
This article describes the experience of Nottingham and Birmingham Universities in partnership with workers from Advocacy In Action and shows that service-users, carers and other eligible citizens can and should be involved in deciding fitness for practice and in the managing of that practice, and that such involvement enhances the student experience and lays the foundations for partnership working in the professional arena. The users and citizen stakeholders of social services are a valuable resource in respect of all aspects of service planning, delivery and control. In respect of social work education, their involvement is too valuable an opportunity to miss and we look forward to further exciting partnerships in the field of practice learning.


This paper reports on a piece of action research that has involved people who use mental health services in systematically providing feedback from a user perspective on participants' assessed work completed for one module of a masters' training programme in mental health. In an attempt to improve professional practice and include people who were accessing mental health services in so doing, it outlines how users were trained to provide feedback and the training methods employed. The findings summarise the kind of issues users raised in their feedback to participants about the evidence professionals provided to demonstrate their learning from the training programme. A focus group interview with professionals provides a contrasting insight into the participants' experience of having their work commented upon from a user perspective. The paper draws on the experience of a five-year external evaluation of an interdisciplinary programme in community mental health at Birmingham University in the UK which has highlighted the involvement of people who use mental health services as a particular innovation in the design, delivery and evaluation of the curriculum.


University regulations typically assume that the assessment of students is essentially a task for paid academic staff. However, this is a far cry from much of the current literature about assessment in social work education, of which one of the distinguishing features is the not infrequent references to stakeholders beyond the individuals who are to be assessed and the academic staff employed to teach them. This paper reviews some of the recent literature on the involvement of persons other than social work academics, including students, practice teachers and service users, in assessing students studying in social work programmes. Implications for programme providers of using non-academic assessors are explored.

Service user and carer involvement in social work education is now well established since its inception as a compulsory requirement in the social work curriculum in the United Kingdom in 2003. Since then, there have been many examples of how such involvement has been approached by education providers. Nevertheless, one of the key obstacles and challenges in this field continues to centre on the need to achieve non-tokenistic user involvement which cements the engagement of service users and carers at the heart of social work education. This paper describes one such initiative where service user and carer colleagues in a university in Northern Ireland have been actively involved in the assessment of first year social work students’ preparation for their first period of practice learning. The paper presents the background to this initiative explaining how the project unfolded; the detailed preparations that were involved and the evidence gathered from evaluations undertaken with the students, service users and carers, and academic colleagues who were all involved. We believe that the findings from this project can contribute to the advancement of existing knowledge in the field in exploring and recommending creative methodologies for user involvement in social work education.


This descriptive study at one university in Turkey aimed to document nursing students’ views on involvement of service users in clinical practice assessments. The study sample was comprised of 179 baccalaureate degree nursing students in their second, third, and fourth years of study. Data were collected using a questionnaire developed by the researchers. Participants indicated they had some problems with the present clinical practice assessment methods (73.2%) and that most of these stemmed from the clinical educators (68.2%). Sixty-eight percent of the participants responded positively to service user involvement in clinical practice assessments; however, some noted that this involvement might have some drawbacks. Results of the present study suggest that future studies on service user involvement in clinical practice assessment process are needed to further clarify this issue.


The government, local authorities and academic institutions in the United Kingdom all positively support the involvement of service users in social work practice and education. Based upon research undertaken for a Master’s dissertation, this article argues for such an inclusive approach. The author works for the Training and Development Services of an English Social and Caring Services department, which delivers a Diploma in Social Work course in collaboration with the local university college. This course began to incorporate service users’ views in the assessment of students on practice placements in the mid-1990s. This was a helpful development, although areas of ambiguity and difficulty became apparent, as did a lack of clarity and consistency in the implementation of the process. A qualitative survey of the views of practice teachers was conducted by means of semi-structured interviews, which focussed on the main principles, issues and practical implications of service user involvement in the assessment of DipSW students. The article offers a summary of the findings of the survey, and a critical discussion of the main issues and difficulties that emerged. Some recommendations are made for the course that the author is associated with, although they would probably apply to most DipSW courses in the United Kingdom. The author is male, white and British.

