

## **Better Together: Diverging Trajectories of Local Social Work Practice and Nationally-Regulated Social Work Education in the UK**

**Authors :** Noel Smith

**Abstract :** To achieve professional registration, UK social workers need to complete a programme of education and training which meets standards set down by central government. When it comes to practice, social work in local authorities must fulfil requirements of national legislation but there is considerable local variation in the organisation and delivery of services. This presentation discusses the on-going reform of social work education by central government in the context of research of social work services in a local authority. In doing so it highlights that the 'direction of travel' of the national reform of social work education seems at odds with the trajectory of development of local social work services. In terms of education reform, the presentation cites key government initiatives including the knowledge and skills requirements which have been published separately for, respectively, child and family social work and adult social work. Also relevant is the Government's new 'teaching partnership' pilot which focuses exclusively on social work in local government, in isolation from social work in NGOs. In terms of research, the presentation discusses two studies undertaken by Professor Smith in Suffolk County Council, a local authority in the east of England. The first is an equality impact analysis of the introduction of a new model for the delivery of adult and community services in Suffolk. This is based on qualitative research with local government representatives and NGOs involved in social work with older people and people with disabilities. The second study is an on-going, mixed method evaluation of the introduction of a new model of social care for children and young people in Suffolk. This new model is based on the international 'Signs of Safety' approach, which is applied in this model to a wide range of services from early intervention to child protection. While both studies are localised, the service models they examine are good illustrations of the way services are developing nationally. Analysis of these studies suggest that, if services continue to develop as they currently are, then social workers will require particular skills which are not be adequately addressed in the Government's plans for social work education. Two issues arise. First, education reform concentrates on social work within local government while increasingly local authorities are outsourcing service provision to NGOs, expecting greater community involvement in providing care, and integrating social care with health care services. Second, education reform focuses on the different skills required for working with older and disabled adults and working with children and families, to the point where potentially the profession would be fragmented into two different classes of social worker. In contrast, the development of adult and children's services in local authorities re-asserts the importance of common social work skills relating to personalisation, prevention and community development. The presentation highlights the importance for social work education in the UK to be forward looking, in terms of the changing design of service delivery, and outward looking, in terms of lessons to be drawn from international social work.

**Keywords :** adult social work, children and families social work, European social work, social work education

**Conference Title :** ICSWESD 2015 : International Conference on Social Work, Education and Social Development

**Conference Location :** Osaka, Japan

**Conference Dates :** October 08-09, 2015