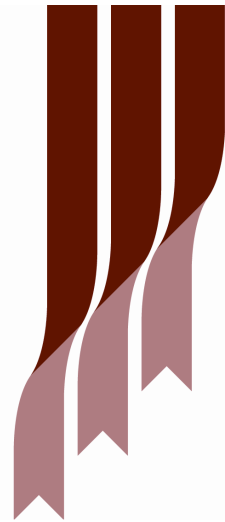# SCOTTISH INSTITUTE FOR EXCELLENCE IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

INTEGRATED ASSESSMENT

Shared Approach to Performance Assessment

Final Report on the Demonstration Projects
August 2005

The overall project is a collaboration between the Universities of Stirling, Paisley and the Open University in Scotland

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Introduction

The aim of the overall project is:-

To explore and document the ways in which professionals from disciplines other than social work can contribute to the performance assessment of social work students.

It was agreed by the project team that we should also be exploring the converse of this, where other professionals may be less able to contribute to the shared assessment.

The earlier practice audit and literature review, available on the Institute website, identified a number of themes that have formed the backdrop for the demonstration projects.

These included:-

- Shared assessment already takes place on social work courses, for example law and social sciences, and that in itself is not contentious.
- There is a difference between sharing subject teaching and learning for collaborative practice.
- The literature shows that to date, the preoccupation of educators has been with the what and how of teaching, as opposed to assessment.
- Shared learning and assessment took place in a range of forms and sizes. As a general rule the larger the student groups the more complex the planning and management. However, small scale examples showed that successful outcomes could be achieved for less work.
- Assessments ranged from the traditional essay and case studies to presentations and community profiling.
- More was known about University based units and very little about assessment on practice placements.

Therefore, we needed to focus on the following question in the demonstrations

What is complicated and contentious about shared assessment?

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS

Three demonstration projects were initially planned to cover assessment of performance of social work students within three distinct aspects of the social work degree: readiness to practice, academic based coursework and practice learning. The University based coursework project did not proceed. However, as noted above, this area was covered in more detail in the literature. The two demonstrations that ran addressed areas where little appears to have been tested.

Practice Learning

Coordinated by Anne Ritchie at the University of Paisley

Anne Ritchie evaluated the contribution of other workers and professionals, as link workers, in the assessment aspect of placements. The key questions were: Who is contributing to assessment? What do they wish to contribute? How do they wish to contribute? What are the issues for non social work qualified staff? What information and support do they need? How does their assessment compare with social work trained link workers?

This was a joint demonstration with project LEEP 1.2, whose main aim is "to develop innovative opportunities for inter-professional learning within new service settings to serve as models of good practice." The initial pilot took place in a multi-disciplinary setting with eight students in 2004 with link workers form professionals other than social work. The demonstration involved 14 students on their second and final direct practice placement in 2005. They explored feedback from link workers and also from service users given on the students' practice by evaluating the placement reports and the practice based academic assignments.

Readiness to practice

Coordinated by Kathryn Mackay at the University of Stirling.

Kathryn Mackay established an experiment to explore the commonalities and differences in the assessment of a student exercise designed to test readiness for practice. A videoed social work interview was watched by different groups of professionals and people who use services. Regarding service users and carers, there was collaboration with project 3.3, which is "exploring a range of ways in which employers and people who use services and their carers can be involved in and contribute to the assessment process". The key questions were what the similarities and differences between and within the groups were. How do groups take account of the level of performance at a particular stage of training, in this case readiness to practice? In addition, what support and information do people need if they are assessing social work students?

DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS

Practice learning

This was led by Anne Ritchie at the University of Paisley and was a joint demonstration with project 1.2 in partnership with the University of Dundee,

The remit was to combine the key objectives of both projects;

> 1.2 "To develop innovative opportunities for inter-professional learning within new service settings to serve as models of good practice."

> 3.2 "To explore and further develop a shared approach, with other professionals, to the performance assessment of social work students."

The integration of these objectives, therefore, acknowledged the symbiotic relationship between practice learning and the assessment of competence to practice. The pilot project took place in late 2004 and the demonstration proper built upon this experience. In particular:

> To broaden the range of placements
> To focus more upon the contribution from link workers
> To further explore service user feedback and their contribution

The full report of the pilot is available on the Institute website (www.sieswe.org). The following evaluation of the demonstration project, undertaken by John Brady, independent consultant should be read in conjunction with it.

Evaluation of the full demonstration project

This report will evaluate the Demonstration Project which involved 14 University of Paisley students on their second and final placement which began in October 2004 and finished in May 2005. Eight students were placed with Quarriers, a Scottish Charity, (four were from the Part Time Diploma in Social Work course and four were from Year Four of the BA Honours in Social Work degree course). A further six students were placed with Renfrewshire Council (two were from Part Time Diploma in Social Work course, three were from Year Four of the BA Honours in Social Work Degree Course and one was from the Fast Track Diploma in Social Work course).

The Agency Settings

Quarriers placed students in a range of settings:

- an outreach team providing a tenancy support service to 16-25 year olds
- inclusion/advocacy within The Disabilities Service Sector
- short term residential epilepsy assessment centre
- a project offering intensive support to 5-13 year olds experiencing problems in mainstream school because of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties
- residential homeless centre for 16-25 year olds
- housing support service for 16-25 year olds
- a residential school for boys from 7-17 years old experiencing social, emotional and behavioural difficulties

This range of placements offered inter-professional links with housing, health, education and disabilities services.

Renfrewshire Council placed students in a range of settings:

- criminal justice group work project
- older adults community mental health team
- community support project for young people who have been accommodated or are at risk of so being
- psychiatric hospital – community care team for older persons
- community based project supporting people with drug addiction problems

This range of placements offered inter-professional links with criminal justice, mental health, drug and health services.

