

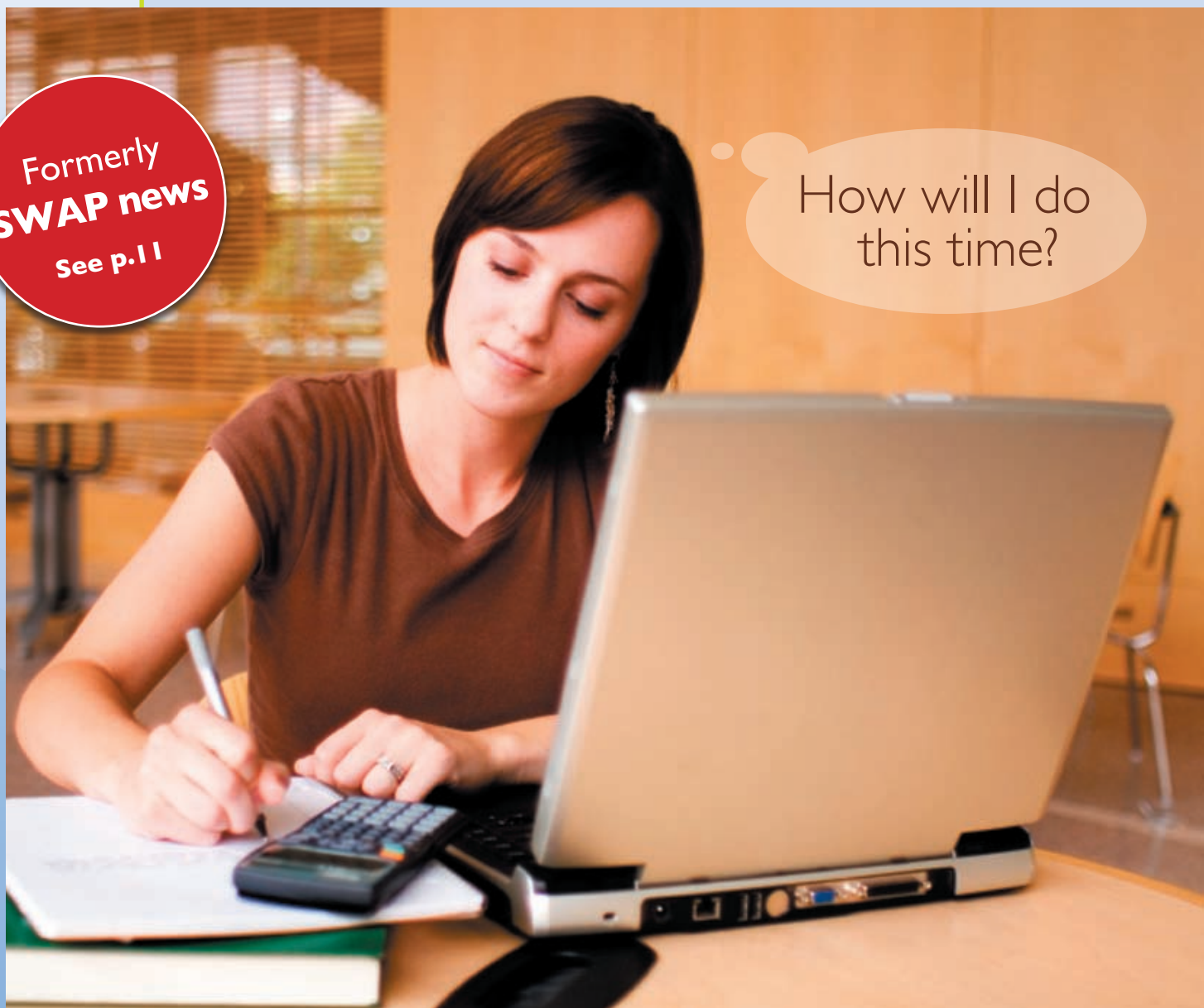


Social Policy
and Social Work
(SWAP)

in focus

Supporting learning and teaching

Formerly
SWAP news
See p.11



How will I do
this time?

