

Institution: University of Dundee		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 20 Social Work and Social Policy		
Title of case study: Transforming social work education and professional learning in Scotland: Impact on public policy, education and workforce development		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2015-2016		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Patricia McCulloch	Reader; Discipline Lead: Social Work	2003 - ongoing
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2016 - ongoing		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		

1. Summary of the impact

Research led by Dr McCulloch has directly underpinned national and local policy development, policy implementation, social work education and workforce development practice across Scotland. Key impacts to date include:

- (i) Headline recommendations in the *National Health and Social Care Workforce Plan* to improve social work education and develop career pathways; serving 1,899 students and 10,913 social workers.
- (ii) Implementation of a national *Social Work Education Partnership* providing national collaborative leadership and accountability for social work education; benefiting nine HEIs, all practice providers, 2086 students and service users.
- (iii) Three pilots of a Supported and Assessed Year in Practice (SAYP) across three locality sites, benefiting 90+ Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) in 2019/20; creation of an NQSW implementation group to support national roll out of a SAYP; and development and publication of NQSW benchmark standards for practice.

2. Underpinning research

In 2013, the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) announced an intention to 'develop a new and different approach' to professional learning, premised on unsubstantiated accounts of inadequate existing provision. McCulloch and colleagues responded with a call for evidence, culminating in a national Review of Social Work Education.

McCulloch was appointed co-chair of the Review and led a programme of collaborative and improvement-led research, knowledge exchange (KE) and impact activity. Adoption of an evidence-led approach was distinctive in a sector known for its ambivalent relationship with research and vulnerability to politically driven reform. Relatedly, McCulloch's early and sustained involvement of policy makers, sector leaders, academics, practitioners, students and service users was distinctive and integral to creating pathways for impact. Her approach distinguished the Review from a comparative process in England, which had been seen as top down and divisive, and succeeded in shifting its focus from correction to improvement [R1].

McCulloch was involved as PI or CI in four of twelve commissioned studies. Her research focussed on understanding:

- (i) philosophies of learning for social work (SW) education
- (ii) the value of a generic and core curriculum
- (iii) approaches to integrated learning
- (iv) the professional experiences of NQSWs

McCulloch was also responsible for a meta-analysis of findings from across the twelve studies, reported on in a final Review report [R2]. Again, a collaborative and multi-method approach to data collection and analysis was adopted, maximising participation from academic, practice and service user stakeholders at key stages. Initial findings were refined through a sector-wide KE event in March 2016, co-led by McCulloch and attended by 120+ policy, academic, practice and service user stakeholders.

Key findings underpinning impact were:

1. SW education in Scotland is fit for purpose but facing significant challenges. A generic approach is the right one but needs to be understood as a *foundation* for professional learning rather than completion of it [R1; R5].
2. SW education is a shared endeavour requiring integrated and sustained contributions from all stakeholders. Cutbacks across practice and the academy have resulted in partnership-light models of learning, to the detriment of learning and practice outcomes [R1; R3; R4; R5].
3. Practice learning requires sustainable investment and infrastructure. Once robust partnerships now rest on strained goodwill and require national infrastructure to support excellent outcomes [R3; R4].
4. Excellent professional learning requires innovative and sustained integration of academic and practice-based learning opportunities *across* career pathways [R1; R3].

McCulloch's findings were published in the final report as five review recommendations [R2]. Following sector-wide endorsement of the report, the Scottish Government appointed McCulloch as academic lead to the Review Implementation Group. Findings 1,2 and 4 directly underpin: (i) new national and local workforce policy to improve social work qualifying education and career pathways, (ii) implementation of three NQSW pilot sites, (iii) development of new NQSW benchmark standards, (iv) development of the policy detail to support national rollout of a supported and assessed year in practice, and (v) development of a new national strategy and standards for workforce CPD. Findings 2, 3 and 4 led to the implementation of a national *Social Work Education Partnership*, now providing collaborative leadership and accountability for all involved in the delivery of social work education.

McCulloch's research is distinctive in a field which is frequently preoccupied with qualifying education and lacking in research evidence, with policy making often based on anecdote and political 'mood' for change rather than rigorous, evidence-based research [R1; R6]. Her work is recognised as having moved the learning agenda towards a focus on professional learning broadly and for building the learning partnerships needed to achieve and sustain policy and practice impact, as is demonstrated in her appointment as academic advisor to the recent Review of Social Work Education in Northern Ireland. The Chief Social Work Officer, East Ayrshire Council; E6) notes:

The research has been pivotal in enabling all stakeholders in social work education to step back and really see the limited way in which professional learning is currently being framed. Being involved at an early stage has been hugely beneficial in taking forward conversations, debate and action at policy and practice levels. ...Perhaps most importantly, at a time when social inequalities are so stark ...the research methods and findings promote the participation of people who use services and their carers as key partners in the design and development of social workers' professional learning.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[R1] McCulloch, T & Taylor, S (2018), 'Becoming a Social Worker: Realising a Shared Approach to Professional Learning?', *British Journal of Social Work*, vol. 48, no. 8, pp. 2272-2290. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcx157> (Peer-reviewed and REF-eligible journal article).