Definitions:
As was identified in the Pilot Project these placements provided opportunities for collaborative practice as defined by Whittington 2003 i.e. opportunities for a range of inter-professional, multi disciplinary and inter agency approaches.
Inter-professional learning opportunities were defined as those taking place in settings where there were perceived adaptations of roles, responsibilities, values, knowledge and skills between professionals and where workers were expected to take account of and interact with these in their practice.
Multi professional learning opportunities were defined as those taking place in settings where collaboration within roles occurred but did not necessarily involve adaptation of professional values, knowledge and skills. Collaborative practice and learning opportunities were those which involved people working together from different agencies or professions towards providing a better service for users (Payne, 2000). Drawing attention to the definition of these terms is important as it pin points that while commonly terms are used interchangeably there is a wide variation in the organisational arrangements and cultures of the placement settings and it would require further research to be able to draw clearer conclusions as to which factors are most significant in the experience of social workers collaborating with other professionals.

Sources of evidence drawn on for evaluation

Material for 13 of the 14 placements was made available to me and I had access to working agreements, final reports from students and practice teachers, reports

from other staff involved in the assessment of the students, evaluative comments from service users and Integrative Practice Studies. I also had access to five final Direct Practice Two placement reports and Integrative Practice studies for Fast Track students who had been part of the Pilot Project to evaluate any impact their Direct Practice One placement experiences might have had upon collaborative practice as demonstrated in their Direct Practice Two placements. These placements were set in:

- adult learning disability team
- family centre
- youth justice team
- children and families team
- drug addiction service

Evaluation of student learning

Any attempt to evaluate the evidence for learning in specific areas requires to be set in a developmental context which recognises both the stage of professional education reached by the student and also the culture and organisation of placement settings which differed considerably. All students were undertaking final practice placements and were approaching the point of qualification. With a renewed national emphasis on continuing professional development and post qualifying education it is important to adopt realistic expectations of final placement students.

The evaluation of the Pilot Project adopted the use of a number of headings for analysis in this area and I have employed them with some adaptation:

Understanding of the legal, policy and organisational context for inter-professional and collaborative practice.

Generally there was clear evidence that students were aware of these contextual areas but the extent to which they were made a particular focus for comment varied. The reasons for this may be associated with different factors including the significance that the agency and/or the practice teacher placed on it. For some students it appears that their stage of development may have meant that they were highly focused on the specific role and task they were undertaking often for the first time. The wider context, while central to the definition of practice, was not their highest priority as they sought to make sense of often complex situations. There is also some indication that where the legal, policy and organisational factors were problematic within the agency they impinged on students more directly and thus received more attention in their analysis.

In comparison some of the Fast Track students who had been involved in the Pilot Project did make more explicit reference to these contextual factors. In sections of their reports on the context and in case summaries there is acknowledgement of the ways in which inter-professional issues were relevant. This suggested that their importance in framing practice was perhaps more integrated from the beginning of the placement.

Understanding and appreciation of the origins and ethos of inter-professional and collaborative practice

As with the Pilot Project there was wide acknowledgement that inter-professional and collaborative practice was important and of benefit to service users. This varied in degree across settings and in those placements where contacts were collaborative rather than inter-professional or multi disciplinary there was less specific evidence and some reports reflected a rather insular approach to practice with an emphasis on "my case". The Integrative Practice Studies were a useful source of evidence as they offer opportunities to focus on knowledge without the demand to evidence competence through meeting specific practice requirements. Again there was some variation where the best clearly understood the origins, ethos and debates around inter-professional practice while others made somewhat unintegrated mentions of it, perhaps recognising that it is one of the areas to be addressed in the assignment rather than drawing on specific concepts that had helped illuminate their practice.

There was some clear evidence of understanding relating to risk assessment and management but this was not highly developed and may again be related to the student's stage of development. For many of these students the placements would have been their first opportunity to undertake such an exercise.

Appreciation of the roles and responsibilities of social work and other professionals

Given that this was the second and final placement for students it is reasonable to expect that they would be able to display a confidence in this area. This was supported by the evidence to a large extent. Those students working in settings directly alongside other professionals were afforded opportunities to articulate the specific contribution of social work, sometimes in a relatively hostile environment. This appeared to be less so in agencies where students worked collaboratively with colleagues from external settings. This may reflect the culture of agencies when in some cases collaborative practice was accepted as necessary but not viewed as something positive to be pursued in a developmental manner.

Student reports and Integrative Practice Studies offered evidence that students had an academic understanding of the contribution made by other professions and the implications for practice e.g. in relation to health, students identified how an understanding of medical and social models helped them understand the approaches that might influence health personnel. Some also were able to analyse the model in operation in their placement settings and to evaluate its appropriateness. The extent to which this is evidenced varied from very specific comments to a more implied approach.

There is some evidence from the Fast Track students that they approached their Direct Practice Two placements with inter-professional collaboration as an aspect to be actively pursued because of an appreciation of its importance e.g. one student in a children and families team addressed the importance of inter-professional practice in relation to risk assessment and was the driver in

convening an inter-professional case conference to ensure that an holistic assessment could be formulated. For these students in the Pilot it may be that the sessions jointly run by practice teachers and tutors resulted in a more developed understanding of inter-professional working, when moving into Direct Practice Two placements. It is clear that for some of the students in the Demonstration Project where inter-professional working was not an agency priority they showed some implicit understanding but very little explicit articulation of the knowledge underpinning such practice. Unlike the students in the Pilot Project these students did not receive the benefits of teaching sessions within the University where practice teachers and tutors addressed issues of integration.

Ability to acknowledge the differences in values and approaches between professionals and agencies

Practice opportunities particularly with health professionals seemed to produce the clearest statements from students concerning differences in approaches. This was not often articulated as an explicit values difference but rather a difference in approach or priority. Some limited references made by students to the relationship between different paradigms but it was not particularly evident that they were applying this to the analysis of organisational issues. Where there were poor inter personal work relations it is arguably difficult for a student confidently to differentiate between conceptual differences and personal conflicts, particularly given their stage of development and the length of the placement.

It must be made clear that there was a substantial body of evidence that students developed sufficient clarity about the contribution of other professionals and were often appreciative of the benefits of being able to access a different perspective on a piece of work. This reflects well on the students as there was little evidence of overt tribalism on their part.

Arrangements for placement management and support

It was clear from the evaluation of the Pilot Project that careful planning of the students' learning experiences was vital if the placements were to be successful. Preparing the placement settings, service users, link workers and practice teachers made heavy demands on staff time for both University and Quarriers. The overall outcome reflected this attention to both process and outcome and it was identified that widening the project would increase these demands.