Approaches to Assessment

What works for educators?

Inside this issue:

- Changing an assessment method
- In conversation with Nick Ellison
- Introducing a formative assessment tool

Focus on

Changing an assessment method

Karin Crawford



About the author

Karin Crawford is a Principal Teaching Fellow in the School of Health and Social Care at the University of Lincoln. Karin teaches on the undergraduate programmes in the school, with a particular interest in the development and facilitation of learning through open, distance part-time learning and using technology to aid learning. In her role as Principal Teaching Fellow, Karin also supports the work of the University's Centre for Educational Research and Development (CERD).

Background

In this article I describe how and why I changed the assessment method on the second level module on the BSc (Hons) Social Work entitled 'Knowledge Based Practice', which I coordinate. Students undertake this module through supported open learning as part of their first practice experience; it is very much about practice informing theory informing practice.

How it was

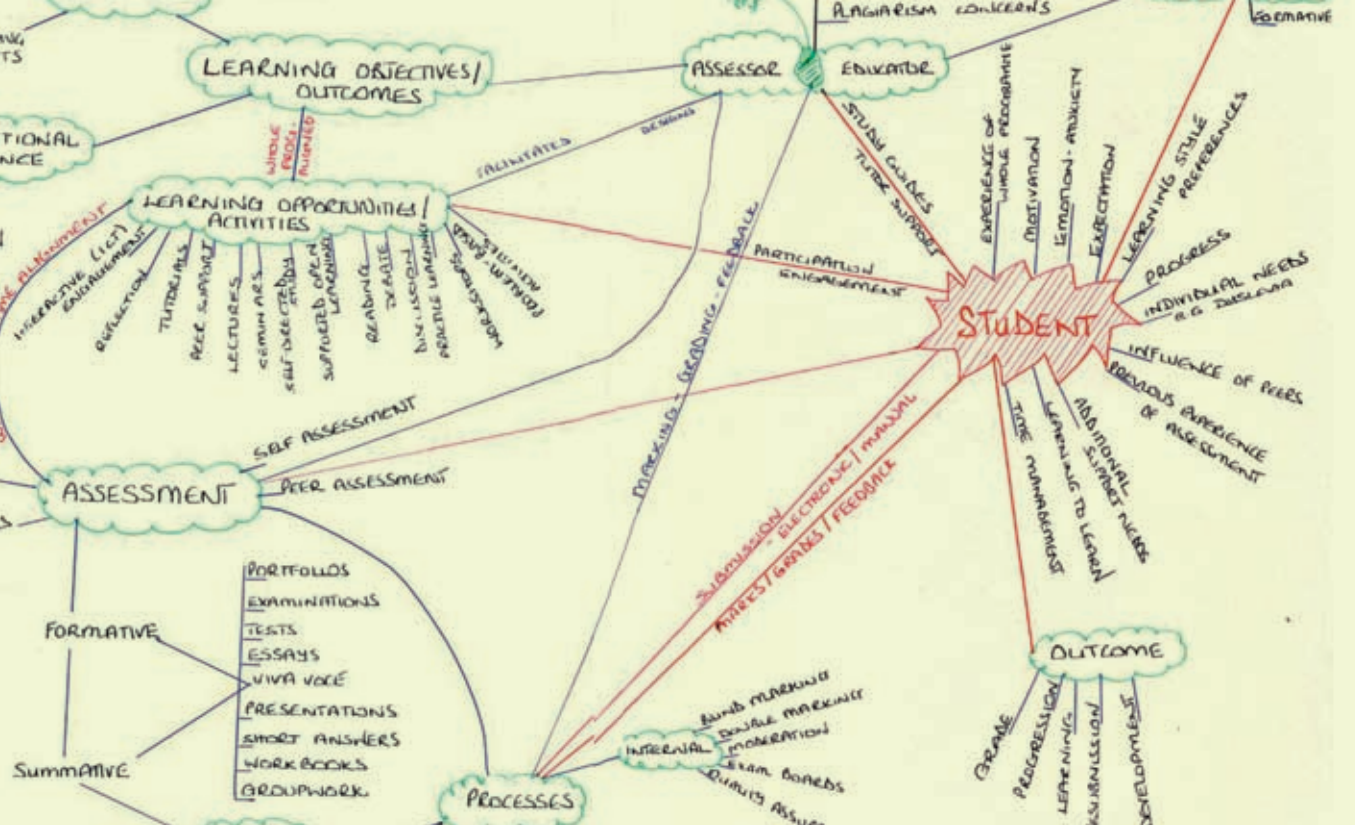
I took over the unit with an assessment already in place and no time to change it, so

