Area of Inquiry 6

How much of the qualifying programme should be undertaken with students from other professional groups and how can these opportunities be maximised

Executive Summary:

In 2013 the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) announced the beginning of a process to develop a different approach to professional learning in qualifying and post qualifying learning for the social service workforce in Scotland. The Review has, so far, encompassed research, consultation and evaluation around social work education to identify elements and structures for development. A formal Review of Social Work Education (RSWE) working group was established in September 2014 and designed to reflect views of key stakeholders. Specific themes and questions emerged from the work of that group leading to the establishment of a second phase of the RSWE. Ten areas were identified where further information was required. These were developed into *Areas of Inquiry* to be undertaken in partnerships between universities, employers and service users.

Research into the subject of **Area Inquiry 6: How much of the qualifying programme should be undertaken with students from other professional groups, and how can these opportunities be maximised** was undertaken by The School of Applied Social Studies, Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen.

From the 1970's onwards a knowledge based model of IPE was developed. Content focussed on curricula thought to be applicable both to education and to practice in and between each of the professions taking part. It incorporated commonalities of language, knowledge and ideas which underpinned collaborative practice (Barr, 1998) to the detriment of differences. An appreciation of the distinctive qualities of different professions resulted in the introduction of comparative learning. This fostered a better understanding of respective roles and responsibilities and with those a greater opportunity to develop mutual trust and to dispel stereotypes, resulting in strengthening of relationships and improvement in collaborative practice. Attempts to evaluate such claims have been inconclusive (Barr and Shaw, 1995). Even where inter-professional education appeared to bring about a change in attitude, behavioural changes were not necessarily inevitable and, where they did occur, were not always long lasting.

This study into Inter-professional Education aims to explore what is currently addressed on social work courses and how it is delivered. The intent was to capture the views of employers, students and HEIs in relation to the efficacy and challenges of current approaches. Finally, a

view as to what might strengthen the quantitative and qualitative experience of students in relation to IPE was to be formed.

Given that the focus of the Inquiry was pre-determined, and in order to assess the effectiveness of current IPE provision across eight HEIs, a process of *evaluation research* was adopted. A mixed method design was employed and a survey via questionnaires was carried out in order to gather information from across Scotland.

Final year social work students on undergraduate and postgraduate programmes (full-time and distance learning) from six of the eight providers of social work education in Scotland agreed to take part. Out of a total population of approximately 459 final year students the study collected 43 responses. IPE leads on qualifying programmes across six of the Scottish HEIs responded and twenty four employers representing Local Authorities, third sector and private organisations who employ social work graduates from across all eight HEIs participated.

Summary of findings

The following responses were received from students studying at both undergraduate and post graduate levels and studying part-time and full-time:

Postgraduate	Undergraduate	Full-time	Part-time
19%	81%	81.4%	18.6%

Findings in relation to the key questions informing inquiry suggest the following:

1. The nature and extent of inter-professional learning in social work courses:

IPE is delivered in a range of different ways across the HEIs: through shared group activity, as   part of both shared assessed modules and discrete social work focussed modules, in practice learning and at dedicated IPE events.

The frequency and timings when students are exposed to IPE activity varies across HEIs.

Group IPE activity took place as follows:

Yearly	Monthly	Weekly
30%	2.5%	5%

Group IPE activity occurred during the following stages of courses:

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
22.5%	17.5%	7.5%	0%

Shared assessed IPE modules were delivered as follows:

Yearly	Monthly
18.8%	31.1%

Shared assessed IPE modules were delivered during the following stages of courses:

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
25%	15.6%	12.5%	12.5%

Discrete assessed Social Work specific modules involving IPE are delivered on the following basis:

Yearly	Monthly	Block periods
30.8%	3.8%	15.4%

Discrete assessed Social Work specific modules involving IPE are delivered during the following stages of courses:

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
11.5%	7.7%	26.9%	3.8%

IPE in practice learning was recognised by students in the following years:

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
11.4%	0%	31.4%	11.4%

In examining the content of IPE, students identified consideration of the following areas:

Different professional	90.2%	Common professional	70.7%

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Different professional values	80.5%	Common professional values	73.2%
Different professional skills	78%	Common professional skills	65.9%
Different professional knowledge	78%	Common professional knowledge	63.4%

Students told us that the most important and useful aspects of IPE for them appears to be around gaining knowledge, learning about other professional groups, their values, roles and the limitations.