The new BSc (Hons) Social Work requires students to undertake an assessed preparation for practice. For students in their first term at the University of Plymouth and Cornwall College, a cornerstone of this 'Safety to Practice' assessment is the 'service user conversation'. Service users and carers meet individually with students to tell them what they think a good social worker should be like. Students write an account of the conversation and are given feedback on their interpersonal skills and on the accuracy of the record. This process involves service users and carers as 'teachers' and contributors to assessment from the beginning, thus reversing the usual power relationship. The conversations have proved to be a fascinating journey for all those involved, with significant implications for future practice. The students' learning needs come into sharp focus at the very beginning of their course and an assessment of their performance is meaningfully ascertained through this process. The method has been evaluated with many of the service users and carers who were involved and the outcomes of this research are presented. This innovative and creative process has much to offer in the education and the professional development of new social workers in ways that are both ethical and inclusive. We share the richness of the experience that has gone beyond our expectations and seek to encourage discussion about the possibilities of a fully inclusive approach to social work education.


In this exercise, a small group of students (4) was involved in seeking feedback about their practice from service users with whom they had worked during placement. Feedback was sought through a questionnaire which was based on a framework supplied by tutors (Appendix 1). Both students and service users/carers were then asked to complete a semi-structured questionnaire about the process and outcomes of seeking and giving feedback (Appendices 2 and 3). Thereafter, students were asked to prepare a short presentation based on the completed questionnaire but also addressing their feelings about the whole process. Finally, a group discussion explored the ways in which the process and outcome had contributed to the assessment of the student’s practice and ways in which this process of could be further developed.


This paper describes a teaching and learning initiative developed in a UK social work programme that has involved carers, service users, academic social work staff and practitioners. Post-graduate student social workers spend 24 hours in agreed periods with family carers or people who use social work services. The paper explains the origins of this initiative, rooted in a model of service user and carer involvement established over a number of years within the social work programme at the University of Dundee, Scotland. The development of this teaching and learning method is outlined and an account is given by a family carer describing their experience of being involved in the programme. Findings from the evaluation of this first year of operation are reported.

Mental health service user involvement in education has gained momentum and prominence over the past decade, but service user involvement in the assessment of students' practice remains underdeveloped. This paper reports findings from a qualitative analysis of documentary data that captured service users' feedback to mental health student nurses about their practice. Third year mental health nursing students in acute inpatient placements were required to elicit, record and reflect on the feedback that service users gave them about their practice. One hundred and eighty eight accounts of this feedback were analysed and findings are presented in terms of the methods that students used to gain feedback and the issues that emerged from this. The analysis also explored the role that students appear to play in care delivery and what aspects of their role service users most valued. The impact that the feedback had on the students' learning and practice is examined and discussed in relation to future opportunities for, and likely barriers to, continued service user involvement in assessing students' practice.


Rationales for involving service users and carers in professional health and social work education tend to derive from arguments of empowerment, consumer rights and/or improvement in service outcomes. In the UK, these rationales are now firmly embedded, and involvement is increasingly expected in all aspects of training, but little literature exists describing or evaluating the impact of involvement outside teaching activities. This paper describes the approach to involvement in admissions interviews in the social work and clinical psychology programmes at the University of Birmingham. It reports the results of a post hoc survey into the experiences and expectations of the 2007–08 cohorts of successful applicants and interview-panel members from each programme, with the aims of highlighting underlying rationales and informing future practice. Survey respondents tended to focus on outcome-based rationales rather than value-based ones in support of involvement. Impact on the selection process was cited by many as important, but service user and carer visibility to applicants may be a more significant outcome. Disagreements among panel members were uncommon, but did raise some training and procedural issues. To be meaningful, the rationale(s) for involvement should be clearly articulated at the outset and the mode(s) of involvement should reflect this.


Assessment tools were designed to provide health and social care students with multi-sourced, interprofessional feedback in practice. This includes feedback from service users. Third year medical students at the University of Leeds were given accesses to 4 assessment tools whilst in practice. Completed assessments were then sent to the university where service users and carers worked with university tutors to give further feedback and comment on the overall development of students. Three service users then took part in a focus group and one provided written feedback. Four key themes were identified from the focus group: Preparation and support; The design of the tools; The process of using the tools in practice; Feedback. The project provided both challenges and rewards for all involved. The service user educators involved were able to bring a different and valuable perspective to formative feedback. The
combination of their personal and professional experiences, along with the preparation they had received, helped bridge the gap between service users in practice and university based tutors. The findings from this study went on to inform a review of the assessment tools and revised versions are now being used.


