

## **Standing on a precipice? Practice educators and the future of practice learning in social work**

Recent initiatives aiming to strengthen and improve practice education have culminated in the conceptualisation of a new practice educator framework that is due to be in place by 2013. This hopeful plan has been devised against a backdrop of unprecedented challenge, pressure and at a time of great uncertainty about the resources available to support social work practice.

As reported by Community Care magazine, we are seeing placement providers, particularly in the voluntary sector, shutting up shop due to lack of funding. Additionally, there is a general decline in the number of statutory placements available; probably because of an increase in workloads as staff numbers are cut. Yet, as Laming, Munro and the Reform Board agree, the future of social work education rests, in large part, on the availability of high quality and robust practice education.

Based on findings from:

- i. Recent empirical research into practice education and
- ii. Involvement in a pilot project to trial the new practice educator framework

We invite you to participate in a lively workshop and actively engage with the following questions that have emerged from both projects:

- Preparing for successful implementation of the new framework by 2013 means finding space to ponder and commit to creative ways to engage practice educators and their sponsors. What can be learned and transferred from our experiences to date?
- Given the intrinsic value of the role, what are the most effective ways to retain practice educators?
- Where 'calling a halt' in a student's placement is indicated, which key considerations will assist practice educators to exercise their authority as gate-keepers for the profession?
- How do we best garner practical support to enable candidates to take up the new M level practice educator courses?
- How do we "protect" and maintain quality standards in practice education during times of uncertainty and economic pressure?