IPE was delivered to Social Work students and with students from the following professions:

Nursing/midwifery	65.9%
Education	63.4%
Occupational Therapy	53.7%
Physiotherapists	46.3%
Pharmacy	26.8%
Medicine	22%
Dieticians	19.5%
Police	19.5%
Sports Science	4.5%
no other professions	2.4%

IPE Interaction was both direct (face-to-face 77.8%) and indirect (online activity 33.3%)

Changes brought about through IPE:

Improvements in the following areas were acknowledged:

Learning	56.4%
Improved skills	51.3%
Changes in attitudes towards other professions	60.5%
Improved collaborative practice	68.4%

When looking at behavioural change as a result of IPE, students identified the following developments:

Awareness of different professional roles	92.1%
Clearer understanding of their role as social worker	81.6%
Greater understanding of how different professional roles overlap	75.7%
Understanding of the limitations of different professional roles	68.4%
Understanding of activities which fall between specific professional roles	60.5%
Ability to challenge stereotypical professional roles	73.7%
Development of skills in inter-professional teamwork	78.4%
Ability to recognise and adopt good models for collaborative practice	68.4%
Better prepared for professional practice in inter-disciplinary contexts	68.4%

Five of the six HEIs who participated delivered IPE opportunities across all their qualifying programmes.

2. Perceived strengths in IPE provision

- The majority of HEIs explicitly articulate IPE provision in their School Strategy and in their Course Documentation with just under half of them also making explicit reference within their Teaching and Learning Strategy
- The majority of employers were aware of the nature of IPE activity across HEIs

Employers' perceptions of graduates' understanding of:

Their own professional role and skills:

Very Good understanding	44.8%
Good understanding	48.3%
Poor understanding	6.9%

The roles and skills of other professionals:

Very Good understanding	17.2%
Good understanding	62.1%
Poor understanding	20.7%

The knowledge base and values of other professionals:

Very Good understanding	10.3%
Good understanding	62.1%
Poor understanding	27.6%

The ability to develop and maintain relationships with other professionals:

Very Good	37.9%
Good	55.2%
Poor	6.9%

The ability to work collaboratively with other professionals:

Very Good	44.8%
Good	51.7%
Poor	3.4%

No employer believed that graduates possessed excellent skills in any of the above areas.

Employers were asked whether they considered that student involvement in IPE had any impact on practice and on service delivery. 65.5% of employers considered that there was a resulting positive impact on practice and service delivery. The other employers did not know whether there was a direct impact.

- The majority of Students, HEIs and employers recognise that IPE helps equip graduates to develop awareness of different professional roles; achieve a clearer understanding of their role as social worker; gain a greater understanding of how different professional roles overlap; acquire an understanding of the limitations of different professional roles; understand activities which fall between specific professional roles; gain the ability to challenge stereotypical professional roles; develop skills in inter-professional teamwork; recognise and adopt good models for collaborative practice; be better prepared for professional practice in inter-disciplinary contexts

3. **Challenges to effective inter-professional learning present and future**
   - Only 50% of HEI respondents believed that IPE activity was positively received by students
   - Respondents felt that the operation of different models for providing social care presented the greatest challenge for the future of IPE provision
   - Challenges were also noted because of different professional priorities within the workplace
   - Many surveyed believed that it was the hierarchies amongst the different professional groups that brought the greatest challenges for inter professional learning
   - Others suggested that the reality of assisting graduates to understand the pressures faced by different professionals and addressing poor communication between different professionals were the greatest challenges

Outline of Area of Inquiry:

The following brief was given:

Inter-professional education is a feature of all of the social work programmes currently, to varying degrees. Finding our more detail about the inter-professional education in each of the universities, and the extent to which inter-professional education is, or should be driven by the professional needs of social workers, will provide essential evidence and rethink inter-professional education in social work programmes. An options appraisal which could be shared with colleagues in other related professions could explore ways in which this could be enhanced, potentially resulting in students experiencing programmes which provide a firm foundation of inter-professional working, while protecting their specific professional development. This would also ensure that all students have access to the same quality and quantity of inter-professional learning.

The evaluation had the following objectives:

- To map the current nature and extent of inter-professional learning in social work courses across Scotland
- To identify the perceived strengths and weaknesses of such approaches
- To ascertain the views of social services employers about the advantages and challenges of IPE
- To investigate the possible future direction of IPE
- To examine the views of social work learners in relation to the value of IPE in meeting their learning needs
- To identify the main challenges to effective inter-professional learning
- To consider the options to enhance the nature and consistency of IPE offered to social work students

These objectives were taken from the key questions to inform inquiry. There appeared to be a lack of concordance between these and the initial area of inquiry heading and so it was decided that the key questions would be accepted as the focus for this research study.

