

<b>Institution: University of Sussex</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: UoA 22 Social Work and Social Policy</b>
<b>Title of case study:</b> Changing social work education
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>In a period of national questioning of social work quality, Sussex research has significantly influenced the curricula content of and entry standards for social work education (SWE). New guidelines set admissions standards for all English social work courses, resulting in better quality candidates. Law teaching has been shaped by a new curriculum guide based on our research, as well as the development of prize-winning educational resources. Social workers feel better equipped to communicate with children through contributions to new curricula requirements, textbooks to improve teaching, and direct influence – via Continuing Professional Development – on the quality of communications.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Leadership of the quality enhancement of SWE was brought to Sussex in 2001 with Taylor's appointment and her Co-Directorship (with Rafferty, University of Southampton) of the HEFCE Learning and Teaching Support Network Social Policy and Social Work Subject Centre. Funded research into SWE took a significant step forward in 2006, when Sussex was selected (from 300 applicants) as a Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) Registered Provider of Research. Sussex staff were commissioned to undertake ten studies of teaching, learning and assessment in Department of Health required curricula. Our research contributed to the knowledge base for implementation of the new social work degree (introduced in 2003–04) and was methodologically innovative – including participation by users in its research design and implementation – and was the first to apply systematic review methodology to SWE.</p> <p>Two SCIE studies, <i>Teaching, Learning and Assessing of Communication Skills with Children and Young People in Social Work Education</i> and <i>Teaching, Learning and Assessment of Law in Social Work Education</i>, selected here for their significance to the changing policy and practice context, were informed by systematic reviews, surveys of university practices and consultation workshops with service-users, including children and young people. We found that the teaching and assessment of communication skills with children was inconsistent, with diverging views on its importance [see Section 3, R1], and that the law–social work relationship was often strained – students found law learning difficult and curricula were diverse [R2]. Both SCIE studies led to further commissions to extend the reach of the initial research. Following a commission (2007) to develop innovative e-learning tools to enhance law-learning, Braye and colleagues undertook a further SCIE study (2011) using 283 matched student pairs across 8 institutions to explore educator capacity to use e-learning resources, and their impact on student learning [R3]. Luckock and Lefevre were commissioned to develop 2 core practice texts translating the SCIE findings [R1] for HE educators, students and practitioners: (i) in 2008, the British Association of Adoption and Fostering commissioned them to address direct practice with children (2008) [R4]; ii) in 2010, Policy Press commissioned Lefevre to write <i>Communicating with Children and Young People</i> [R5]. In 2009, following a presentation by Lefevre at the UK Joint Social Work Education Conference, the Care Council for Wales invited Lefevre and Taylor to undertake 3 linked studies to inform SWE and practice with children in Wales. Overall, in addition to 5 SCIE publications, these studies generated 10 peer-refereed journal articles, 8 national conference presentations (6 by invitation) and 9 international (4 by invitation).</p> <p>In 2008, following a child-abuse death, perceptions escalated of a failure to select 'suitable' social work students and/or produce high quality graduates. Stakeholders voiced concerns to The House of Commons' Children, Schools and Families Select Committee investigating the training of children and families social workers (2008–09), the Social Work Task Force (SWTF) (2008) and the Social Work Reform Board (SWRB) (2010). In response to changing policy, we pro-actively engaged with new bodies mandated to raise the standards of SWE: The College of Social Work and the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) – which replaced the General Social Care Council (GSCC). In 2008, the</p>

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first UK exploratory study of its kind examined the relationship between applicants' pre-admission information and their performance on a social-work programme [R6]. This led the Higher Education Academy (HEA) to commission Holmstrom to research student selection in social work, and to inform development of admissions policy in England [R7]. This study found limited evidence to support SWTF/SWRB concerns, particularly expressed by employer stakeholders, regarding below-average entry requirements compared to other professions. It underpinned two further HEA commissions: (i) to survey admissions practice (2009–10) and (ii) to write national guidance for Social Work Admissions Tutors (2011) [see Section 5, C3].

Key researchers were employed by the University of Sussex at 31 October 2013: Barry Luckock, appointed 1998; Professor Imogen Taylor, appointed 2001; Dr Michelle Lefevre, appointed 2003; Professor Suzy Braye, appointed 2005; and Cath Holmstrom, appointed 2006.