ran the unit for one year in its existing form. The assessment was in two parts, an essay and the completion of a workbook which largely aimed to reflect work undertaken in groups during workshop call-back days.

The essay focused on the analysis and critique of two examples of knowledge for practice, and reflection on how these examples had influenced (or not) the student's developing practice.

The workshops used case study materials with small groups of students and asked them to work together to identify different forms of relevant knowledge (e.g. research, policy, legislation, user-led knowledge and so on) whilst sharing their thoughts on how this knowledge could inform the practice outlined in the case study.

The workbooks were designed to be like 'answer books' for the activities taking place in the workshops. The reality was that some students in the groups perceived themselves as being more active and productive than others and this caused resentment. There were also difficulties where some students did not attend the workshops (often for legitimate reasons).



View and comment on this mind map: www.swap.ac.uk/resources/themes/assessment.html

What I did

I changed the assessment after the first year in direct response to student module evaluation feedback and the reflections of the module teaching team. It was readily apparent from the student feedback that the workbook was too onerous in terms of the time it took to complete. In addition, the need to complete the workbook resulted in less depth of study with students avoiding the associated learning materials and essay. In collaboration with student representatives, the teaching team and the external examiner we decided to make some changes to the learning outcomes and to have one piece of assessed work that would support the practice learning portfolio.

The assessed piece of work has remained an essay of 2500 words. It is a critique and analysis of knowledge for practice and invites reflection on the way in which this knowledge influences the students' own practice on their practice learning opportunity. Students are also encouraged to engage with a range of debates. These included whether knowledge based practice can be shown to be good social work practice; the place of service users in

developing and influencing the knowledge base for practice; and the interface with values and ethics for professional social work.

Why I changed it

The main reasons for the changes were to provide more clarity for students; a greater focus on the 'things that matter' in the module; and a consequent move away from

“The workbooks were designed to be like ‘answer books’ for the activities taking place in the workshops.”

the surface approach encouraged by filling in a workbook. It was intended that a greater emphasis on critique and analysis should be developed at this critical point in the students' degree programme as this is one of the first level two modules they study.

“Furthermore, the external examiner commented that the sample scripts showed more coherent links to practice than he had seen in the previous year.”

What worked well and why?

I think the change has been successful. The students still have a great deal of work to do at this stage in their study, but when the module team met to moderate the last cohort’s scripts the markers agreed that there did seem to be an overall improvement in student engagement with the task and the level of understanding demonstrated. Furthermore, the external examiner commented that the sample scripts showed more coherent links to practice than he had seen in the previous year.

I think it is important to change assessment methods if there is evidence that the current method is not meeting its aims. If you have something that works well, then

why change it? However, you do need to evaluate and reflect upon the methods you use constantly, as what works today may not work tomorrow!

