Participation

Universities should understand that actively promoting and sustaining participation is a process which takes time to develop effectively.

Practice points

Give sufficient time for all aspects of involving service users and carers. It is vital to take time to build relationships, maintain contact, to plan, prepare, deliver and evaluate work [6, 7, 8].

* Bracketed numbers refer to the documents which are listed in the reference section.

Building local networks including a wide range of service users and carers is crucial; universities should review existing links and plan where and how involvement needs to be developed. [1, 6].

Building new systems and structures *and* changing systems and structures within universities is needed to empower and enable service users and carers to participate in a meaningful way [9].

Participation in social work education may contribute to the personal and/or professional development of service users and carers [3, 10].

Changes and absences of service users and carers should also be planned for in order that work can be sustained [1, 6].

University staff acting as 'champions' for service user and carer involvement are crucial in achieving progress [7]

Example

Robert Gordon University has developed opportunities for participation of service users and carers through a Service User Panel and a Carer Involvement Network. These two separate strands have the same aim: 'to enable social work students to gain skills and an understanding of the needs and conflicting interests of those who use services and carers who provide services' [11, 12].

3. Teaching and learning in universities

Service users and carers should be involved in a wide range of teaching opportunities in the classroom.

Practice points

Clear information about the purpose of any involvement is essential for service users and carers, and for students [13, 19]

Preparation is important for a successful outcome in role play for service users and carers and training in role play may reduce students' anxiety. Practical and ethical issues about involving service users and carers need to be addressed in role play work:

- Service user has 2 roles that of role play participant and observer
- Giving and receiving feedback is a skill that needs to be taught
- Role play may engage difficult feelings on the part of the service user which may persist [13, 14]

Feedback from service users and carers is one source of feedback alongside that of other students and lecturers in role play work [8, 13]

A range of involvement in teaching can arise from the development of service user and carer network links [15, 16, 17, 20]

Service users and carers can successfully contribute to materials and to the evaluation of course materials [3, 18]

Examples

Social work programmes include the delivery of teaching through videoed role play; didactic teaching; small group teaching; co-facilitated teaching; a proposed module in the new postgraduate social work degree (University of Dundee) where students spend 24 hours with individual service users and carers; curriculum design, case study materials, critical reading (Open University); Enquiry and Action Learning seeking service user and carer perspectives (University of Dundee); induction of new students (University of Edinburgh) [2, 5, 32].

4. Practice Learning

Service users and carers should be involved in giving feedback in all practice learning opportunities, contributing to the assessment of students' practice.

Practice points

A requirement for service user and carer feedback in all practice learning opportunities should be clearly indicated in university documentation for practice learning [2, 21].

Social work practitioners and social work organisations should also model service user and carer involvement in their work [21, 22].

Preparation of service users and carers should be available within organisations and supported by universities. Future developments include a leaflet in Plain English on social work training, briefings offered in giving constructive feedback, joint work with service users and carers in devising specific questions for feedback [21].

Preparation of students (before practice learning opportunities begin) should include teaching about the giving and receiving of feedback, looking at different methods of gathering feedback, and consideration of how feedback is part of reflective practice [21, 23].

Support for practice teachers as regards service users and carers should be available in the form of written guidance from universities, regular group meetings with university staff, dissemination of tools for gathering feedback [21, 24].

Careful planning is needed in gathering feedback from service users and carers over the course of the practice learning opportunity so that (1) it can inform students' practice and

(2) there is sufficient time to incorporate it into the final report by both student and practice teacher - both in terms of students' learning and in terms of assessment by practice teachers [21, 25].

Practice panels should monitor placement final reports with reference to the incorporation of service user and carer feedback into student learning and the assessment process [21].

Example

Service User and Carer Feedback on Students' Practice on Placement: A Student Group Exercise: A small student group was set the task of gathering feedback from service users during their placement, followed by a presentation to their peers on the approaches used. Learning points included the broad context in which service users view students' practice; consideration of how service users want to complete the process; looking at different ways in which feedback can be shaped; core skills are valued by service users and should be practiced and developed throughout the whole social work programme [23].

5. Student assessment

Service users and carers should be involved in the assessment of students both in practice learning and in institution based learning.

Practice points

Feedback from service users and carers is most commonly drawn on, in the assessment of students during practice learning opportunities rather than in classroom settings. Feedback is predominantly about the quality of relationships between service user and student and is overwhelmingly positive. A 'toolkit' of methods to elicit more detailed constructive feedback is required [1, 21, 22, 26].

Students may see feedback from service users and carers as an assessment tool of practice teachers and therefore do not often refer to it in terms of their own learning. Teaching in this area should emphasise the contribution of service user and carer feedback (alongside other sources) in reflective practice [10, 21,].

'Readiness to practice' is another area where service users and carers can contribute to the assessment of students, alongside others in the assessment process [27, 28, 29].

Example

'Service User Conversations', a method used at the University of Plymouth to assess readiness to practice, provides feedback on communication skills, links between theory and practice, writing reports, exploration of assumptions and values, time management, self assessment skills. The process includes a conversation with a service user or carer, followed by the student's self assessment and the service user's or carer's feedback. A report of the conversation is written by the student and verified by the service user or carer [29].

6. Decision making

Service users and carers should be involved in the planning, management and evaluation of courses; involvement methods should be developed by service user and carers groups themselves.

Practice points

Programmes should instigate methods of building up a long term alliance between staff and service user and carer consultants [1, 3, 30].

Service user and carer groups should take a lead role in determining how they can best represent their interests at management level [31].

Service user and carer involvement should have real influence on decisions rather than being tokenistic [3, 7, 30, 31].

Representation is enhanced by the existence of service user and carer groups of influence within institutions [31].

Methods to ensure accessibility at university meetings to service users and carers must be considered [1, 2].

Service users and carers should be involved in the selection of student social workers. Creative ways of enabling service users and carers to be involved should be identified; for example in jointly establishing selection criteria, being involved in shortlisting, being involved in interviewing processes [1].

Examples

Glasgow Caledonian University has service users on Programme Boards, Programme Assessment Boards, and on the Masters Development Board. A lecturer is also meeting with service users in small groups to gather views on the proposed new Masters degree [28].

The University of Edinburgh has recently appointed a worker, experienced in facilitating service user and carer involvement, for one day a week for 6 months, to progress their work in this area [32].

7. Payment for involvement

Service users and carers should be offered appropriate payment for their involvement in all aspects of social work education. Service users and carers have diverse views on receiving payment, and these views must be considered.

Practice points

Each university should develop its own policy and procedures concerning payments to service users and carers. Service users and carers should be provided with a straightforward and speedy way to have expenses reimbursed and fees paid [1, 10, 30].

Payments may include fees for attending meetings, teaching, consultancy, developing course materials; travelling expenses (this should include public transport, taxi fares and car mileage); allowances for childcare, personal assistance and replacement carer costs, and other costs (e.g. telephone, stationery, photocopying) [1, 10, 30].

Universities should ensure that their payment arrangements comply with benefits and tax regulations. (Local Benefit Offices may vary in their treatment of such payments, where individual service users or carers are in receipt of benefits.) [1, 10, 30]

Example

A draft paper, 'Money Matters', was developed by the Scottish Voices: Short-life Working Group to meet the immediate financial needs of the Group. This paper determined payment of travel costs, a participation fee, replacement carer costs, payment for additional work, payment for phone calls, postage etc. [30]

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