Lead Partner and Team Members:

An advisory group was set up which reflected the social work practice and social science research experience of the School. Janine Bolger, Head of Social Work, was identified as Principal Investigator. Questionnaires were

devised by J Bolger and Mike Shepherd, Social Work Lecturer and Learning Enhancement Coordinator, and Stephanie Creasy (student) was engaged to assist in reviewing available literature. Ethical approval for the project was granted through the School's Ethics Committee.

Search Methods:

The following electronic archives were searched: EBSCO, Web of Science and Science Direct and Google Scholar. Manual searches were conducted of The British Journal of Social Work and the most common Social Care periodicals, the IRISS, SCIE, CAIPE and SSKS websites

Primary search terms included: 'Inter-professional education' OR 'IPE' OR 'Interdisciplinary education'. Secondary search terms included 'student' AND 'health education' AND 'service users'.

Inclusion criteria

- Studies that focus on the development or delivery of inter professional education
- Studies that explore the practice of IPE
- Studies that explore the perceptions of students/employers or HEIs in relation to IPE
- Studies conducted in the United Kingdom
- Studies composed in the English language

Exclusion criteria

Given the limited amount of research into inter professional-education in the UK the exclusion criteria was limited to the exclusion of studies that related to IPE which did not involve social work students or focussed on preparation for only one specific area of practice (e.g. domestic violence).

Inclusion criteria and exclusion criteria were utilised to screen abstracts and full texts obtained where eligibility was met. Papers were considered for relevance and quality prior to inclusion.

Research Literature

The amount of published research relevant to IPE with Social Work students appears to be limited. Three studies were identified that focussed on the development of IPE: Barr, Helme and D'Avray (2014); Barr, Helme and D'Avray (2011); Low and Barr (2008). One study on

each of the following areas was identified: the design, implementation and practice of IPE - Anderson and Lennox (2009); the preparation of students to work effectively in inter-professional settings - Stevenson, Seenan, Morlan and Smith (2012); moderating the stereotypical views through IPE of health and social care students - Foster and Macleod Clark (2015); IPE in practice - Chambers, Clouder, Jones and Wickham (2013). A further study exploring three tested models of IPE (Joseph, Diack, Garton and Haxton, 2012) and one looking at opportunities for IPE (Gillies, Simpson and Walker, 2004) were identified.

No study appeared to explore the perceptions of employers about IPE.

Barr, Helme and D'Avray's 2011 progress report gives an in-depth view of IPE. The authors chronicle the rise and the pressures faced by professionals pre- IPE as well as the increasing demand for more overlap between professions. Claims that professional institutions were impeding the advance of IPE provision were generally discredited. The absence of national structures to bring together education and professional institutions, government departments and local government associations, the HEA and CAIPE to review progress, identify and act on related policy issues and support developments in delivery and practice was highlighted. The establishment of local partnerships appeared to sustain IPE while changing priorities, perceptions and circumstances in HEIs impacted on provision.

Barr, Helme, and D'Avray (2014) examined prequalifying IPE in the UK. The study highlighted that at least two thirds of universities with qualifying courses in health and social care included IPE. Research findings suggested that IPE was becoming more integrated into professional programmes with discrete IPE modules becoming less evident. Learning methods were interactive with a focus on development of mutual respect and understanding through consideration of professional similarities and differences. Face-to-face learning was augmented by e-learning and IPE elements within practice learning were strengthened. The role of the IPE Co-ordinator was found to be crucial and institutional endorsement of programmes was critical. Unilateral changes in IPE provision across different professional programmes disrupted activity in others and internal and external evaluation of programmes placed differing value on the merit of IPE provision across professions. The synchronisation of inter-professional learning and assessment in practice learning was found to be particularly problematic.

Low and Barr (2008) determine how social work education providers in the UK deliver IPE training. It focussed primarily on practical learning of skills such as the importance of team working. Information on delivery and assessment is also examined. The study included 13 HEIs and gathered views from students, tutors and service users although the number of students that participated was small.