I think students will always be individuals with a range of different needs and each student will find certain forms of assessment more accessible than others. Some assessment methods will be easier vehicles through which to demonstrate their learning than others ■

Related resources

Case study

Responding to student perceptions of assessment feedback, Gary Saunders. A case study detailing how a department of policy studies responded to a research project’s findings on student use and understanding of assessment feedback.

www.swap.ac.uk/resources/pubs/casestudies/gsaunders.html

Video

Using group work to engage new social policy students
Social policy educators talk to SWAP about teaching and assessing multi-disciplinary groups of students taking social policy units.

www.swap.ac.uk/resources/digitalresources/video.html#engage

Have you changed your assessment method recently?

Share your experience with the community by writing a case study for SWAP. You’ll receive a £25 Amazon voucher for any case study published on the SWAP website.

To find out more visit the ‘get involved’ section of the SWAP website at www.swap.ac.uk/getinvolved/casestudies.html



Resources for assessment

Gateways

SWAP

The resources section of the SWAP website includes a page with case studies, book reviews, digital learning resources and external resources related to assessment www.swap.ac.uk/resources/themes/assessment.html

The Higher Education Academy

The Academy website has a page on assessment including case studies, reports, projects, audio and video resources on feedback, assessment for practitioners, assessment for managers, plagiarism, group work and working with students www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/learning/assessment

Scottish enhancement themes

This section of the website includes reports, case studies and outputs produced by Scottish educators on the theme of assessment www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/themes/Assessment/outcomes.asp

Centres for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CETLs)

Assessment and Learning in Practice Settings (ALPS) CETL www.alps-cetl.ac.uk

Centre for Excellence in Assessment for Learning (AfL) www.northumbria.ac.uk/cetl_af1

Assessment Standards Knowledge exchange (ASKe) www.business.brookes.ac.uk/learningandteaching/aske

Digital learning resources

Companion to Undergraduate Dissertation

An online resource to support undergraduate social science students through the dissertation process. www.socscidiss.bham.ac.uk

SCIE e-learning resources


SCIE has produced a collection of interactive activities, including formative self-assessment tools e.g. a self-reflection exercise on law and social work www.scie.org.uk/publications/elearning/law/law10


Further Guidance

Open University - Making your teaching inclusive

Video clips on written, practical, online and oral assessment www.open.ac.uk/inclusiveteaching/pages/inclusive-teaching/assessment.php

Case Studies

 Using peer formative assessment with social work students, Patricia Cartney www.swap.ac.uk/resources/pubs/casestudies/pcartney.html

 Plagiarism, controlled conditions and assessment of social work skills in real time, Yasmin Farooq, Kathy Boxall, Nora McClelland and Joe Smeeton www.swap.ac.uk/resources/pubs/casestudies/yfarooq.html

In conversation with

Nick Ellison



Nick Ellison is Head of the School of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Leeds. He teaches on the undergraduate courses *Central Debates in Welfare* and *Global Equality and Diversity* and on the MA module *Issues in Social Policy Research*. He is also a member of SWAP's steering group and the Social Policy Association's (SPA) Learning and Teaching sub-committee.

SWAP: Could you describe the assessments you typically employ with your students?

Nick Ellison: We mostly use an assessed essay followed by an unseen exam for every module. We are looking to vary this in the coming year and will be including other methods e.g. poster presentations.

SWAP: What methods of assessment do you find most satisfying?

NE: I do think there is a real place for assessed essays and exams. Students who come to study at degree level in the social sciences should have the opportunity to do both assessed essays and unseen exams and a core dissertation because that shows they can sustain an argument over 20-30,000 words. They are probably the best ways of developing critical ability. I don't think they are the only thing we can do; however, I would still see them as a sort of baseline. I don't think every module has to do

exactly the same though; which is partly my reasoning for starting to move away from that form of assessment.

There are a number of other possibilities; for example much shorter sharper types of assessment, like a book review of a key text. Or an impromptu presentation, where you come into the seminar without knowing what you will be presenting on except that it will be something from two or three topics. This would get you thinking on your feet.