### 3. References to the research

- R1** Luckock, B., Lefevre, M., Orr, D., Jones, M., Marchant, M. and Tanner, K. (2006) *Teaching, Learning and Assessing Communication Skills with Children and Young People in Social Work Education*. London: SCIE: <http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/knowledgereviews/kr12.asp> Accessed 14 October 2013.
- R2** Braye, S. and Preston-Shoot, M., with Cull, L.A., Johns, R. and Roche, J. (2005) *Teaching, Learning and Assessment of Law in Social Work Education*. London: SCIE. <http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/knowledgereviews/kr08.asp> Accessed 14 October 2013.
- R3** Braye, S., Preston-Shoot, M. and Marrable, T. (2011) *Law Learning in Action: An Action Learning Project to Evaluate Processes and Outcomes of Using Law E-Learning Objects in Social Work Education*. London: SCIE: <http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/elearning/files/EvaluationFullreport.pdf>  
The SCIE Reports above (R1, R2 and R3) were externally peer-reviewed by at least 2 or 3 independent reviewers, including a service-user, and were quality-assured by SCIE.
- R4** Luckock, B.A. and Lefevre, M. (eds) (2008) *Direct Work with Children*. London: British Association of Adoption and Fostering.
- R5** Lefevre, M. (2010) *Communicating with Children and Young People*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- R6** Holmstrom, C. and Taylor, I. (2008) 'Researching admissions: what can we learn about the selection of applicants from findings about students in difficulty on a social work programme?', *Social Work Education*, 27(8): 819–36.
- R7** Holmstrom, C. (2010) *Selection and Admission of Students for Social Work Education: Key Issues and Debates in Relation to Practice and Policy in England*. London: The Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Social Policy and Social Work: available at: [http://www.swap.ac.uk/docs/projects/admissions\\_rpt.pdf](http://www.swap.ac.uk/docs/projects/admissions_rpt.pdf) accessed 13 October 2013.

Outputs can be supplied by the University on request

### 4. Details of the impact

***Our research has led to new guidelines, setting admissions standards to almost all social work courses, resulting in better quality candidates.***

- ***Influencing policy:*** The research findings [see Section 3, R6 & R7] informed national discussions between 2008 and 2012. In 2008, they led to an invitation to Holmstrom to join the national Social Work Task Force (to become the Social Work Reform Board in 2010), and lead discussions on admissions. This resulted in Holmstrom's first influential report [R7] which 'dispelled the myths...and replaced them with a widely acknowledged evidence base... Over a couple of years – from the SWTF to passing recommendations to the SWRB – the work has fed into discussions, led to a sub-group specifically on this area and to two influential documents' [see Section 5, C1]. Holmstrom's second 'influential document' comprised the national guidance on the selection of social-work students aimed at HE admissions tutors and partners in England [C3], commissioned by the HEA and GSCC/HPCP

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to explain the HCPC standards on admissions procedures and their interaction with the relevant legislative and policy drivers and widening participation and equalities issues. Holmstrom's research 'was extremely well received and helped set a benchmark for what new procedures should be adopted by SWRB and The College' [C2].

- *Influencing HE practice:* Crucially, Holmstrom's admissions guidance [C3] was specifically designed to equip social work admissions tutors and their partners with both technical and operational guidance and some exemplars of good practice. It was also designed to integrate with the criteria for programme endorsement used by The College since 2012. It informed an HEA translational summary, *Recommendations for the Selection of Students*, now held by The College, which cites Holmstrom's contribution on p. 1 [C4]. Holmstrom's guidance 'has set the benchmark for what good admissions looks like and so the criteria for programmes to be endorsed by The College. ...It will impact on some 97 per cent of the 250 courses currently being offered' [C2]. Furthermore, 'Perceptions are that this work is positively influencing the calibre of entrants...there is also now a focus on quality over quantity' [C1]. This statement was echoed by an Admissions Tutor who said, evaluating participation in one of the 7 national workshops led by Holmstrom and funded by the HEA to develop good admissions practice, 'We now have an effective balance between personal attributes and qualifications, ensuring that those selected are the best qualified AND most able' [C11].

***Law teaching nationally has been shaped by our research evidence*** (conducted in partnership with the University of Bedfordshire, the research reflects a distinct and material input from Sussex).

- *Influencing policy:* Following the original research, Braye was commissioned by HEA to conduct further research into the law field curriculum (see [http://www.swap.ac.uk/docs/projects/socialworklaw\\_rpt.pdf](http://www.swap.ac.uk/docs/projects/socialworklaw_rpt.pdf)). This research was cited in the Law Commission's review of adult social-care law as evidence of the need for legal reform (see [http://lawcommission.justice.gov.uk/docs/lc326\\_adult\\_social\\_care.pdf](http://lawcommission.justice.gov.uk/docs/lc326_adult_social_care.pdf)) and subsequently in the Department of Health impact assessment relating to the Care Bill 2013 (see [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/197938/Care\\_and\\_Support\\_Legal\\_Reform\\_IA\\_FINAL\\_.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/197938/Care_and_Support_Legal_Reform_IA_FINAL_.pdf), para 6.12). Braye provided evidence to the SWTF working group on the law curriculum, and commented on its proposals. Law is now more thoroughly woven within the HCPC and TCSW requirements, and the national law curriculum reflects Sussex input to the TCSW *Law Curriculum Guide* to accompany the Professional Capability Framework [C5].
- *Influencing HE practice:* Law learning has improved as a result of Law e-learning resources produced by the Department. The resources [C6] were commissioned by SCIE on behalf of the Department of Health, and were based on the evidence from the underpinning SCIE study [R2]. The resources were awarded first prize for innovation by the HEA Association of Learning Technology. Subsequent SCIE-commissioned outcome-focused research [R3] led to the Collaborative Capacity Building Learning Set research, with educators and students focusing specifically on the impact of the e-learning resources. They identified the factors that enhance tutor engagement with their use, the positive impact on student knowledge and confidence, and the pedagogic practices that enhance learning. Participants attest to the transformative change in education practice, as exemplified by this quote from an educator: 'I've gone into (the learning set) meetings feeling bludgeoned by higher education and my workload (and have emerged) feeling empowered to come back and make changes. ... In terms of professional identity, I went from being somebody who was new to having some credibility and professional confidence with colleagues; I felt really of value because I was part of it ... I've got some kind of identity within my profession and teaching' [C11].