Of the 13 placements that I reviewed all had qualified practice teachers with Social Work qualifications. Two of the Quarriers full time practice teachers who had been involved in the Pilot Project undertook the supervision of all but one of the Quarriers placements thus offering a degree of continuity. The six Renfrewshire placements were divided between a full time practice teacher who supervised four of the placements and two singleton practice teachers who each supervised a placement.

Of the seven Quarriers placements that I reviewed all but one had link workers. The exception was where the practice teacher was based in the agency. The Renfrewshire placements were organised on a similar basis with five of the six placements having link workers and the one where the practice teacher was on site did not have a link. The Renfrewshire link workers were social workers while there was more variation amongst Quarriers link workers – nurses and project managers and their deputies.

In each case where I had access to the working agreement drawn up as part of preparation for the placement, opportunities for inter-professional working were identified. The language adopted to identify this aspect varied considerably from explicit statements regarding inter-professional or multi disciplinary working through to vague statements about working with other agencies. It is likely that this variation in terminology reflects agency practice but in the light of some of my findings it may be useful to consider a more consistent form of language for inclusion in future working agreements to underline the significance being attributed to this aspect of the placement. This may not change agency practice dramatically but it might serve to pull it out from the background in those settings where it is not considered to be central or where its acceptance has lent it a degree of invisibility.

The working agreements also identified the role of the link workers both in relation to supporting the student on a day to day basis and also in relation to their contribution to the assessment of the student's practice. A range of approaches was adopted from having link worker comments incorporated into the practice teachers report to separate reports compiled by the link workers themselves. The content of these assessments will be considered at a later stage.

All the placements showed clear evidence that the arrangements for planning and managing the students experience resulted in a consistently high standard of provision. In a sample of this size it would not be uncommon for disruption and even breakdown to occur and the positive comments from the students concerning the management of their placements and the support they received from a range of staff is very likely to be related to the thoroughness with which these arrangements were put in place.

Assessment of Student Practice

Assessment by practice teachers

Of the 13 reports available to me 12 recommended a pass grade. The one fail recommendation reflected personal difficulties experienced by the student and did not appear to be related to the placement setting or issues of support and supervision. The reports were the responsibilities of the practice teachers and they incorporated link worker evaluation in different ways. Since there was only one recommendation that the student should fail, the outcome for the majority of students was successful. The standard varied across the sample and a recurring

comment from practice teachers related to a discrepancy between the students' ability to practise competently and to commit that process to paper in such a way as to meet all the requirements. This is not a new phenomenon and reflects a difficulty in assessing competence based practice that has been long recognised. It makes it difficult therefore to comment with accuracy on how well students addressed inter-professional issues in their direct practice when a relative absence of it in the report does not necessarily mean that it was not satisfactorily addressed in direct work. The best of the practice teachers reports were able to offer supplementary evidence to address shortfalls in student evidence across the criteria including inter-professional practice.

Amongst the more positive evaluative comments from practice teachers were statements about the students' value base. In general there seemed to be strong evidence of a commitment to an empowering practice base through partnership with service users. There are some indicators that directly sharing practice with other professionals, for example with health workers in a Community Mental Health team for older people, created opportunities that allowed students to articulate clearly their position in relation to service users. Some of these examples were very positive but a number arose from attitudes and practices which required to be challenged if the student were not to collude with potentially disempowering practice. This area also provided interesting material on which to base reflection on the stage of development of the student and the expectation of how far the challenge to other professionals should be pursued. At Direct Practice Two stage there is some expectation that students should not simply recognise/understand the dynamic but also be able to address it. The evidence from the reports suggest that this did happen in some cases but that it was particularly difficult where the other professional was perceived to be of higher status and more experienced.

In joint working risk assessment and management are of high priority and there was some evidence of students being advantaged by being placed in settings where opportunities existed to contribute to a single shared assessment format e.g. through the use of Carenap (an assessment tool developed initially for older people and people with dementia). This meant that the student had to demonstrate not only competence in terms of their own role but also appreciate the contribution of other professionals who would likely have some degree of difference in those areas to which they accorded highest priority.

Given that these practice teachers were all experienced in the role it was noteworthy that a wide variation occurred in the extent to which they addressed inter-professional working in an explicit manner. Again this may be a reflection of wider agency contexts and culture but it might have been anticipated that since they had set up the placements and been instrumental in identifying learning opportunities for the working agreements that a more consistent reference to this area would have resulted. On the other hand some of the reports demonstrated clearly that it was possible to address all the requirements and at the same time integrate the evaluation in relation to inter-professional working. This did not appear necessarily to be linked to the context of the setting offering more obvious opportunities but rather to the identification with the task from the planning of the placement through to delivery and evaluation of service.

Whatever the balance of factors may be, it seems clear from the documentation that agency ethos and practice are key if inter-professional working is to be a focus for improving practice. The influence of agencies to define practice is clearly evidenced in the documentation. Where inter-professional practice was not high on an agency's priorities it seems there was little encouragement to address it discretely. At the same time there was a clear expectation that students were expected to be capable in a range of competences which together were central to inter-professional practice such as networking, demonstrating clarity about role and purpose and dealing with conflict. This may be an area where development would result in students being able to see that particular clusters of competencies are at the core of effective inter-professional working.

Assessment by link workers

Link workers came from a variety of professional backgrounds including social work, social care, various nursing specialities and some in managerial posts where original professional qualification was not identified. Six of the placements had reports from the link workers attached to the practice teacher's report (Quarriers) and the four practice teacher reports from Renfrewshire placements made substantial reference to link worker evidence in the text of the reports.

