

## ANNUAL COURSE MONITORING REPORT

Course: BA/MA (Honours) Social Work

Department(s): Glasgow School of Social Work

Academic Session: 2009-2010

Report compiled by: Graham McPheat

### 1. INTRODUCTION

During session 2009-2010 there has been significant planning for structural changes which will be implemented from August 2010 onwards. GSSW will be located in the newly formed Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS). Within this we will exist within the School of Applied Social Sciences along with Community Education, Geography and Sociology. It is anticipated that this will present many opportunities for inter-disciplinary collaboration, especially with regards to teaching and research. However, in the initial stages of these new structures the new Faculty will exist across two different campuses, Jordanhill and John Anderson, which is likely to present challenges as to how partnerships are developed. Equally significant within the planning for these new structures have been the changes experienced by the admin and course support teams. From session 2010-2011 new structures will be in place and session 2009-2010 has involved significant uncertainty for the staff involved. Despite this the service offered by the course support team to the BA/MA (Honours) Social Work during the 2009-2010 session has been excellent.

Another significant impending change which was confirmed during the 2009-2010 session was the decision of Glasgow University to remove itself from the synergy agreement with Strathclyde University. This decision will see the end of the joint school arrangements at the end of session 2010-2011. Whilst this will have no direct impact on the BA/MA (Honours) Social Work course, the removal of resource from the school as a whole is likely to hold implications. This is likely to become more apparent in planning for session 2010-2011.

The course was reviewed in session 2008-2009 and there were changes to curriculum design and placement. Consequently some significant changes have been implemented in session 2009-2010. Students embarking on year 1 in session 2009-2010 have followed a curriculum containing new and revised modules and have for the first time completed an elective as part of the course. GSSW has offered one social work themed elective but students have been free to access any elective module from elsewhere in the university. The other most significant curriculum change occurs later in the course when the first Practice Learning module has been moved from year 2 to year 3.

Social Work education in Scotland has been subject to major review in recent years. This culminated in the publication of the Framework for Social Work Education (2003) which together with the Standards in Social Work Education (SiSWE) sets out what student social workers need to achieve to gain the honours degree and to become professionally qualified. The SiSWE bring together key elements of two previous standards documents for social work: the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's Benchmark Statement and the National Occupational Standards for Social Work. These documents formed the backdrop against which the MA (Honours) in Social Work course was developed and begun in 2004.

Also in 2004 the Scottish Executive commissioned a review which was asked to take 'a fundamental look at all aspects of social work and make recommendations on how services should be developed to meet the future needs of Scotland's people' (Roe 2006, p.3). The report of the review group 'Changing Lives' (Scottish Executive, 2006) was published one year after the new degrees in Social Work had been introduced. Several of the recommendations from Changing Lives have been affirming of the direction adopted by this course team, particularly those relating to the increased involvement of service users and carers in all aspects of social work education

and training. Other recommendations related more specifically to continuing professional development but nonetheless are able to be linked to qualifying training as the foundation upon which future educational and professional progress in the field may be built.

The BA/MA (Honours) in Social Work\* is an integrated degree which combines an academic award with a professional qualification. It enables graduates to seek registration with the Scottish Social Services Council under the protected title of 'social worker' and to apply for employment in areas of work designated as particular to those with that professional title. It is also possible within this degree to follow a particular route which focuses on a specific context for practice, e.g. residential child care, within the sequence of modules offered. Once qualified, those graduates will be able to practise social work with any client group and in any organisational context within the UK, but those students recruited specifically via Residential Child Care (RCC) funding will focus on this particular area of practice in order to equip them more fully for work in residential child care. Thus, while all students will follow the same programme of modules throughout the course, those funded as RCC students will undertake the learning associated with these modules in ways that are more directly related to residential child care than other students. This will be reflected for example in the settings in which they will undertake the modules Assessed Practice 1 and Assessed Practice 2, and in their approved topic for the Honours Dissertation. In many other modules their work in learning groups will be explicitly related to topics and scenarios of particular relevance to residential child care.

\*From session 2008-2009 the title of the degree has been changed BA in accordance with Strathclyde University regulations and the degree of MA is currently being phased out.