I think poster presentations are also quite good because they are graphical and help you to design your thoughts. One of my colleagues is going to try posters on her module and I'm going to be one of the assessors. I like the idea that students can produce a poster on a particular topic that they've found interesting.

I certainly think that an assessment which includes presenting is as important as one which develops critical abilities. Therefore you can think about using group work; where students would have to organise themselves and stand up to deliver a presentation. If you choose group assessment you're going to have to think of some way to assess them. People get very stuck on that and it is incredibly hard. The only other thing I'd say about presentations is that you have to teach students how to use the technology.



Groupwork: what are the assessment options?

SWAP: What do you think the big issues regarding assessment will be in the next ten years?

NE: I would imagine the big thing would be assessments that are relevant to the work place. Anything which is not relevant won't have much of a role. So anything that demands a kind of considered approach to a particular question would be relevant. To that extent essay work is very relevant to the workplace.

The other thing which is increasingly relevant nowadays is problem solving skills. It is not just about critical ability but also about how to sort out a problem, what you bring to it in order to move it on and solve it.

You might actually want to set the students problems or tasks instead of simply getting them to write about it. Let's say, getting them to solve an environmental issue. Getting them to think of things as a problem that needs solving would actually help them work their way round the issue rather than just debate it. This would also work well in groups.

I would have thought in terms of assessment over the next ten years we would want to keep the basis of critical work and add to that by focusing much more on problem solving both on an individual basis and group basis. Again, however, if you're going to go the route of group assessment you're going to have to think of some appropriate ways to assess.

“I certainly think that an assessment which includes presenting is as important as one which develops critical abilities.”

SWAP: If you had the opportunity to bend John Denham's ear for an hour on assessment what would you say to him?

NE: I would remind him that critical ability is essential and we need to ensure team working and team building. I would also say that I'm quite in favour of impromptu seminars and problem solving; the issue is balancing all these. I don't want to lose the traditional approach whilst embracing the new. There is a range of opinions on this across social policy but on the whole I think the community would agree with this ■

Wholeheartedly agree with Nick?
Completely disagree with Nick's point of view?

Write to us with your comments and they could be included in the next edition of *in focus*. Email swapeditor@soton.ac.uk or write to 'In Focus' at the address on the back cover.

For consideration

Introducing a formative assessment tool

Anne Quinney



About the author

Anne Quinney is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Health and Social Care at Bournemouth University. She teaches on the BA Social Work programme. Anne and her colleague Jonathan Parker have contributed to the Evaluating the Outcomes of Social Work Education (OSWE) project where their particular focus has been on the development and administration of self efficacy scales to learn more about students' confidence in research skills.

What is self efficacy?

Self efficacy is “an individual’s assessment of his or her confidence in their ability to execute specific skills in a particular set of circumstances and thereby achieve a successful outcome” (Holden et al, 2002). Believing in your ability to do something tends to be associated with a positive attitude to problems or challenges with higher levels of motivation.

