

Pracademia in Irish Higher Education: The Only Solution to Contemporary Regulation in Professional Social Care Practice

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Abstract : The synergy between theory and practice can be considered elusive, the touchstone for the development of successful undergraduate programmes particularly in allied health professions such as social care. A 'pracademic' is a person who spans both the somewhat ethereal world of academia as a scholar and the pragmatic world of practice. This paper examines the concept of 'pracademia' in relation to the role of the social care practitioner and continuing professional development. It also assists in the understanding of the synergy between social care professionals and higher education. A consideration of the identity and position in terms of approach to regulation is explored as well as an acknowledgement of the strengths and opportunities for sharing power in hierarchical positions. The world of practice serves as the centre point of the academic compass for most professional programs. Just as schools of engineering and law are disciplined by the marketplace, which seeks well-trained students, so our social care programmes must perennially find ways to address the fast changing needs of practitioners, whether they be government, not-for-profit organizations, consulting firms or contractors. We may not expect such traditional academic disciplines as history, sociology, or political science to cater to the needs of external audiences or practitioners— indeed, these disciplines' insulation from public concerns and issues is considered a strength by some. This paper aims to explore the integration of academic teaching and research with the communities of practice in social care. This appears to be a fundamental aspiration of the social care profession. While building and integrating an important body of academic theory and concepts from a variety of disciplines, social care as a field has embraced a professional orientation by seeking to be relevant to practitioners at various levels. While teaching theory, social care programmes, and faculty are often acutely aware that their academic content and credibility, in part, rest on a deep connection with practitioners. While theory can be self-contained, the impact of our research and teaching arguably finds its most compelling and highest audience when it addresses the agenda items and concerns of practitioners.

Keywords : social care, pracademia, supervision, practice education

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