The Pilot Project had provided a pro forma asking for comments in the following areas:

1. The student's ability to develop and sustain effective working relationships with service users
2. The student's ability to work in partnership with service users, building on their strengths
3. The student's ability to work as a member of your team
4. The student's ability to work with professionals from your own or other agencies
5. The student's ability to identify dilemmas in working with other professionals
6. Feedback from service users, other professionals and agencies upon the student's performance
7. How the student has worked with you as link supervisor
8. The student's ability to manage workload; reliability, attendance; punctuality
9. The student's progress in undertaking the work carries out by your agency

Link worker reports did not follow these headings necessarily but made reference to them. My impression is that number five – ability to identify dilemmas in working with other professions and agencies – was not focused on in these reports. The reports tended to be slightly weighted towards description rather than explicit evaluation. I found them illuminating as they often offered an insight into situations which were addressed in the practice teacher and student reports where the emphasis was on specific competence rather than a wider overview. While the link reports were not required to substantiate the students' claims for competence the evidence produced in the link reports appeared to be based on

assumptions which were consistent with the criteria adopted by the practice teachers. An example of this is in relation to working in partnership with service users where link worker reports were able to give very concrete examples, having observed students in direct practice more frequently than those practice teachers who were not on site. Another example of shared assumption came from a link worker from a nursing background who adopted "presenting and underlying problems" as a concept she used to evaluate the student's assessment skills.

In one instance three short reports from link workers accompanied the practice teacher's report. While it is probably not feasible to expect this generally, the result of this triangulation did produce a fairly robust picture of the student in practice. Since assessment of student practice is often dogged by lack of consistent evidence this approach may have much to recommend it despite the additional work it would require.

The reports also provided evidence that in some settings staff had clearly benefited from the presence of a social work student. There were examples of students using their knowledge of how social work departments operate to aid communication and to leave workers in the placement settings with improved images of and relations with social work departments. In some reports it was clearly stated that service users/residents had benefited materially through the intervention of students with the skills and knowledge required to negotiate with social work departments. Within some placements students have clearly contributed to the development of practice e.g. in raising awareness of inadequate policies in relation to ethnically sensitive practice.

Assessment by service users

An approach to practice based on partnership with service users was clearly identified in all the reports. Students consistently made reference to the need to work from a value base that strove to achieve maximum partnership with users. I saw no evaluative comments on student work which raised concerns about the practice base in this respect. On the contrary there were many examples of students addressing partnership issues in meticulous detail. The placements contexts have already been identified as key in determining how far partnership extends, dependent on professional culture.
Another factor illustrated in the range of reports related to service user profiles. All of the students worked with people who were disadvantaged and on the receiving end of discrimination but even within this spectrum some service users had additional physical and intellectual impairments that taxed the communication skills of students. It was, therefore, particularly interesting to review the extent to which service users had formally contributed to the assessment process.

In a number of the reports there were incidental comments on service users expressing gratitude for a student's intervention or asking for the student particularly on a return visit to the agency. While these statements are useful and contribute to an emerging picture of the student in practice they lack the

weight that a formal request for service user feedback carries. This was identified at the pilot stage and a series of questions that could be used flexibly was produced for guidance. This follows:

"Some suggested questions to ask people working with the student.

1. Did s/he show interest in your situation? Did s/he listen to you and pay attention to what you said? Did s/he put you at ease? How?
2. Did s/he show respect to you? Did you feel s/he was open/honest?
3. Did you feel you were offered choices? Did you feel you were treated fairly? Was s/he encouraging and supportive? Any examples you can think of?
4. Did you feel involved in making decisions about what to do? How?
5. Did s/he give you good information or advice? Did you think s/he knew what s/he was talking about? An example?
6. Did s/he do what s/he said s/he would do?
7. Did she speak to for you/others when necessary? Any examples?
8. Any other comments you would want to make to contribute to the student's development as a future social worker?

These questions can be varied and re-phrased differently depending on the setting/service user group. For service users who do not use verbal communication, appropriate graphics could be used or the people who know them best could be consulted."

Four of the placements provided materials from service users based on this suggested format and they served to illustrate some of the methods used to gain feedback and their implications. In the first example, the link worker followed the suggested format for her report and in addressing question one i.e. the student's ability to develop and sustain effective working relationships with service users, she sought feedback from three service users and incorporated their comments into her overall evaluation e.g. "X listens to what you want/need asks the right questions, this helps you to make up your mind". While it is perhaps unclear exactly what the service user was asked, what is helpful is concrete evidence of the student's ability to engage and communicate from the service user's perspective.

The second example involving another young person resident in a housing support project follows the format more closely and he was asked to give specific examples to substantiate each assertion and the link workers pulled this into report form.

The examples are particularly important as they serve to show that the service user understands what is being asked and ensures that she/he is able to say exactly what she/he wants communicated.

A third placement where the service users had a range of intellectual impairments provided three feedback forms. One was produced by a service user who was able to type the form himself and began by taking the opportunity to state his opposition to the language used, preferring "users of service" – he then went on to answer the questions having asserted himself. This respondent

was able to offer quite extended pieces of evidence and communicated an authority and confidence about his expectation of workers. The second feedback came from a user of service who required his support worker to write up his responses for him. This respondent gave positive answers to the questions but found it difficult to give specific examples. The support worker included an additional comment from the respondent saying that he was sorry the student was leaving. This is an example of where a flexible approach to seeking feedback is helpful if relevant qualitative data is not to be missed. The third respondent answered the questions very briefly but was able to give examples which were relevant and give further credibility to his answers.

These three sources of feedback from the one placement demonstrate that even with marked intellectual impairment it is possible to devise flexible methods which can result in gaining pertinent material expressing some fairly complex ideas. It is noted that this placement has a strong emphasis on the student's role as an advocate and inclusion worker and the quality of the feedback perhaps reflects an agency ethos which expects participation to be at the heart of practice.

The fourth example is of an education based project where families as a whole and not just the child attending the project are asked to give feedback on the service they receive. The questionnaire used is one devised by the agency but the information sought is very similar to the project document. This format asked for yes or no answers which were then to be backed up by specific examples. Some of these examples demonstrated that the student was drawing on relevant theory in her practice e.g. the use of techniques to facilitate communication between family members.

Formative and summative assessment

What is noteworthy from this approach to assessment is the way in which practice teachers, link workers and service users all made different contributions to the assessment of the students' practice. The practice teachers were properly focused on the Diploma in Social Work requirements being met and the format of their reports reflected this. The link worker reports covered a more limited range but illustrated the student's capacity to work in the setting with service users and other professionals. The service users provided not only testimonials to the students overall capacity to deliver a service but also some quite detailed concrete examples. These three sources of evidence taken together seem to be moving close to a method of assessment that permits legitimately different views to be expressed at the same time as providing a holistic overview of the student in practice.