The research self efficacy scale

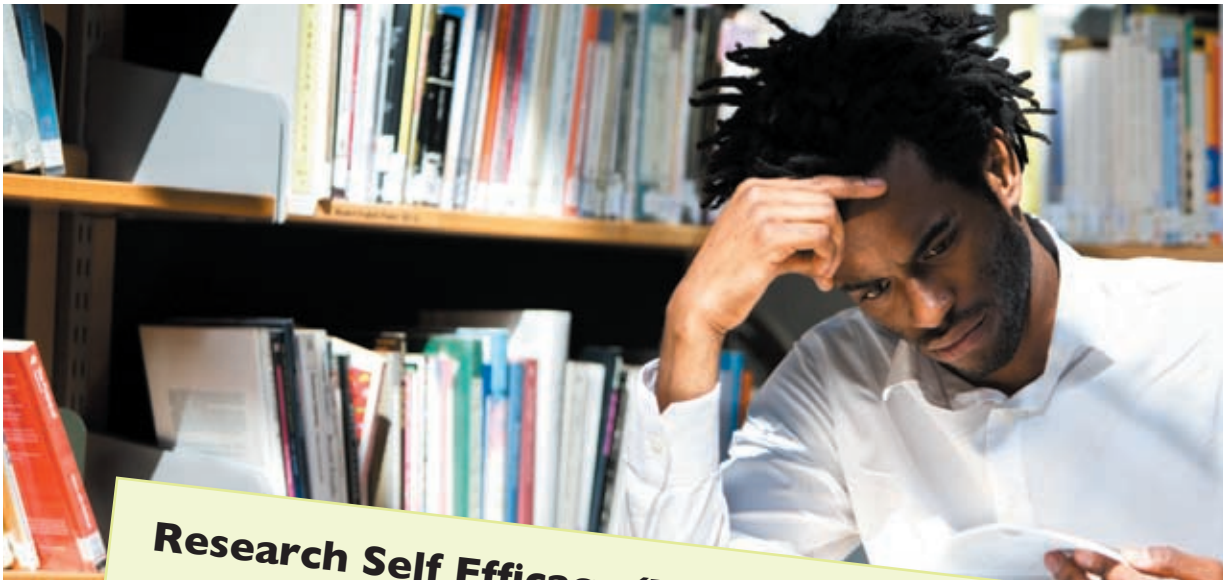
The scale developed by Anne and Jonathan builds on the work of Holden who has developed and used self efficacy scales for practice learning and research skills. This research self efficacy (RSE) scale (see opposite) was developed in consultation with him.

The scale can be used as a formative assessment tool to enable students to identify where they feel they need more support and the areas they need to learn more about. Students are asked to rate their confidence on the 15 items of the scale pre and post participation in a module. Curriculum materials can then be developed or adjusted to match more closely the students' needs.

Possible uses of the RSE scale

- As a formative assessment tool for students to monitor their own progress
- To inform adjustments in the curriculum for current and future students
- To inform staff about levels of research skills and awareness amongst their students.

“The students found it easy to complete and (...) their self assessment of their strengths and weaknesses is reflected in the scores they give themselves for the different elements of the scale.”



Research Self Efficacy (RSE) scale

How confident are you that you can successfully ... (on a scale of 1-10)

1. Perform an electronic search for research information (e.g. journal articles) using the internet
2. Read and understand research findings and discussions in academic journals
3. Reference other people's work using the University's Harvard system of referencing
4. Briefly define 'qualitative' and 'quantitative' research methodologies
5. Debate whether a proposed research study is ethical or unethical
6. Design a questionnaire
7. Design an interview schedule
8. Conduct a research interview
9. Analyse basic quantitative and qualitative data
10. Present findings both verbally and in written form
11. Access the resources for this unit on a 'VLE' using university computer facilities
12. Perform an electronic literature search using databases (e.g. socialcareonline)
13. Access research findings in academic journals using the internet
14. Access research findings from research bodies, social work organisations, government departments etc (e.g. JRF, SCIE) using the internet
15. Follow an online learning programme

©Fell, Parker and Quinney.

References

Burgess H and Carpenter J (2008) Building Capacity and Capability for Evaluating the Outcomes of Social Work Education (the OSWE project): Creating a Culture Change. *Social Work Education*. 27, 1-15.

Holden G, Meenaghan T, Anastas J and Metrey G. (2002) Outcomes of Social Work Education: The Case for Social Work Self-Efficacy. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 38(1), 115-133

New SWAP resources

Available to download from www.swap.ac.uk/resources

Monograph

University life uncovered: making sense of the student experience (2008) – a collection of 10 research papers

Consultancy reports

The Career Paths of DPhil Social Policy Students in the UK (2008)* – Rana Jawad (University of Warwick)

Social Work Doctoral Students in the UK (2008)* – Jonathan Scourfield (Cardiff University)