Anderson and Lennox (2009) undertook a 10 year longitudinal study. Their evaluation focusses on the Leicester model used in an under privileged area of the city where one of the first 'multi-disciplinary' centres was developed in an attempt to more adequately meet the community's needs via one health care centre. Anderson and Lennox emphasise the need to integrate education research into the development and delivery and to engage with practitioners who recognise the student's contribution to team working. Placing users of services at the centre of the learning experience and developing local working partnerships (HEIs, health and social care agencies and the third sector).   Such a model has since been adopted internationally in Belgium and Japan.

The discussion paper published by Stevenson, Seenan, Morlan and Smith (2012) examines IPE delivery at undergraduate level. With a focus on the introduction of IPE at Glasgow Caledonian University it highlights the implementation of a web based peer-assessment tool for IPE. The paper identifies how the process of employing Web PA differentiates between students who are working effectively in inter-professional teams and those who are not.

Foster and Macleod Clark (2015) address the shortage of empirical evidence around the positive impact of IPE. This study on the stereotypical beliefs, towards colleagues from other disciplines, of undergraduate health and social care students compared their views at the beginning and end of their studies. The findings were compared to students not exposed to IPE. The authors found that stereotypical views were most likely to be dispelled when IPE is carried out together. The author's conclusions are a contrast to other works undertaken and cited in this article (Ateah et al 2011).

Chambers, Clouder, Jones and Wickham (2013) explored current thinking in relation to IPE within the context of contemporary health and social care practice in the UK and worldwide. The need for further empirical evidence to support investment in inclusion of IPE into education programmes was emphasised. The research addresses the benefits of

Inter-professional Education in practice from the active engagement of learners, the value of collaborative learning, the development of knowledge, skills and values, the opportunity provided through IPE to test out professional identity and roles and the centrality of collaborative working between health care professionals.

Through their review of available literature Gillies, Simpson and Walker (2004) discovered a wide range of benefits to effective IPE and the need for ongoing research which supports findings from Chambers, Clouder, Jones and Wickham (2013). They identified possible cultural and ethical components relating to professional groupings which brought about positive outcomes for service users. Barriers to effective inter-professional practice were considered to be financial, cultural, organisational and professional and believed to be linked to perceptions of status differentials. Other key findings were around the positive level at which IPE pre and post qualification was received and the innovative learning opportunities employed by HEIs. Messages around the need for IPE to be linked to ongoing CPD were clear.

Discussion and Conclusions

Discussion around and conclusions drawn from student feedback in this study must be considered with some caution given the small sample who participated in this process. Additionally data was received from only five of the seven HEIs who provide social work education in Scotland and employers who responded were self-selecting.

IPE within social work education across Scottish HEIs is delivered in an integrated manner through regular shared group activity, as part of shared assessed modules and in practice learning. To augment such practice some HEIs run dedicated IPE events. Face-to-face delivery is complemented with e-learning in line with recommendations from the Review of Inter-professional Education in the United Kingdom (Barr, Helme and D'Avray, 2014). There is evidence that IPE also continues to be delivered via discrete social work modules. The focus of IPE appears to be largely around the development of knowledge, skills and values and on understanding and development of professional identity and roles across professionals (Chambers, Clouder, Jones and Wickham, 2013). This study notes satisfaction from students and employers in terms of the value of collaborative learning, the focus of IPE, the timings, organisation and usefulness of IPE. Students appear to see themselves as active

participants within IPE preparing themselves for working within integrated service contexts.

Issues relating to institutional organisation continue to present some challenges to how and when IPE is delivered (Barr, Helme and D'Avray, 2014). HEIs should be supported in aligning courses to optimise inter-professional learning with reference to staffing, timetabling and placement patterns.

Recommendation 1: That HEIs continue to regularly review their IPE provision to ensure fitness for purpose and to develop it accordingly. In order to support the continued provision and integration of such activity it would seem appropriate to avoid the imposition of regulation in terms of standardising practice and policy. Any attempt to impose standardisation would likely exacerbate any organisational challenges faced.

Caution must be exercised, however, in assuming that bringing a group from different professional backgrounds together will automatically change knowledge, attitudes, values and skills for the better. Consideration, therefore, must be given to the nature of the provision.