## **2. ADMISSIONS**

**See GSSW Admissions 2009-2010 Spreadsheet**

### **Admissions Policy**

There were no changes made to the admission policy during the 2009-2010 session

### **Accessibility of the Course to Minority Groups**

This is an ongoing issue in the School and is kept under constant review. Our publicity materials reflect diverse images of students and we are active in our efforts in Open Days on both University campuses. We also run a recruitment seminar in November each year which is open to employers as well as potential students.

We are members of the Scottish Wider Access Programme and liaise with the FE colleges who run access course for adult returners without formal qualifications. This partnership offers opportunities to those applicants without formal qualifications. We are also exploring articulation arrangements with the Open University in Scotland to widen access to the qualifying programmes.

This offers the opportunity for flexible routes to qualification in partnership with the OU. We have identified attracting more men on to the programme as a priority through ensuring that men are represented in our publicity materials. Currently we have about 18-19% of students who are male and this is inline with the rest of the sector in Scotland.

### **Impact of the Above**

We are not yet in a position to report on the success of these current and planned initiatives.

## **3. IMPACT OF ENHANCEMENT INITIATIVES**

Again, the impending structural changes and the formation of the new HASS Faculty will provide us with increased opportunities to engage with the University enhancement initiatives, especially the closer working relationships we will form with our colleagues from Community Education,

Geography and Sociology. The BA/MA (Honours) in Social Work currently fits well within the Excellence Agenda of the University. The main areas of articulation are as follows:

### ***Excellence in Research:***

The University of Strathclyde Strategic Plan 2011-2015 outlines the following research ambitions:

- Organise research in and across disciplines addressing global challenges
- Increase the number of academic staff recognised internationally for their research excellence
- Support a vibrant postgraduate research student community
- Create and maintain an enviable, dynamic and sustainable research environment
- Increase the University's research reputation internationally, securing the value of Strathclyde's distinctive ambition

The activity of GSSW in relation to research is consistent with this agenda. GSSW has made great progress in establishing a culture which places research clearly at the heart of its identity. Although the successful seminar series, writing workshops and retreats have played a significant part in the process, the key developments concern linking research mentoring and workload management. Members of staff therefore expect to be research active and expect to be supported to be research active. Students are able to benefit from this expertise and early access to new initiatives and policies influenced by the work of the academic staff in GSSW. The GSSW website carries full details of the publications and consultancy work which staff members are involved in.

The impact of these developments for students is significant in relation to the experience of being engaged in teaching and learning processes by leaders in the fields of study. Additionally students are introduced to ideas in relation to their own research mindedness from the very outset of the course, beginning in the module Preparing for Lifelong Learning and embedded in several other modules throughout the course, particularly Research for Ethical and Effective Practice, Honours Dissertation and Development Planning.

The GSSW research strategy places high emphasis on the need to develop further research capacities and opportunities across the academic team. The strategy recognises that whilst GSSW already hosts internationally recognised scholars it's future depends on not only enabling these leaders to continue to excel, but also on their continuing commitment to helping others develop as researchers. Within this it needs to diligently support its early careers, contract and postgraduate researchers to progress towards becoming principal investigators in internationally significant projects. However, commitment to capacity building extends beyond GSSW. At the strategic level, we need senior staff to continue to play a lead role in UK developments concerning social work research infrastructure. We also need to try to ensure that more staff members become involved and visible in these important developments in our discipline. The research strategy also recognises that staff members at all levels in the school need further support and encouragement to develop international research collaborations and to secure significant external research funding, especially research council funding. This is essential to the enhancement of the GSSW's research, scholarship and knowledge transfer activities and to its reputation for international excellence.

### ***Excellence in Education:***

As a course which incorporates a professional as well as an academic qualification the BA/MA (Honours) Social Work has a dual function. We aim to produce high quality public service professionals who are able to articulate clearly their roles and functions in the professional arena and are able to contribute to the ongoing development of their professional discipline.