SWAP Guides

Guide 4a – Maximising student learning in lectures (2008)*

Guide 4b – What makes a good lecturer? The student perspective (2008)*

Book reviews

Interprofessional education and training (2008), John Carpenter and Helen Dickinson. Reviewed by Pauline Noden, Buckinghamshire New University, October 2008

Islam and social work (2008), Sara Ashencaen Crabtree, Fatima Husain and Basia Spalek. Reviewed by Professor Shula Ramon, Anglia Ruskin University, October 2008

New directions in social work practice (2008), Kieron Hatton. Reviewed by Marcia Cameron, NSPCC, October 2008

Professional risk and working with people (2008), David Carson and Andy Bain. Reviewed by Jane Watt, Sheffield, October 2008

Communication and interpersonal skills in social work (2008), Juliet Koprowska. Reviewed by Caroline James, NSPCC, October 2008

Video resources

Advice for new social policy lecturers (2008)

Using lectures to engage new social policy students (2008)

New social policy students – existing knowledge (2008)

Engaging social policy students (2008)

New resources from the Integrated Children's Services in Higher Education (ICS-HE) project <http://icshe.escalate.ac.uk/1458>

Project Summary (2008)* – Hilary Burgess and Jackie Rafferty (SWAP)

Knowledge Review (2008)* – Imogen Taylor, Russell Whiting and Elaine Sharland (University of Sussex)

Conference Report (2008)* – Judy McKimm (University of Bedfordshire), Hilary Burgess and Jackie Rafferty (SWAP)

Those marked * are also currently available in print. Please email swapteam@soton.ac.uk to request a copy.

From the editors

Sharp and striking or faint and unclear?

SWAP would like to know what you think to this new format newsletter. After conducting some research with subscribers of the old SWAP news we've adapted our approach with this new shorter but focused version which we hope to publish on a different theme once each term.

We hope that 'in focus' will provide an opportunity for the social policy and social work communities to share knowledge and facilitate discussion about the development of learning and teaching in higher education. However without your feedback we won't know if it's something you find useful and enjoyable to read or just extra filling for your in-tray.

So please take a few seconds to tell us what you think of the first issue, by emailing swapeditor@soton.ac.uk or writing to 'in focus editorial team' at the address on the back cover. Your feedback would be appreciated and could help shape the future of the publication.

What's
your
opinion?



Next issue: Employer Engagement

“Those activities [which HE institutions develop to engage employers] should share equal status with research and academic activities”

(World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England(2007))

Contact us with your views and ideas.



Email swapeditor@soton.ac.uk or write to 'in focus' at the address on the back cover

Forthcoming events

Date	Title	Location
12 January 2009	Utilising authentic assessment and e-portfolios in the social services A technology based day for academic and agency staff working in its place	Glasgow Caledonian University
27 January 2009	Symposium: changing academic practice - implications for future social policy academics A free one day symposium to explore the professional identities and roles of academic lecturers in social policy.	Lincoln EPA Science Centre, Oxford
27 February 2009	Ensuring the quality of social work practitioners through external examining for the degree An opportunity for external examiners for the degree in social work to consider how to ensure standards are maintained. Please note that attendance at this event is primarily for existing external examiners, but a small number of places will be reserved for those wishing to take on this role.	Friends House, London
February 2009	Focus on PQ (England) or Masters programmes Joint forum with JUC-SWEC. Details TBC – please check www.swap.ac.uk/events	TBC
11 March 2009	Professional doctorates in social work – how do they work? A free one day event to enable staff involved in providing Post Doctoral programmes (as course leaders, teachers and research supervisors) to share experiences and discuss best practice in the light of examples and research evidence presented.	Cardiff University
8-10 July 2009	JSWEC 11th UK Joint Social Work Education Conference with the 3rd UK Social Work Research Conference www.jswec.co.uk	University of Hertfordshire, Hatfield

To receive 'in focus' and be kept up to date with the latest news, publications, events and funding opportunities register with swap at www.swap.ac.uk/register



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