OU & Unison
Learning Partnership Route
to social work degree qualification

Initial investigation of practice-based assessment issues – project summary
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Introduction

The original proposal aimed to evaluate the LPR. However, it quickly became clear that practice-based professional learning [PBPL] in social work is composed of multiple and over-lapping interests and perspectives:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th>Interests</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open University</td>
<td>Pedagogical / widening participation / implementation / academic assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unison</td>
<td>Workforce development / widening participation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employer</td>
<td>Service delivery / finance priorities / staff retention / appraisal assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student / learner / worker</td>
<td>Professional development &amp; identity / transitions / practice assessment</td>
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There were 3 different sites of PBPL with the options of 3/4/5 year flexible pathways which offered too much complexity to undertake an ‘evaluation’ within a one year funded time-period. It was decided to embark upon two phases of enquiry.

Phase One

In the first phase, the following enquiry methods were used:

1. Questionnaires to all – identify volunteer interviewees
2. Focus group discussion in 2 sites – elaborate WBL factors that inhibit or enhance learning:
   - Self home / family
   - Office supervisor / colleagues
   - Practice service users / carers
3. Individual interviews with willing participants in all 3 sites
4. Two follow-up interviews at second level practice learning

The processes of enquiry led to the progressive re-focusing upon:

- Workplace learning factors that inhibit or enhance learning
- Overlay of assessment: ‘assessing and being assessed’
- Professional identity and personal transitions
Emerging Themes:

1. The shift from non-qualified worker to professional learner gave rise to different transitions:
   - Status staff to student
   - Self family patterns and learning baggage
   - Learner ‘traditional’ Graduate to reflective PBPL

2. Achievement of learning and qualifications later in life

3. Knowing ‘self’ and the ‘right time’ to study

4. NVQ assessment v professional learning

5. Importance of workplace support for learner role

6. Reflective help to generate own learning aims & needs

7. Overlay of assessment in social work education: Assessing and Being Assessed

Phase Two

Analysis of results from the first phase of data collection led to the emergence of a second phase in which the project focused down to discover and pilot, with two individuals, a new enquiry tool. The resulting Professional Identity Transition Tool © will form the basis of future work.

Development of the Professional Identity Transition Tool – PITT.

- PITT aims to specify and clarify the focus and direction of their professional and learning journeys recognising the personal meanings of the transitions from unqualified worker to learner to qualified social worker. This is achieved through reflective activities upon perceptions of themselves and upon social workers they have encountered from which personal constructs of their own social work values are elicited. Through the prioritising and scaling of these constructs, personal goals, learning objectives and meaningful steps in reaching these can be developed.

- PITT uses theoretical and empirical strands from Constructivist approaches such as Personal Construct Psychology and Appreciative Inquiry

- PITT was developed because of common themes arising from previous interviews, particularly from those who fit into the widening participation agenda.

- To date PITT has been piloted informally with two volunteers. Both of these are working in social care settings, currently unqualified in this area, and are in their first year of the part-time social work degree, being sponsored onto this by their work place.