[R2] Scottish Social Services Council (2016) *Review of Social Work Education: Statement on progress 2015-2016*. Available at: <https://www.sssc.uk.com/knowledgebase/article/KA-01885/en-us> [Accessed 11 March 2021] (Publicly available peer-reviewed report, endorsed and widely disseminated by SSSC. Co-authored by McCulloch (lead author), McCusker and Gillespie).

[R3] Kettle, M., McCusker, P., Shanks, L., Ingram, R. and McCulloch, T. (2016) *Integrated Learning in Social Work: A review of approaches to integrated learning for social work education and practice*. Dundee: University of Dundee. Glasgow: Glasgow Caledonian University. Available at: <https://www.sssc.uk.com/knowledgebase/article/KA-01739/en-us> [Accessed 11 March 2021] (Publicly available peer-reviewed report; accepted, endorsed and disseminated by SSSC).

[R4] McCulloch, T., Roesch-Marsh, A., Simpson, M. and Cooper, S. (2016) *Is there a shared philosophy of learning in social work education in Scotland?* Dundee: University of Dundee. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh. Available at: <https://www.sssc.uk.com/knowledgebase/article/KA-01820/en-us> [Accessed 11 March 2021] (Publicly available peer-reviewed report, accepted, endorsed and disseminated by SSSC).

[R5] McCusker, P. and McCulloch, T. (2016) *Should there be a core curriculum and if so what should it include?* Glasgow: Glasgow Caledonian University. Dundee: University of Dundee. Available at: <https://www.sssc.uk.com/knowledgebase/article/KA-01883/en-us> [Accessed 11 March 2021] (Publicly available peer-reviewed report, accepted, endorsed and disseminated by SSSC).

[R6] McCulloch, T. (2018) Social Work Education: A (hi-)story in two halves. In, Cree, V. and Smith, M. (eds), *Social Work in a Changing Scotland*. London: Routledge. Pp. 98-107. (Peer-reviewed REF-eligible book chapter, published by Routledge).

4. Details of the impact

McCulloch's research is described as having had an 'outstanding impact' [E8] on national and local policy development, policy implementation, social work education and workforce development practice across Scotland, through the implementation of a national and shared approach to professional learning. This replaces an approach to qualifying education where responsibility for outcomes has sat principally with HEI providers and partnership working has been reliant on goodwill. It has redirected an often-divisive focus in learning policy on qualifying education and is recognised as having acted as a 'catalyst' [E6] for renewed investment in professional learning across career pathways and settings [E6-E9]. Beneficiaries include all involved in the delivery and uptake of education and professional learning across Scotland, including all social work academics, students, employers and practitioners [E5-E9]. Benefits to people who use social work services are emergent through the development of a more confident and competent workforce [E6; E9]. Key impacts include:

1. **Two headline recommendations in the *National Health and Social Care Workforce Plan*** to (i) improve SW education and (ii) develop career pathways in line with the Review recommendations (E1, recommendations 6 & 7). The *Plan* sets the strategic direction for improved workforce planning and development across social services in Scotland and provides direction and accountability to nine HEI providers, all practice providers and 10,913 social workers (including NQSWs). Wider impacts include publication of *Revised Standards in Social Work Education* (2020), a *National Review of Post-qualifying Learning* by the SSSC in 2019 and replacement of the 'post registration training and learning' (PRTL) requirement with a 'new continuous professional learning' (CPL) requirement in 2020. McCulloch's research also informed the Northern Ireland Social Care Council's *Review of the Degree in Social Work* [E4], reflected in her appointment as external academic advisor to the Review committee.

2. **Implementation in 2019 of a national *Social Work Education Partnership* [E2].** This strategic partnership was established in 2019 by the Scottish Government with the purpose of improving the quality, consistency and experience of SW education across Scotland; it provides leadership and accountability to nine HEI providers, 32 Local Authority (LA) providers and all third sector providers. It serves 1,899 students and, ultimately, all who use SW services. Throughout COVID-19, the Partnership has enabled a national coordinated response to significant learning and practice challenges, including:

- the accelerated entry of final year graduates into the workforce;
- the resumption of Practice Learning following nationwide suspension;
- agreement of flexible arrangements to support students to meet the Standards in Social Work Education during COVID-19 while maintaining safeguards to the public;
- access for 1899+ students in practice to key worker status, vaccination and the NHS Scotland and Social Care Coronavirus Life Assurance Scheme 2020;
- GBP500,000+ of new funding to support the purchase of essential equipment to support students to resume practice learning while working from home;
- the creation of a national data system to monitor and support the demand and supply of placements.

