

SERVICE USER AND CARER INVOLVEMENT IN SOCIAL CARE AND
SOCIAL WORK

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

RESEARCH STUDY COMMISSIONED BY SCOTTISH SOCIAL
SERVICES LEARNING NETWORK WEST AND SCOTTISH SOCIAL
SERVICES LEARNING NETWORK SOUTH EAST

SARA FITZHENRY

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Summary of Findings

This research was undertaken on behalf of Scottish Social Services (SSS) Learning Network West and SSS Learning Network South East. The research aimed to map existing practice of service user and carer involvement in further education institutions (FEIs) that deliver social care programmes and higher education institutions (HEIs) that deliver social work programmes. A questionnaire was developed to obtain this information. The research also involved service users and carers in obtaining their views on service user and carer involvement in social care and social work education. Interviews were conducted to obtain this information. The research was conducted within the geographical remits of SSS Learning Network West and SSS Learning Network South East.

This is a summary of the key findings. A copy of the full report is available by contacting the Scottish Social Services Learning Network West.

Twenty-five questionnaires were sent to FEIs that deliver social care programmes and five questionnaires were sent to HEIs that deliver social work programmes. Twelve of the questionnaires were returned from FEIs, and three HEIs returned the questionnaires. The questionnaire was divided into sections that address the different ways that service users and carers may be involved including direct delivery, indirect delivery, selection of students and assessment of students. FEIs and HEIs were also asked to comment on the benefits and barriers of service user and carer involvement.

The data gathered regarding current practice in FEIs and HEIs of service user and carer involvement in their social care and social work programmes demonstrated the

varying levels of service user and carer involvement. What is clear from the questionnaires is that many FEIs and HEIs view service user and carer involvement in their programmes positively and were aware of the benefits for students.

There was agreement between FEIs and HEIs who participated in the research that facilitating factors for service user and carer involvement included staff group motivation. HEIs stated that available funding was also a facilitating factor. The barriers to service user and carer involvement were noted as lack of allocated funding and insufficient time for staff to enable service user and carer involvement.

Thirteen interviews were conducted with service users and carers. There were three group interviews consisting of eight or more people, seven interviews with groups of two to five people and three individual telephone interviews conducted. The focus of the interviews was to ascertain the views of participants on what type of involvement is appropriate and effective in social care and social work education, and to identify the benefits and barriers of involvement.

The majority of service users and carers who were interviewed felt that assessment and selection of students is a role to be fulfilled by academic staff. Most interview participants felt that direct involvement and indirect involvement were both appropriate and effective types of involvement for service users and carers in social care and social work programmes. There were some interview participants who felt that involvement in the development and design of the course and a governance role within the course was also an appropriate and effective way of service users and carers being involved. There was agreement from participants that support, and in some cases training, was essential for service user and carer involvement.

From this research it was clear that FEIs, HEIs and service users and carers that were interviewed all identified the benefits of service user and carer involvement. These included enhancing students' learning, challenging students' assumptions, service users and carers being heard and valued and ultimately improvement in service provision.

There was no consensus from interview participants on whether payment is appropriate for service user and carer involvement, and to what amount service users and carers ought to be paid. This appears to demonstrate the complex implications that surround this issue and the individual circumstances of each service user and carer who may be involved in social care and/or social work education. Commonality across FEIs and HEIs regarding payment for service user and carer involvement did not emerge from the research, with practice including no payment at all, travel expenses only, vouchers and payment equivalent to teaching staff. It has become clear throughout this research study that the issue of payment is one that requires further attention in order that clarification for all those involved can be achieved.

The research has highlighted the benefit and value that many place on service user and carer involvement. The barriers to service user and carer involvement have also been noted, which require addressing if meaningful and sustainable involvement can be achieved.