In this sample the evidence for the three sources is consistently in agreement and this served to strengthen the final evaluation but it would also be important to note where discrepancies occurred and to use this as a tool to confirm evidence both positive and negative. Questions remain as to the relative weighting given to each of the components within such an approach.

Conclusions

The Demonstration Project has confirmed that inter-professional learning is extremely complex and is subject to the interplay of a wide range of factors. Progress in the development of this crucial aspect of practice learning is likely to occur through carefully planned and managed experiences such as are evident in the Demonstration Project.

Three areas in particular are identified:

1. What is a realistic expectation to have of students in this area of practice at the point of qualification?

The development of a confident, articulate worker in an inter-professional setting is highly dependent on her/his ability to have internalised an understanding of the social work role and task, as a basis for negotiating shared practice with a worker from another profession. The students in the sample had at most undertaken 145 days of supervised practice in all and generally there was good evidence that they were clear enough about professional identity to move into qualified practice. It was evident from the data that developing that confidence about their professional persona would be an ongoing task – as it should be. The Demonstration Project has very usefully shown that there are benefits to having social work students in inter-professional settings, not least by helping them address the boundaries of their professional role. It would, however, be unrealistic to expect that a student should be able to evidence highly confident practice when we know that long qualified workers are challenged by this demand. In a climate where continuing professional development and post qualifying education are firmly on the agenda it is essential that qualifying workers are encouraged to see themselves at the beginning of a continuum in which education and training in inter-professional practice are key.

2. What about the learning environment?

The evaluation makes it clear that student practice and the context in which it occurs cannot be separated. The Demonstration Project was based on careful negotiations which took up time and a range of staff resources. The Pilot Project by definition was smaller in scale and the clear sense of close partnership between agency and University in such areas as preparation of link workers and joint teaching of students was a marked feature of this stage. Widening the scope of the Demonstration Project necessarily increased the range of settings in the voluntary and unitary authority settings and brought in more variety but also more challenges. It was apparent that some of the settings were marked by inter-professional tensions and some of the them seemed to make little attempt to actively develop collaborative practice. This reflects a wider reality and one in which scarce placement provision necessitates the use of placements where support and supervision for students are vitally important. There is no sense in which the project placements were not well supported and students helped to develop considerably but the wider organisational implications should not be underestimated. This is a time of change in development in relation to joint working and it is inevitable that organisations demonstrate the stresses and

anxieties brought about by demands to give up familiar practices and procedures in favour of new and untested ones. This is the context that is likely to predominate in the future. It is a difficult environment in which to teach social work students not only what the core social work role is, but also to help them to begin negotiate changes in that role with other professionals who may be uncertain themselves. Lest this sounds too depressing I would stress that the agencies, on the whole, were able to provide sound opportunities that were appropriate for students and help them develop their understanding of inter-professional practice.

3. How do we know when a student is fit to practise?

The assessment of students' practice was well organised and the results of the procedures adopted suggest that further exploration along these lines should be pursued. Practice teacher reports were necessarily confined to some extent by Diploma in Social Work requirements but the additional materials supplied by link workers and users of service added dimensions to the assessments which made for stronger confirmation of the students' ability to practise appropriately. The weighting that the latter two should be given requires further exploration. The format for the link worker report is clearly appropriate and it may be helpful to develop this further towards a more evaluative rather than descriptive base. The service user feedback format was also clearly a useful tool and might repay further development as a means not only of evaluating students' practice but also in furthering the aims of partnership with users.

The findings from the 1.2 Practice Audit and Literature Review suggested that it would be useful to explore whether students would demonstrate:

- Enhanced awareness of their professional identity and those of other professionals
- Understanding of the roles and responsibilities of social workers and other professionals
- Appreciation of the different perspectives and values of a range of professionals
- Greater familiarity with collaborative processes and systems
- Improved joint practice to the benefit of service users and carers
- An improved level of reflection and critical analysis as a result of exposure to other ways of thinking and doing

The data from the Demonstration Project has yielded evidence for all the above criteria and although not evenly spread it is reasonable to conclude that in the main these criteria have been met satisfactorily.

Readiness to Practice

Aim

The aim of this demonstration project was to test the similarities and differences between different professions and service users of their assessment of a social work assignment. This assignment is used at the end of a skills module to assess the students' ability to engage in an interview with a service user. It is also the test for readiness to practice and a student can not progress to their first practice without passing this module. As such other people are being asked to assess not just the performance of the student but the level i.e. at pre practice placement, early on in the course.

Assignment

The assignment is to role play an initial interview with a service user who is played by another student. The students receive outlines of the scenario to aid their preparation. The chosen video is an interview with an older woman who lives in sheltered housing. This is the student's first contact with the woman after the previous worker has left.

The role play is video- recorded in one of the University media labs.
The performance of the video is assessed on the basis of:-
    Communication: non verbal, speaking and listening
    Structure of the interview: explaining role, review and future tasks
    Beginning to make an assessment: picking up on cues, exploring
    issues

There is a second part to this assignment which is a 1000 word critique written by the student. This was not included in the demonstration as it was thought to be too time consuming.

Three pairs of students from the last cohort to undertake this module were asked for their written permission to use the video. They were chosen because they had passed the assignment with a low average mark. As such there would be some good aspects to the video but also clear areas where they could have done better. Out of these one was selected for use.

Participants

We had a target of 10 people, although we would have been happy with six to eight, from the following groupings:-

Nurses
Occupational therapists
People who use services
Social workers
Teachers

It was agreed that we should aim to have people who have had some experience in assessment within their own group. Nurses and teachers were accessed through the university's departments, both of whom had representatives on the project management group. Occupational therapists were drawn from one local authority via the occupational therapist who was on the management group. Social workers were directly contacted in one local authority.

People who used services were potentially the one group who may have had no experience of assessment. The Institute project 3.3 had a specific remit to work with people who use services to increase their participation in social work training. As a result the group were already quite well versed in social work training and had undertaken a previous piece of work in relation to assessment.

Method

The above groups received an invitation to attend a focus group with an information sheet about the project. After a brief introduction they watched the video. Immediately afterwards they were asked to fill in an assessment sheet which asked them to rate the overall performance on the following scale:

Poor   Okay   Good   Very Good   Excellent

They were also asked to note down reasons for their decision.