As one member of the Partnership outlines [E8]:

It would be difficult to envisage these significant achievements being able to be realised during a national pandemic without all the groundwork that had been laid in the previous few years. The genesis of the Social Work Education Partnership, and [its] significant achievements, can be traced back to Dr McCulloch's research undertaken as part of the review in 2016, her recommendations for action, and her ability to bring together differing interest groups around a common purpose.

3. **Implementation of three national pilots of a supported and assessed year in practice (SAYP) for NQSWs (2019), development of supporting NQSW benchmark standards (2019), and creation of a national NQSW Implementation Group (2020) to develop the policy detail to support national rollout in 2022 [E3].** Pilots were implemented in Aberdeen, Angus and West of Scotland, providing a structured approach to the support and assessment of 90+ NQSWs. National rollout (currently planned for autumn 2022) will benefit all practice providers and NQSWs across Scotland.

McCulloch's research and KE activity has had a transformative impact on learning partnerships and outcomes. Leaders and practitioners in Angus, Clackmannanshire, Dundee, East Ayrshire, Fife and Perth & Kinross Councils describe how the research has led to a 'greater focus on professional learning... at a local level' [E6], a 'renewed status and focus on practice learning' [E7] and 'an enhanced sense of professional identity and empowerment' [E9]. Outcomes achieved through improved partnerships between the University of Dundee and local practice partners include:

- (i) A 51% increase in LA placement offers in 2018/19, improving learning opportunities for 160+ students.
- (ii) Service redesign in Angus and Ayrshire Councils creating new career pathways, including introduction of senior practitioner posts with a protected remit for practice learning [E6; E7].

Implementation of a quarterly professional development forum, titled *Talking Social Work* (2018-ongoing), has brought together academics, practitioners, students and service users across Tayside. Eight forums have taken place since 2018 and are regularly attended by 60+ participants. The challenge of advancing a shared approach to professional learning is widely understood and 'much bemoaned' across social work communities in Scotland and beyond [E4; E7]. That McCulloch has achieved the above 'outstanding' [E8] impacts in challenging contexts of public sector reform, health and social care integration, public sector austerity and in the wake

of COVID-19 is recognised as significant [E8]. As the Chief Social Work Officer for Angus Council and President of Social Work Scotland [E7] explains:

Often research papers are interesting but lack impact in the real world. They seem to struggle to get traction in the midst of other pressing operational and policy issues. In the case of this research, it has found the weight and authenticity to break through these usual barriers ... [and] proven so successful in influencing at scale. ... it has set the bedrock for a fundamental shift in how we consider the issue of social work practice development.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[E1] Scottish Government (2017) National Health and Social Care Workforce Plan Part 2 – a framework for improving workforce planning for social care in Scotland. Edinburgh: Scottish Government (see recommendations 6 & 7). Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-health-social-care-workforce-plan-part-2-framework-improving/> [Accessed 11 March 2021]

[E2] Scottish Government (2019) Social Work Education Partnership – Governance, Remit and Membership (Revised).

[E3] Scottish Social Services Council (2020) Learning from the NQSW pilots and next steps in developing a supported year. Dundee: Scottish Social Services Council. Available at: <https://www.sssc.uk.com/knowledgebase/article/KA-02928/en-us> [Accessed 11 March 2021]

[E4] Northern Ireland Social Care Council (2019) Review of the Degree in Social Work. Belfast: Northern Ireland Social Care Council. Available at: <https://learningzone.niscc.info/storage/adapt/5f463199ad4b2/course/assets/5ee24cf591b8eb183d8c1ecb.pdf> [Accessed 11 March 2021]

[E5] Supporting statement from Unit Head, Office of the Chief Social Work Advisor, Scottish Government (impacts 1, 2 & 3)

[E6] Supporting statement from the (then) Chief Social Work Officer East Ayrshire Council; former President, Social Work Scotland (impacts 1,2 & 4)

[E7] Supporting statement from the Chief Social Work Officer Angus Council and President of Social Work Scotland (impacts 1, 2 & 4)

[E8] Supporting statement from a representative member of the Social Work Education Partnership.

[E9] Supporting statement from Social Worker, Adult Care, Perth and Kinross Council.