
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.
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.

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 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. Downloaded on 30 May 2010 from [https://portal2.nottingham.ac.uk/nmp/research/mental-health/completed/SUSA_FINAL_REPORT.pdf](https://portal2.nottingham.ac.uk/nmp/research/mental-health/completed/SUSA_FINAL_REPORT.pdf)


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.