Assessment of learning in practice through observation is a key part of social work training in the UK. There is no evidence of systematic dissemination or evaluation of observation tools in social work training. The Assessment of Learning in Practice Settings (ALPS-CETL) programme developed observation tools intended to provide comprehensive assessment through the collection of analytic student reflection, alongside commentary from practice assessor, professional colleague and service user. These ALPS tools were further developed to include specific social work assessment criteria. The purpose of this study was to establish student and practice assessor views about how the tools had been used and to understand their effectiveness, or otherwise, in practice. Through analysis of student focus groups, practice assessor interviews and completed ALPS tools, this paper evaluates the use of the social work adapted ALPS tools on an undergraduate social work programme in an English university. The findings of this study support the view that the ALPS tools can be used to promote reflective writing and support students in obtaining formative and summative evidence of their progress. In addition the tools appear to promote a student-led process of observational assessment thereby potentially helping to address the issue of power in the student/assessor relationship.


This paper discusses the involvement of service users in academic assessment as part of a second year module for social work undergraduate students at Canterbury Christ Church University in the UK. The three main tasks undertaken in partnership are detailed: designing an assessment form, assessment of student group presentations and assessment of a written reflective essay. The paper starts by identifying key questions raised by the assessor team before providing a critical commentary on the process, and identifying challenges and learning points. The experience emphasises the need for a more critical and searching approach towards service user involvement in social work education in academic assessment. Moreover, the team’s experience suggests that such work is best achieved in the context of collaborative working relationships based on trust, with opportunities for team reflection and supported by training in academic assessment.


Competence in building therapeutic relationships is essential for student mental health nurses and therefore requires robust assessment. However, the assessment of such complex skills is problematic. Following policy directives exhorting increased service user involvement in general, there have been recent suggestions that service users could contribute to the assessment of practice. This paper outlines a research project which investigated the views of 24 stakeholders (service users, lecturers, mentors, ex-students and student nurses) about the potential involvement of service users in the assessment of student mental health nurses’ competence in forming therapeutic relationships. The findings revealed that service users interviewed had a largely positive attitude towards this potential
development. Nurse participants were more ambivalent. Despite citing several key advantages, nurses also expressed some important reservations about how such a proposal could be implemented in practice. Nevertheless, on balance, they were in favour in principle. Key recommendations for the implementation of this potential development included strategies to enable anonymity and freedom of choice for service users. A range of options for obtaining service user feedback were put forward, along with some ideas about how the fairness of the assessment might be protected.


This article describes and critically analyses the process of developing an assessment tool designed by users of mental health services to assess student nurses in practice. The developmental process raised a number of complex and unexpected issues. The findings suggest that rather than “assess” student nurses in practice, service users should have a role in reviewing student’s practice. Whilst there was a consensus amongst stake-holders that engaging in this feedback process is beneficial to both the student and service user, it is the manner in which it is sought which requires further investigation.


This paper reports on a participatory action research project focusing upon service-user involvement in the assessment of student mental health nurses in practice. The principle of student nurses being assessed by service-users was found to be desirable in theory. However, its implementation proved to be fraught with difficulty especially with regard to the concerns about increased workload and feelings of vulnerability amongst students. It is recommended that the model of assessment should be adjusted to that of review and that a program of service-users reviewing student nurses on placement be implemented and evaluated.


This research project was designed and implemented as a pilot study in order to develop a method of mental health service users assessing student nurses in practice.

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This article is based on workshops for practice teachers designed to promote exploration and constructive ideas around the theme of involving service users in student assessment in social work. The workshop used three scenarios created from amalgamating real life occurrences which also challenged the thinking of the participants. Notes were also given to participants after the discussion to consolidate the ideas covered and to stimulate further thinking. A total of 60 practice teachers and tutors participated in the discussion. The article provides details of the three scenarios, followed by the issues paper given to the participants. In addition, the existing literature is examined, and the authors provide guidance towards a model of successful inclusion of service users in student assessment.

The training of future mental health professionals offers one avenue of change to improve service user and carer involvement in mental health services. This study looked at experiences of trainees on the University of Surrey's Clinical Psychology Doctorate programme in involving service users and carers on training placements. Twenty trainees completed a self-report semistructured questionnaire providing qualitative data that were analysed using thematic analysis. A number of benefits of service user and carer involvement in training were identified as well as practical considerations, including factors that might facilitate or limit such involvement on training placements. It is intended that the findings will prove useful to others involved with the training of mental health professionals.

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