Afterwards there was a group discussion about the student's overall performance under the following criteria:-

    Engaging with the person
    Listening to the person
    Speaking to the person
    Responding to cues from the person
    Explaining their role
    Providing information
    Demonstrating respect

They were also asked about the task as a whole and participation in assessment of social work students in general.

Focus group discussion was recorded, transcribed and analysed under the above and other emerging themes.

Sample size

We fell short of our target for social workers, teachers and nurses but in the time from the interim report we did manage one focus group of teachers and, a second group of service users. The first group of three came from the Institute's project regarding involvement of users and carers in social education and such they had developed knowledge regarding social work education and had experience of similar exercises. The second group was consciously drawn from a more traditional service user project and as such they had little knowledge about social work education but most had direct experience of social work

services, this led to another nine service users participating in the project. Table One shows the breakdown of the final sample.

Table One: Sample Size

Grouping	Numbers attended
Nurses	2
Occupational therapists	6
Service users (2 groups)	12
Social workers	2
Teachers	3
Total to date	**25**

There are various reasons why we struggled to get enough people. Even with six weeks advance notice, out of a pool of 12 social workers only four could attend the proposed date. One pulled out due to a court commitment and the other failed to appear on the day. The decision to go "in house" for nurses and teachers meant that we had large staff groupings to target. Unfortunately we got a poor response from nurses in particular given a department of over sixty staff. However, it was pointed out that the week in which we offered dates was a very busy one in general but invitations direct to named people for a second proved unsuccessful. The teacher focus group took place at the third attempt. It is important to note these details because any future goal of shared assessment does require enough assessors to carry out the task.

FINDINGS

Grading based on the assessment sheets

No participants graded the mark as poor. Table two shows the spread of grades. There were differences around the acceptability of the student's performance. On scores alone occupational therapists and service users, as a group, scored the student lower than social workers and nurses.
One service user did change their mark from very good after the discussion. Initially he felt the students had done very well. He said he later realised he was grading her highly due to how friendly she had been and had not realised the flaws in the interview until they were pointed out.

One of the social workers thought the grading scale was too simple and that the student's placing varied between different aspects of the task. The grading did not allow for degrees of scale.

The university marking criteria had placed the student as a low good. This compares favourably with the participants, with 11 of the 13 participant choosing okay or good.

Table Two: Grading the student's performance per grouping

	Okay	**Good**	Very Good	**Excellent**
Nurses (2)		2		
OTs (6)	3	1	2	
Service users (12)	4	2	5	1
Social workers (2)		2		
Teachers (3)		1	2	
Total (13)	7	8	9	1

Written reasons for the grading by individuals show that the nurse group generally wrote less and were not too specific. The others groups gave very specific feedback about what the student did or did not do. Gaining more participants in each group will help to determine if this was an individual or professional style. One nurse did write that the absence of detailed assessment criteria made it difficult to provide feedback.

Teachers were much less clear, in comparison to other groups, about what benchmarks they might use in assessing a social work piece of practice.

Occupational therapists, social workers and services users wrote detailed notes and generally highlighted the same issues. It should be noted that the occupational therapists were all based within community care teams alongside social workers and had experience of social work students being placed in their offices. Also the nature of the interview was a familiar one to them. The student mentioned a possible referral to occupational therapist within the role play. This may have led to a harsher grade by some of them as the student was criticised for not following through the issues of physical disability or the actual referral with the older person. However two occupational therapists also scored the student's performance as very good emphasising the student was at an early stage in training and this was about readiness to practice.

Focus group discussions of the student's performance

The analysis of transcripts has followed the criteria used in the group discussions. Specific to the video these are: engaging with the person, listening to the person, speaking to the person, responding to cues from the person, explaining their role, providing information and finally demonstrating respect. Discussion on the assessment exercise in general used the following criteria: how did you find the grading, is assessment something you would want to do, and what might the issues be in involving other professions in the assessment?

Engaging with the person

In terms of engaging with the client, just about all groups felt that the student had performed well overall. However, emphasis on the strengths and weaknesses of

that engagement did vary by group. One of the social workers thought that there was good eye contact, a view echoed by one of the occupational therapists, and warmth about the student's engagement. The other social worker thought the student, although not tense, did not look completely relaxed. Both social workers agreed that the pace of the interview was good, with the student allowing the client to speak and not jumping in when there was a short pause. The nursing group did not identify any particular strength or weakness, only stating that they thought the student had done quite well and had started to develop a rapport with the client. Only the occupational therapists made any comment about the seating arrangements, suggesting there was a therapeutic relationship with the way the chairs were arranged. Another occupational therapist thought the student's body language was quite closed in. The service users thought she had interacted well or very well, demonstrating concern and a sympathetic ear, and letting the client feel comfortable with her. The teachers were unsure of the nature of the interview to what extent it should take the form of a conversation.

Listening to the person

A common view among the groups, except the teachers, was that the student did not pick up on some leading responses, for example, the client's problems with cooking and cleaning. The student could have intervened here and asked if there was anything that the department could do to help. One social worker thought that

> "There is a superficiality to it, that was my overall feeling. The student will come away and think, 'what actually did I find out?' It is difficult to separate out listening from the exploring, because the listening is going to lead to the exploring. She certainly listens but I'm not sure that she heard"

Similarities can been drawn from a quote below of one of the service users

> "I think she listened but not in a productive way, she did not come back with any answer to the OT for example. What is the point of listening; it's a two-way thing, why are you listening? She did not seem to do anything with the information she was given. She only gave information back when she was actually prompted"

Another service user thought that the student gave the impression of listening, certainly by her demeanor, but thought that it should all have been brought to a conclusion to let the client know that she had picked up on it.

One of the nurses thought that the student had a framework in her mind of the things she wanted to find out about the lady and adhered to this too closely. An occupational therapist group member thought the student had done some 'active listening' but could have done more, the student did not probe some of the things that were there. In a similar vein, a user group member thought there was no 'achievement listening'.

Speaking to the person

Little comment was made in any group about the student's speech to the client. A member of the service user group one thought the student was not assertive enough or sufficiently forthcoming about herself. Members of the social work group thought the student's clarity of speech was fine and that the client certainly understood her.