GSSW has a strong profile in the development and dissemination of innovative teaching and learning strategies and has been fully engaged with new and developing technologies to enhance

and support delivery of teaching materials. There are LearnOnline sites for all modules on the course and these are used to facilitate on line discussion, assessment and evaluation. Students are supported to develop good engagement techniques with each other in both direct contact and in on line environments. This helps to bring a degree of flexibility into the student experience and can help students with diverse responsibilities in addition to full time study to manage their commitments more effectively. The School had previously established a Learning and Teaching Committee, convened by the Depute Head of School (Learning and Teaching), in recognition of the importance of developing robust, effective and innovative teaching and learning strategies. Within our new Faculty structure it is likely that this Committee may no longer exist but it will be important that we ensure that the functions covered by it are replicated elsewhere.

Our commitment to excellence in teaching is further evidenced by the strength of the research stream in relation to pedagogy. This ensures that we are feeding the most up to date ideas and issues in relation to teaching and learning practices into the lived experiences of students on all our courses. The use of authentic case material, simulation and the increasing involvement of users and carers in many aspects of teaching and learning serve to enhance the student experience and help to create a realistic appreciation of the range and complexity of the real life situations which students will encounter in practice.

The mix of teaching and learning approaches includes lectures, seminars and problem based learning (PBL)\* groups. Our teaching model is designed to offer substantial support and guidance in the early stages of the course moving steadily toward a self directed approach in the latter years of the course. In the revalidated degree in year one there are PBL groups and seminars which are staffed, in year two the number of modules which have PBL will be reduced and modules using SIMPLE\*\* are introduced. In year three students will be placed in semester one and in semester two are involved in modules which adopt a more consultancy style role for staff. In year four the hope and expectation is that students will engage with staff in a focussed and specific way having identified for themselves the kind of expertise on which they need to draw. Essentially, by year four students should be operating as self directed learners with minimal levels of staff support and guidance.

\*PBL: Rather than having a teacher provide facts and then testing student's ability to recall these facts via memorization, PBL attempts to get students to apply knowledge to new situations. Students are faced with contextualized, ill-structured problems and are asked to investigate and discover meaningful solutions. In GSSW this takes place in small group settings using examples from practice and policy.

\*\* SIMPLE (**S**imulated **P**ractice **L**earning **E**nvironments) Simulations sit learners in a practice context, where there are aggregates of transactions, perhaps multiple solution paths, and where their work is, as it will be in the workplace, distributed between tools, colleagues, resources, anticipated and unanticipated problems and individual constructions of knowledge and experience. McKellar (2007). This is a 'transactional' learning environment as opposed to a 'virtual' learning environment and has involved GSSW in partnership with a local authority in order to provide an authentic professional practice context.

## **University Initiatives**

### **First Year Experience**

In addition to the information provided on the GSSW website we also run pre course information meetings where applicants are invited to attend a 2 hour meeting which offers an opportunity to ask questions and to visit the departments. Many applicants take up this opportunity and feedback from these meetings suggests that these are helpful, useful forums for informal discussion and clarification.

Induction takes place over the first few days of the semester when students are following an induction timetable. This involves a range of sessions from within and out-with the GSSW and is contextualised in terms of an induction to the School, the Faculty and the University. We have consulted with students over the years about the usefulness of the induction period and have reduced it in response to the student view. Formal classes therefore begin toward the end of the induction week.

GSSW operate a personal tutor system for students in qualifying courses. In Year 1 students are seen initially in a group context and are then invited to make individual appointments as the need arises. We also operate an attendance system so that any student who falls below the required attendance standard can be invited to meet with his/her tutor. This can act as an early warning and support system for any student getting into difficulties at the beginning of the course.

The practice expectations and aspirations noted in the Manifesto for Excellence in the First Year Experience are embodied in the overall approach in GSSW. From 2009-2010 onwards first year students are also now able to select an elective module from anywhere in the university calendar.

### **Internationalisation**

A number of staff in the School are engaged with international research networks and in presenting at international conferences in the fields of criminology and criminal justice, child protection, community care and a range of pedagogical issues

We have a long standing exchange programme with the University of North Carolina in Greensboro in the USA. This involves a Summer School in which students from both Universities engage in a module which compares and contrasts approaches to social work services in each country. In the 2009-2010 session a group of 9 US students attended class at Jordanhill for 4 weeks alongside 12 Scottish students. We are also exploring the possibility of an exchange in terms of the assessed practice modules in the curriculum. This venture also includes a staff exchange in relation to research opportunities and the potential for joint international publications.