***National teaching of communication skills with children has been shaped by our research evidence, and communications with children have improved***

- *Influencing policy:* In 2013, the Care Council for Wales (CCW) reported that they have used the 3 studies commissioned from the Sussex team to improve practice with children in Wales in the following ways: (i) to revise the National Occupational Standards for Social Work upon which the Wales socialwork degree is based; (ii) to inform the CCW review of requirements for approval of the degree and increase the requirements in relation to safeguarding; (iii) to develop, consult on and begin to implement a framework for Continuing Professional Education and Learning for social workers in Wales, which forms a nationally agreed career pathway for social workers; (iv) to inform

CCW quality assurance of socialwork degree programmes; (v) to inform the preparation of child-developmentannotated bibliographies as a resource for educators and practitioners [C7]. In England, Luckock raised awareness of the SCIE research findings [R1] in his submission to the House of Commons' Children, Schools and Families Enquiry into the Training of Children and Families Social Workers (Para. 14, *Seventh Report of Session 2008–09*, Volume 1).

- *Influencing HE practice*: The research led to social workers feeling better prepared for work with children. Research was used in two books on good practice with children: (i) BAAF identified Luckock and Lefevre's book [R4] as 'a core text ...widely used to train social workers and other professionals' [C8]; (ii) Policy Press records (2013) show that Lefevre's book [R5] was adopted by 31 BA and MA SWE teachers in 29 HEIs in England and Wales who were teaching 1,529 students a year [C9]. Lefevre was consulted on development of The College 'Curriculum Guide on Communication Skills', where her 2010 book is cited as a core text [C10]. The HEA continue to support development of the impact of Lefevre's research. In 2013 they awarded a teaching development grant to Lefevre to develop and evaluate the learning and assessment of communication and engagement with children and young people in final-year social work placements.
- *Influencing social work practice*: Nationally Lefevre receives more invitations from social-work and non-social-work children's agencies to contribute to training their staff than she can accommodate. In 2013, this included an invitation from the British Association of Osteopaths. In 2011–12 and 2012–13, the Children and Family Court Advisory Service commissioned Lefevre to train their practitioners in London. This training draws directly on her researcher–practitioner perspective and leads to improved communication with children by practitioners. Practitioners commented on the *effect* of the training: 'I hope and I believe that I have developed some kind of attunement, becoming a bit more alert to what children tell me and finding/developing creative ways in establishing communication with them'; 'It has encouraged me to listen to children on how they communicate in implicit ways that I failed to pick up previously' [C11].

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- C1** Former Head of Social Work Education Inspection, General Social Care Council, now with The College of Social Work.
- C2** Senior Academic Adviser , Higher Education Academy, Social Work Education Project in England.
- C3** *Guidance for HE Admissions Tutors and Partners on Implementing New Arrangements for the Selection of Students for Social Work Courses.*  
[http://www.swapbox.ac.uk/1133/1/Admission%2520to%2520SW\\_Dec2011\\_final%2520doc\[1\].pdf](http://www.swapbox.ac.uk/1133/1/Admission%2520to%2520SW_Dec2011_final%2520doc[1].pdf)  
f Accessed 13 October 2013.
- C4** *Recommendations for the Selection of Students onto Social Work Degree Courses in England.*  
[http://www.tcsw.org.uk/uploadedFiles/TheCollege/\\_CollegeLibrary/Reform\\_resources/RecommendationsSelectionStudents\(edref2\).pdf](http://www.tcsw.org.uk/uploadedFiles/TheCollege/_CollegeLibrary/Reform_resources/RecommendationsSelectionStudents(edref2).pdf)
- C5** TCSW Curriculum Guide: Social Work Law  
[http://www.collegeofsocialwork.org/uploadedFiles/TheCollege/Media\\_centre/CG\\_Law.pdf](http://www.collegeofsocialwork.org/uploadedFiles/TheCollege/Media_centre/CG_Law.pdf)
- C6** Braye, S. and Preston-Shoot, M. (2007, updated 2009) *E-Learning Law and Social Work.* London: SCIE: <http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/elearning/law/index.asp>
- C7** Manager Higher and Social Work Education, Care Council for Wales.
- C8** Director of Policy, Research and Development, British Association for Adoption and Fostering.
- C9** Policy Press Record available on request.
- C10** TCSW Curriculum Guide: Communication Skills:  
<http://www.collegeofsocialwork.org/professional-development/educators/>
- C11** Evaluation feedback available from Departmental records:  
<http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/elearning/files/EvaluationFullreport.pdf>