Responding to cues from the person

All the professions and the service user group agreed that they did not think the student responded to cues particularly well. One of the nursing group suggested that this is understandable given that there is only a finite time for an interview and a lot of things could be explored further at a later meeting. As one of the occupational therapists said

"……she touched on a lot of topics but never actually explored them"

Members of the social work, occupational therapy and nursing group all thought that the client's health and sight problems were not explored sufficiently. Additionally nursing and the service user groups both wanted further questioning on the family situation, particularly in relation to client support. The failure to respond to the cue to explain occupational therapy and its benefit to the client were noted by members of the social work and, unsurprisingly, the occupational therapy groups.

The teachers did not identify the missed cues around mobility and sight though thought she had picked up on information about the family. This is one example of how the teachers may not be as aware of the social work role in this scenario. As the discussion developed, one teacher commented how they had circled very good but he could now see there were other issues. This was followed up by another teacher stating "I think if you are a professional working in an occupation that involves interaction with other people then you can make judgements about lack of respect, that kind of thing but what you can't do is make judgements about specific purposes".

Explaining their role

The service users in group one were most critical about the student's performance in this regard, going so far as to say this was an example of what a client would call a waste of time. Another of the service users thought there was no "beginning, middle or end to the discussion" (also listed by one of the social workers) and the student had not made it clear what she was doing for the client, or what she wanted from the client. The second user group noted this but in a less critical way.

One of the nursing group wondered

> "although she said it was a get to know each other session, I was still left wondering what was the purpose and the aim of it"

The link between this criteria and the performance in the other video related criteria is illustrated by one of the nursing group who suggests that if the purpose of the meeting was clearer then the student could have said that she would pick up on things (missed cues) later. Clearly, explaining ones role successfully has a knock-on effect on all the other criteria.

One of the social work group wondered what the student was doing there and thought the student had not made it clear what she would do with the information that she received from the client. The student did not establish their role as the person providing assistance. The other social worker stressed the importance of explaining ones role given

> "…..there are so many different professionals come about and I think it is sometimes very difficult for the client to really know who everybody is and what they do"

However, this person also went on to say that it is a normal thing at this stage of the training to not complete this element as well as it could be done.

Providing information

Members of both the nursing and the social work groups noticed that the student had given some information about occupational therapy when asked but, as may be expected, the occupational therapists did not think the student provided enough information when the client asked what an occupational therapist was. Both user groups noticed that the student had explained what an occupational therapist was but did not detail how they could help the client. The occupational therapist group also felt that the student could have suggested that an occupational therapist come and make a visit, and that the student should have summarised the discussion of interview at the end, a view shared by the social workers.

The social workers suggested that the student, after asking if anyone helped around the house, should have stressed that there were various ways that the client could be assisted if she was interested. However, the group also recognised that this was made difficult by a lot of mixed messages coming from the client. She kept mentioning problems and then saying it wasn't so bad and she did not want to be a bother.

Both service user groups thought that the student could have been much clearer at the end about what information she had gathered and what the next steps would be. As a service user from group two stated "She (the student) was not aware of the link to services, sort of I'm your guide to help you get into the right services".

Demonstrating respect

There was general agreement that the student had demonstrated adequate respect to her client during the interview but with one commonly held exception. All of the groups thought that the student's early question asking if she could address the client by her first name showed a lack of respect. An occupational therapist expressed the view that she would never call the client by their first name on the first visit, while a service user thought it was obvious on the video that the client was not comfortable, clearly hesitating when asked the question. The first name issue actually made one of the social work group cringe, suggesting that someone of that age should not be called by their first name. A nursing group member thought that asking the question puts the client 'on the spot'.

A lack of demonstrated empathy was a concern for just one of the groups, the social workers, and they were also concerned about some of the assumptions that the student had made about the client's situation, such as her sight. The only other concern for the social workers was the student's exploration of the client's relationship with her husband. One of the group wondered if this really showed a lack of respect.

Assessment in general

How did you find the grading?

One of the occupational therapists suggested that

> "as OTs we are not used to that, we are used to having a couple of situations and we do make allowances for their reactions or they might be having an off day. All these situations, you've quite a few situations and we tend to go on the better one. Of course, you yourself might be having an off day and be feeling particularly critical. I'd much rather see someone perform over a couple of occasions rather than just the once"

The service users had a mixed response to this question. One member from group one was concerned at how much he had not picked up from the video (when comparing his comments to the other two members). Another was worried that her report on the assessment may not reflect the fact that the student is at the start of a learning curve and may show potential. The second service user group elicited slightly different responses from "I wouldn't like to do it for real. I don't feel I have the right to tell people how to do a job" to "we've all been in interviews with social workers, good and bad, so we can spot a good social worker a mile off" and, therefore, could help student to develop aspects that improve their practice.

Regarding the grading, one teacher states "I felt very uncomfortable, unsure what you were looking for". Overall they demonstrated less knowledge of what a social work interview might be and, therefore, did not pick up on several of the

issues raised by the other groups. Nursing and social work, did not express a view one way or the other.

Is grading something you would want to do?

The occupational therapist group suggested that they have their own skills and also shared skills so think they can be involved but not with doing the whole assessment exercise.

 The social work group was very positive

> "….from what we know at Stirling, the skills video and that teaching sequence is very useful and I think it would be useful for practice teachers to have the results of that. But even better would be involvement with you to assess that readiness to practice aspect"

They went on to say that they did not think there was enough of a link at the moment between practice and the university. They also thought this would help the student to see how seriously that is being taken by the practice.

The nursing team also welcomed the idea of involvement in assessment suggesting that a good deal of the curricula and teaching methods are similar. One of the team did ask though if involvement depended on what the social work department thought of the current nursing assessment, or the people involved in that department, the contribution you think we can make for you rather than what we think we can do for you.

One of the service users from group one wanted to be involved to help eliminate what she had previously described as a waste of time for the client. The group agreed they should be involved and the discussion was about how this could be achieved

"If you are looking at the whole course, I would like to think that every student going through the course would have some user involvement in the assessment but it is how often…."

The second group held some who felt it was quite a responsibility to those who "think it should be done more often and in more depth". Different options offered were noted such as direct observation of the student and paired or panel marking with tutors.

What might be the issues in involving other people?