Since 2008-09 we had engaged in our first Erasmus exchange with the University of Malta. This involved two of our final year students undertaking their second period of assessed practice in social work agencies in Malta and two students from the University of Malta undertaking practice experiences here in Glasgow. It is anticipated that that this process will be repeated again in 2010-2011. The experience has been enriching and valuable and we hope to continue to develop this exchange further in years to come. It is a substantial time commitment for the staff involved but hopefully the set up time can be reduced as we move to future exchanges building on the knowledge and understanding gained from the first experiences.

## **4. PROGRESSION AND COMPLETION**

See [GSSW Progression 2009-2010 Spreadsheet](#)

Progression rates for year 1 were very good with 48 out of 52 progressing to year 2. All 4 students not progressing entered voluntary suspension.

Progression rates in year 2 were more problematic with 46 of 61 students progressing to year 3. A number of these students experienced difficulty during practice learning with 8 due to repeat year 2 as a consequence. The RCC pathway experienced more problems than the general pathway in this regards.

Progression rates in year 3 were excellent with 50 of 51 students progressing to year 4.

Completion rates in year 4 were good also. On the general pathway 30 of 42 achieved their social work qualification whilst a further 9 remain in the process of completing outstanding academic

work. On the RCC pathway 13 out of 19 achieved their social work qualification whilst a further 4 remain in the process of completing outstanding academic work.

Overall the general pathway records slightly higher progression rates than the RCC pathway.

### **Follow up Post-Qualifying**

Students from this and other courses remain in contact with the school via a range of formal and informal means. Many of our former students take up opportunities via the masters programmes offered within the department. Former students also undertake practice teaching / student supervision with existing students and so contact is maintained in this way. Other students retain contacts via their attendance at GSSW research seminars which are held on a regular basis.

### **Graduate Employment**

The Careers Service at University of Strathclyde produce regular reports detailing known locations of social work graduates. Figures for 2008 and 2009 revealed that the known destinations for the majority of social work graduates was employment as a social worker, and in the main with local authorities. The location of 29 graduates was reported. Within this group 26 were employed as social workers and all but one were working for local authorities. Only 1 graduate was working in a non-social work setting. A more significant challenge has been to achieve success with graduates of the RCC pathway achieving employment in RCC settings, with only 1 of the 29 graduates reported to be working in this sector.

*The continuing demand for **Social Work** and **Community Education** qualifications at pass, honours degree and postgraduate levels in the statutory social services and in third sector organisations resulted in an employment level of 99% for those with known destinations, with 75% working in local authorities.*

### **University of Strathclyde Careers Service 2009.**

## **5. FEEDBACK FOR STUDENTS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS**

### **University and Faculty Strategy**

See section 3 above.

### **External Examiner Feedback**

The feedback from external examiners was mostly positive. The main areas to be considered involve the need to continue to provide support to students who struggle to meet required academic standards and the need to ensure that whilst on placement students are appropriately supported by practice teachers on a consistent basis.

### **Student Feedback**

Again, the feedback from students was mainly positive, although some modules attracted more critical comments than others. A pattern amongst those modules which attracted stronger evaluations was the positive attitude and enthusiasm of the academic staff involved in delivering the classes. Freedom to work independently, both on an individual and a group basis, was appreciated also. When modules attracted more critical feedback emergent themes involved students experiencing a lack of coherence in the structure of the module and some ambiguity regarding the focus/aim of the assessment instrument. These are issues which can clearly be picked up by the staff team in session 2010-2011 and onwards. Pleasingly, the issue of delays in returning results and feedback was less prominent than in previous years and is evidence of better systems being implemented. Again, the aim would be to build on and improve this in session 2010-2011 and onwards.

## **National Student Survey Responses**

The feedback received via the National Student Survey was very encouraging and a significant improvement on the previous session. Areas which rated very highly were overall satisfaction with the quality of the course, the quality of teaching on the course, academic support and personal development. The areas which achieved the least positive responses involved the prompt return of feedback on submitted work. It would be hoped that the more positive feedback in relation to this across the four year groups noted above will contribute to this component of the National Student Survey being reported on more favourably in future years.

