

Opportunities and threats to service user and carer participation in pre and post qualifying social work education and training in relation to the social work proposed reforms – our perspectives

“The best of times and the worst of times”? Participation in the social work degree is a good news story for social work. No other profession has so systematically involved service users and carers. How can this high level of involvement be maintained at Degree level and how can the model be developed in post-qualifying training in the current context of the reform board agenda, development of The College of Social Work, spending restraints and new regulation processes? Social work is under pressure, morale is low, spending cuts loom during a period of great change and reform.

It is very possible that in these changing contexts service users and carers will be left behind. Yes, we are invited to be part of the consultation but will our participation be meaningful or tokenistic? Whose agenda and whose reforms are they anyway?

Two Focus Groups with service users and carers on 28th January 2011 looked at the benefits of service user and carer participation in social work education within the context of the Social Work Reform Board proposals. Come along and listen to our views and participate – you will be heartened to hear of the support for Social Work.

The proposals for the Professional Capabilities Standards, the Curriculum Framework, including Practice Learning, and for Continuing Professional Development all need the influence and involvement of service users and carers. Ongoing involvement in Partnerships between Employers and Higher Education Institutions, and in developing the Standards for Employers to support learning and practice is vital.

The profession has always been ahead of the game in terms of service user and carer involvement. During this period of change and upheaval it is vital that social work maintains its commitment to service user and carer involvement and co-production in education and learning, pre- and post qualifying.