

Social Work's New Assertiveness

Hilton Dawson, Chief Executive of BASW discussed 'Social Work's New Assertiveness' at the SSRG Annual Workshop. An abridged version of his presentation was reproduced in the Society pages of the Guardian on Wednesday 10th March. Here, Hilton provides an update on the plans for a College of Social Work and reaction to it.

It was good to have the opportunity to present the BASW plans for a College of Social Work across the UK at SSRG Annual Workshop. My compliments to you for being prepared to engage with 'social work's new assertiveness' Others are not showing themselves quite so willing.

At a mid point now between our decision to hold a referendum of all 12,500 BASW members and the reporting of its result to our Council on April 28th with a General Election fast approaching this is an interesting time to reflect on the experience so far and on what it says for policy making and for social work.

The good news is that BASW is an extremely busy and positive place to be. Key Council members and staff are working very hard, membership applications are still coming in online at 10 per day. The referendum papers have now been out more than a week and while only the independent scrutineers receive them the information from our ongoing survey of members indicates that some 90% say 'yes'.

On April 28th BASW Council will also receive an independently audited investment plan setting out our priorities for building capacity in member services, in senior staff to link



Hilton Dawson

research, knowledge development and publications and in further additions to the staff team in national offices. We are excited and enthused with this project and determined that it will succeed.

Others are not so keen. The London centred elite which spends so much of its time talking to itself about social work plainly doesn't want to talk to us. Meetings with Ministers are proffered but then somehow disappear. The group developing an England College decide that we of all the interested groups around the table have such an over-riding interest that our representative, one of

the 2 registered social workers at their meeting should leave. Community Care has not printed one word of the case for the BASW proposals although they have rushed to publish criticism and condemn.

I have been surprised at the determination of some of the best regarded, highly intelligent, distinguished people from our society and our profession not to listen. We are told that they already agree with our principles when they palpably don't. When we set out ideas for negotiation for the mutually agreeable solution that is there for the taking they are ignored. We are told what a good contribution we've made and how valued we are but when we can't be incorporated in others plans we are ignored.

Well they can try.

One of the worst aspects of all is the lack of respect for democracy. Two members of Council leave because they lost a vote when they could have made a welcome and continuing contribution to refining our plans. Others make a 'unanimous' decision to expel us more redolent of North Korea than our liberal democracy where honest disagreements and healthy 9-4 votes are condemned as 'divided' or 'splits'.

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Some people seem to fear the verdict of our members. We are told that the votes of 12,500 people are irrelevant and that our referendum should be halted. We now have a welcome resolution signed by some of the great and good of BASW past urging us to return to the National College fold – I can easily foresee that this will be presented as evidence of a rampantly divided BASW when it's actually a sure sign of a very healthy organisation. Someone should remind our society from top Government down that democracy - and dissent - are good.

What do we draw from this?

Well it's not by mere chance that social work is in the mess it's in.

Those who have regretted social work's lack of a voice in the past are often those who leap to raise the barriers when it starts to be heard. This particular battle for the body which should have the ability, if properly accountable and sustainable to transform social work is being waged in London rather than England let alone devolved nations who would do the job better.

It's good for BASW to mirror the situation that every social worker should be in at some time in their

lives of being unpopular, of standing up to authority and powerful interests on behalf of a case and a cause that requires to be heard.

England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and as I now realise after my visit last week - the Isle of Man. This really is time for social workers everywhere to take back our profession and for social work's new assertiveness to take hold.

Hilton Dawson, Chief Executive, BASW

Research Governance Framework (RGF) in Social Care: Update

Research Register Development Project

The Research Register for Social Care has been operating for a few years now, and the focus of the current DH-funded development project is to work out how best to improve take-up. Almost half of all the councils in England have been contacted so far, and have given their feedback by telephone or email.

The Register is managed by the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) and runs in parallel to the Social Care Online website. The key aims of the Research Register are interlinked:

- To widen the social care evidence base by recording research carried out in local councils that would otherwise not be available (the so-called 'grey literature');
- To enable local councils to record the research activity approved by their research governance systems (other than student projects);

There is wide variation in the amount of research activity going through RGF systems, with some councils reporting just 1 or 2 proposals approved per year; others (typically) reporting 'less than ten'; others as many as 30 or more. A guesstimate of the total maximum numbers of records that might, potentially, be added to the Register each year would be around 1000 for the 153 councils in England. This would provide a rich source of material to search, but the reality in terms of actual records added is

currently far from achieving this.

From talking to Research Governance leads across the country, it is clear that the majority are aware of the Register's existence, although relatively few have used it to access records, and even fewer have added records to the site. The development project has raised awareness among those who had not previously seen the website: many people have looked at the Register for the first time following an email or telephone enquiry. The Register doesn't have a prominent place even in the more research-minded councils: it is so often described as 'just one more database' and people don't seem to consider adding records to the Register as a mandatory activity.

It seems that, for most people who have taken part in the project so far, the Research Register is an excellent idea but too time-consuming when it comes to adding records to the system, especially now that councils are most likely to have their own research and consultation database, which is generally given priority. What this means in terms of the future of the Research Register is not yet clear. The current project has been extended to look at some of the options suggested to widen the use of the Register, and to ensure that as many councils as possible are given a chance to be involved.

For more information about the Research Register for Social Care, visit www.researchregister.org or contact

sue.jardine@scie.org.uk For further information about the development project, contact Chris Russell (chris@barn.abelgratis.co.uk)

National Social Care Research Ethics Committee (Social Care REC)

The Social Care REC held its first monthly meeting in June 2009 and is reviewing an increasing number of applications from a wide range of applicants. Applicants include Local Authorities; third sector organisations; University staff and students where the research involves people who lack capacity to consent; and studies funded by the Department of Health or the NIHR School for Social Care Research. The Social Care REC may accept studies of integrated services that involve some NHS as well as social care staff, if there is no impact on patient care. The Social Care REC is another option for ethical review: most social care studies will continue to be reviewed by University RECs, and no study should be reviewed by more than one REC.

The Social Care REC reviews adult social care research study proposals from researchers based in England. It is part of the National Research Ethics Service, and its membership, expertise and procedures have been developed to reflect the social care