## **Response to Issues or Good Practice arising from Previous Annual Quality Monitoring**

Several issues and areas of practice continue to be developed and addressed – particularly the continuing refinement and development of PBL and SIMPLE (as detailed in section 3 above), the management and assessment of practice learning and procedures and systems for the return of student feedback.

## **6. TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT**

### **Has the Course undergone quinquennial review during or just prior to the reporting period?**

The course was reviewed in session 2008-2009.

### **If so, what significant changes were adopted in relation to, for example, curriculum design, modes of delivery or assessment?**

Changes introduced during the review in 2008-2009 began to be introduced to year 1 students in 2009-2010. In year 1 this involved some curriculum changes, most particularly the introduction of an elective module. More significant changes will be introduced as this cohort progress to years 2 and 3.

The course review process provided us with an opportunity for some changes to the curriculum design and an opportunity to revise the placing of the practice learning elements of the course. The reasons for these changes involve pedagogical, practice elements and resource implications. Feedback from students and from practice teachers indicated the need for some knowledge and understanding in relation to risk assessment and risk management prior to direct practice. The reconfiguration has allowed us to do this more thoroughly than has been the case until now. This will also address some of the issues raised by the introduction of Key Capabilities (2006) which requires students to develop knowledge and understanding in relation to child protection and the assessment of parenting capacity.

As the BA (Honours) Social Work involves students in two substantial periods of assessed practice in placement agencies and, as a result of the changes in social work education throughout the country most universities have re-sited the times at which students are out on placement. In the West of Scotland this has resulted in all 3 Universities which have social work courses sending students out at very similar times and there is a real danger of placement availability being compromised. The changes we have made would send GSSW students out at a time of less demand and is likely to mean a more certain availability and more opportunity for the most appropriate kinds of learning experiences being requested and required by students. These changes also mean that students will have placements in their third and also their final year of study and this may arguably be seen by employers as ensuring students are more ready to practice than the existing pattern.

## **7. RESOURCE ISSUES**

### **Staff Development**

**Explain development in relation to all staff who contribute to the course, including research development, and how this influences teaching and learning on the course**

A number of staff in the School are engaged with international research networks and in presenting at international conferences in the fields of residential child care, criminology and criminal justice, child protection, community care and a range of pedagogical issues. Please see also the section on Excellence in Teaching in section 3 above.

### **Teaching and Learning Space**

**In terms of utilisation of teaching and learning space, have you identified any key issue(s) which might impact on the development of the new Faculty Building? Please explain:**

N/A since there will now be no new faculty building. Negotiations continue in relation to the teaching space we will eventually occupy on the John Anderson campus. Central to this is a need to secure appropriate teaching space suited to our need for a mix of classes suitable for both lectures, group seminars and PBL.

### **Other Resources**

#### **Library**

We enjoy positive and constructive relationships with all library colleagues and work closely with our designated librarian to ensure adequate, appropriate stock is available to students on the course. Several staff attended information and development sessions run by library staff in the past few years to help ensure best possible use of the range of facilities on offer. We make extensive use of short term loan and use electronic book lists linked to our VLE sites to try to encourage students in adopting good study habits. Students on the current programme make good use of the seminar rooms in the library for independent study groups. We currently have almost 14,000 items in the main stock in Jordhill library, almost 12,000 in the Andersonian and in addition to this we have over 500 electronic books/reports available to students.

In addition to the robust collection in the faculty library, students have access to an excellent collection in the resource centre run by SIRCC which is housed with the GSSW space on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor of the Sir Henry Wood building. Students also use the library facilities on the main campus, particularly the law library but other collections too.

#### **VLE**

We have steadily developed our VLE site over the past few years and now have a space for every module on the programme. Several members of staff, both academic and administrative have attended staff development sessions offered by Learning Services and we are developing a skills base in this area. We have one member of technical support staff whom we employ on a sessional basis and his contribution to this development has been both substantial and invaluable. We use the VLE extensively for teaching and learning, communication and evaluation purposes. Year on year we are moving toward better integration of the VLE with our teaching and learning approaches. We hope to adopt an online portfolio approach to help with PDP developments over the next year.