IPE provision appears to be clearly articulated and implanted within relevant strategies and course documentation in line with recommendations from the Review of Inter-professional Education in the United Kingdom (Barr, Helme and D'Avray, 2014). This, perhaps, emphasises the accepted relevance for practice and the importance with which IPE is viewed. Employers suggest that IPE programmes prepare graduates well in relation to understanding the knowledge base, professional roles and skills of themselves and other professionals. Feedback suggested that many employers believe graduates have a good level of ability to develop and maintain relationships with other professionals and have good collaborative skills. Students, HEIs and employers realise that IPE helps increase awareness of and challenge many aspects of a range of professional roles, including their own, and contributes to skill development for professional practice. Employers note transferability of the outcomes of IPE to professional practice.

What is not clear, however, is whether IPE programmes have progressed sufficiently in terms of focus and content. Social work education has

historically retained a focus on the promotion of relationships and the clarification of role, purpose and identity (Trevillion and Bedford, 2003 in Gillies, Simpson and Walker, 2004). While learning methods have become more sophisticated demonstrating imagination, industry and ingenuity (Barr, Helme and D'Avray, 2014) as evidenced by the range of IPE activity on offer, the content of IPE seems still to be largely focussed on the roles and skills of different professionals.

This research suggests that, although learning across a range of areas is gained, that the development of alternative knowledge bases requires greater attention. In addition, it appears that the more complex aspects of IPE (e.g. understanding limitations of each other's roles and responsibilities and addressing the responsibilities that fall between specific professional roles) requires a greater presence within IPE.

Recommendation 2: That IPE provision might be further developed to encourage a greater focus on the different knowledge sets required for professional practice and should address some of the more complex areas of skill sets in relation to inter-disciplinary practice.

There are a number of challenges, however, to effective inter-professional learning present and future. Employers demonstrate concern relating to the impact of different professional priorities and hierarchies between professional groups within the workplace and in relation to the operation of different models for providing social care. Others suggested that finding ways to assist graduates to understand the pressures faced by different professionals and address poor communication between different professionals were the greatest challenges for NQSWs and for the development of relevant IPE activity.

Concerns of the marginalisation of the social work profession in practice, mirrored through IPE provision, might be responsible for our findings. It is widely recognised that different training and philosophical approaches have resulted in the separate and distinctive evolution of professional groups each with their own identity (Fitzsimmons and White, 1997 in Chambers, Clouder, Jones and Wickham, 2013). Support for a move of identity and commitment from being focussed on the profession to being concerned with the organisation is required (Hafferty and Light, 1995 in Chambers, Clouder, Jones and Wickham, 2013).

Recommendation 3: HEIs should liaise with employers for further discussion in relation to areas for inclusion in IPE.

Recommendation 4: Schools of Social Work should raise the areas outlined as challenges (above) with IPE Committees/Groups in

HEIs so as to ensure these issues are addressed within IPE provision.

Recommendation 5: Discussion should take place within IPE Committees/Groups in HEIs to identify methods of improving confidence and the ongoing development of identity for all professional groups within the context of collaborative practice.

Although students and employers tended to view IPE positively only half of HEI staff who have a lead role in the planning and delivery of IPE believed that associated learning opportunities were positively received by students. In terms of the impact on professional practice just over half of students surveyed believed there had been a resulting change in their attitude towards working with other professionals and had gained learning from their IPE experience including improvement in team work and other collaborative working skills. Just under three quarters of the students surveyed felt better prepared as a direct result of IPE for professional practice in inter-disciplinary contexts.

It is important that the satisfaction with IPE activity in HEIs noted by participants of this study be acknowledged.   It might be that although the external challenges for IPE provision are changing that the internal ones are not. HEIs are not without the imagination or the capability to devise creative and useful programmes of IPE. Organisational issues around the resourcing, planning and delivery constrain provision. IPE in practice learning appears to be sufficiently integrated and can perhaps be strengthened. Partnerships with employers are established but could possibly be developed further. One of the constraining factors might be around a collective understanding of what IPE is. To focus purely on IPE as learning between student groups from different professions runs the risk of relegating synergies to those that are easily available rather than those that bring the most learning.   To harness the most useful synergies opens up greater possibilities in terms of the content and locus of the learning experience.

Recommendation 6: That HEIs consult with NQSWs and employers to gain clearer understanding about the ways in which IPE activity has contributed to the preparation of graduates for practice.

Recommendation 7: That HEIs be congratulated on the current levels of preparedness of their students as a result of IPE and that

they be encouraged to continue developing their programmes in line with recommendation 3.

This research was undertaken within limited time constraints and, therefore, would not claim to be sufficiently comprehensive as to inform wide ranging changes in provision. Further, in-depth, research into this area would be recommended.

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