Finding the time is an issue cited by all of the groups. This view is re-enforced by one of the service users who go on to suggest a way of reducing the need for external assessment

> "I think that assessment by service users is itself quite a commitment. If the things that we have raised were put into the course and then people were

assessed it would reduce the need for us to come. It would eliminate the things that are not right. There should be some sort of tick list before the students go out. And it perhaps wouldn't even need a service user there"

Clear guidance about what the students have been told about the purpose of the assessment was noted as important by the social workers and a few service users. Social workers also suggest that marking frames and standards would need working out prior to the assessment. Their concern was consistency of marking across several markers. The nursing group raised the issue of having to know what the social work assessment tools are. Another issue for nursing is knowing precisely at what stage the student is at. The service users echoed this. A personal opinion raised by one of the nursing group was that she

"feels a bit tentative commenting on people from another department. You can only go on the knowledge and background that you have to make a judgement but it is difficult to know if your judgement is based on what a nurse is doing or a SW is doing"

This was echoed by the teachers. "I think she is a good person, she has some good social skills there but because I do not know what social workers do I can't make the judgement"

Other comments on the video assessment

A member of the occupational therapy group thought that it was quite reassuring that this video exercise was in place, because the university is giving the student the opportunity to perform in a real situation. A similar comment was made by one of the nurses.

The service users also stressed the need for students to practice in such situations to avoid them going out to real situations before they were ready.
One member of group one went on to suggest that a video by actors using this one as the script. The actors could role play this one but then role play a second much improved version to show students the difference. The whole group felt this would be a worthwhile project that people who use services could get involved with. A member of group two suggested they could observe the mock interview directly and give immediate feedback rather than be part of the formal assessment.

Conclusions

This experiment shows that potential for other professions and people who use services to offer very similar observations regarding the student's performance. The teachers demonstrated that some professions may have less awareness of the social work role and thus be less able to comment on specific aspects in a student's performance. Perhaps teachers may have fared better if the person being interviewed was a child of school age with issues around education, which can lead them into contact with social workers. The nurses and occupational therapists had more experience upon which to draw in this scenario.

The actual grading varied between okay and excellent but most were close to the grade the student actually received from the University (good). There were some differences of opinion about the grade and how well the student did in certain aspects. Participants, except teachers, were clear about what might be a good interview and the various key inter personal skills required. The issue of level of performance, in this instance readiness to practice, is perhaps more critical in that some participants needed to be reminded of this. However this was taken on board in the focus groups. Such variances are not unusual amongst markers and could be reduced with experience and guidance.

The focus group discussion points to the loosest similarity being between community-based occupational therapists and social workers, which is unsurprising given their close working relationship in the field of community care. The nurses picked up on the same issues, though in less depth. The people who use services picked up the same range of issues and were most critical about the student's ability to state her role and her overall effectiveness. This may have been because they were less used to working with students as opposed to qualified workers but it is also about their strong desire to protect service users from ineffective workers. The involvement of a second user group who did not have experience of social work education revealed no real differences of views about the student's performance but did bring out a wider range of responses to service users getting involved in assessment of social work students.

All groups expressed interest in shared assessment though issues about time, method and capacity were raised. Commonalities of teaching were noted by the nurses though both they and occupational therapists also noted their own professional specific knowledge and skills.

COMPARISON BETWEEN THE TWO DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS

Both projects have similar findings:-

<u>Ability of other professionals to assess practice components of social work students.</u>

There is evidence that some professionals can assess aspects of social work students' practice. Guidance and clear criteria are required to ease the process. There may be issues about location in that the practice learning setting used in the Paisley's pilot is one in which contact with social work and social work students is common. By the same token, community based occupational therapists, in the readiness to practice demonstration, had a very knowledgeable view of what is expected of social work students and are already involved in their placements within community care teams.

However, it should be noted that these projects have only sought the views of other professionals and services users regarding discrete aspects of social work training: assessment of beginning interviewing skills and collaborative working with other professionals. This still leaves large areas where shared assessment has not been tested. The investigation for and compilation of statutory or court reports is just one example. Few other professions, except medicine, can expect to be routinely asked to undertake these. Such processes have their own legal, ethical and theoretical frameworks. Therefore, the assessment of a student undertaking such a task still requires, we would argue, supervision by a qualified social worker and practice teacher.

<u>Capacity of other professionals to assess social work students</u>

Both demonstration projects found that time and the number of other professionals willing and able to assess social work students are key issues. This means shared assessment will have limits and points very much to a need to continue to take a pragmatic approach (Trevillion and Bedford 2003) to future work in this field. However, general practice related aspects of social work education do seem to lend themselves to involvement of others in assessment. Courses need to consider where shared assessment would benefit the students and when it is best kept to social workers, and then how capacity can be built in so that every student gets similar experiences.

<u>Learning to work collaboratively</u>

There is always a tension for students in writing to the social work competences/standards as well as demonstrating how they undertook particular aspects of their work such as inter-professional practice. The practice learning demonstration points to the need to support collaborative practice with formal teaching sessions. This may help students to be more explicit about this aspect of social work in their placement reports and assignments.

Involvement of people who use services

Both projects sought the views of service users and there are differences in the responses received. In the readiness to practice demonstration, they gave very specific comments about the different components of the interview. These were very similar to those of the professionals. In contrast, the comments received from the practice learning demonstration were more general and tended to comment to how the student made them feel.

Clearly there were differences in the nature of the involvement; it was in some ways easier in the readiness to practice demonstration. They had a defined task and the student was not known to them. This group was also involved in another Institute project which had given them knowledge of social work training and confidence in their contribution to it. Service users who know the student are in a different situation where there are issues of power as well as knowledge about how a social work student should be working with them. The process of gaining feedback from service users in placement settings is being developed in the full demonstration project and is an issue being taken up in general (Edwards, 2003).

In summary the project points positively towards an approach where, in the nature of collaborative working, as defined by Whittington (2003), both other professionals and people who use services can be involved in the assessment as well as the learning of students. We need to ask ourselves, why, when and how we might best facilitate this.

Triangulation of evidence

The three different sources, practice teacher, link worker and service user, were seen to provide different yet complimentary perspectives on the students' work. This both broadens and strengthens the evidence base for assessing the student.

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