#### **Equipment**

In terms of the Scottish Requirements for Social Work Training (2003) we must



*Make sure that all students undergo assessed preparation for direct practice to make sure they are safe to carry out practice learning in a service delivery setting. This preparation must include the opportunity to develop a greater understanding of the experience of service users and the role of social workers.*

One of the ways in which we do this is by recording on DVD students interviewing one another in role play situations. These recordings are then reviewed by member of the module team for SWPP. We do therefore need to access DVD recording and playback facilities. This is becoming more manageable as we develop our own thinking in relation to the nature and purpose of this assessment and we will make further refinements to this assessment instrument in the light of experience and availability of facilities. What is available presently is adequate for current needs.

## **Guidelines**

**Does the Course adopt Faculty and University Guidelines in all its course and module material (see Annex 1, attached)?**

Yes

**Are there aspects to these guides which it believes require updating?**

No

## **8. SSSC ENHANCEMENT THEMES**

**Further development of partnership at a local and national level to achieve shared ownership of the social work degree, practice learning and outcomes**

GSSW continues to engage with both the HEI and Learning Networks as a means of taking forward issues in relation to the social work degree and practice learning. In addition, representatives from GSSW are very engaged via SIRCC in the National Residential Child Care Initiative. In session 2010-2011 this is likely to develop significantly and more scrutiny will be placed on the RCC pathway and outcomes associated with this course.

**Creation of a dissemination strategy for sharing best practice**

Dissemination of work and best practice is currently achieved in a number of ways – most particularly in written publications, via the GSSW website, at GSSW research seminars and through our involvement in the University Research Day. A particular opportunity exists in relation to the increasing number of high quality research dissertations being produced by undergraduate social work students and an area for development will involve devising a strategy to share these more widely.

**Widening participation in social work education and ensuring that all social work students are supported effectively**

As previously mentioned in section 2 we are members of the Scottish Wider Access Programme and liaise with the FE colleges who run access course for adult returners without formal qualifications. This partnership offers opportunities to those applicants without formal qualifications. We are also exploring articulation arrangements with the Open University in Scotland to widen access to the qualifying programmes. This offers the opportunity for flexible routes to qualification in partnership with the OU. We have identified attracting more men on to the programme as a priority through ensuring that men are represented in our publicity materials. Currently we have about 18-19% of students who are male and this is inline with the rest of the sector in Scotland. An area for further development is the recruitment of black and ethnic minority

social work students to our programme and further development of the black and ethnic minority student mentoring scheme.

### **Further development of the social work degree curriculum to enhance understanding of professionalism, risk management, report writing, exploration of personalisation, service specific learning and social justice**

The changes introduced to the course following the review in session 2009-2009 will significantly aid student's development of risk management and their ability to apply this in practice learning. The development of the Development Planning module and the planned introduction of development planning exercises and reviews at earlier stages in the course will present increased opportunity for students to reflect upon their development, professionalism and future learning needs. One area of practice that it is planned to develop the curriculum in is the issue of substance misuse

### **The development of more innovative models of practice learning and standardisation of assessment of practice**

This is an area of the course to which considerable time has been spent on development activities and it is anticipated that this will continue. The new course structure will see the introduction of observational placements for year 2 students in session 2010-2011. This represents a significant development in beginning to prepare students to some of the challenges and opportunities they will experience in practice learning in years 3 and 4. The GSSW practice learning team continue to dedicate considerable time and effort to the development of practice learning opportunities. This is now reflected in the wide range of high quality placements that we can now access for students. As previously mentioned in section 5, one of our main challenges involves ensuring that students receive a consistently high level of support and practice teaching whilst on practice learning. To this end GSSW has developed a good programme of link worker training and practice teacher briefings. It is envisaged that this work will be continued and developed further in the coming year. Another significant area of development has been the increased use of group supervision for students whilst on placement. This helps significantly to support and aid the learning of students undertaking practice learning.

### **Further development of transitional support for graduates**

The above mentioned Development Planning module is one of the main ways in which transitional support is provided for graduates. Sessions have been arranged involving prospective employers to allow them to speak with final year students, alerting them to employment opportunities and other issues. An area for possible development may involve the more formal and structured involvement of employers in the Development Planning module. Another strategy may involve the increased involvement of recent social work graduates to provide their perspective on the transition that are our graduates are about to undertake.