

NOPT response to the Croisdale-Appleby Independent Review Report (2014)

NOPT would like to respond to the recent report and recommendations produced by Professor David Croisdale Appleby (February 2014): *Re-visioning social work education - An Independent Review* and in particular, to Chapters 7, 8 and 9 that focus on: service user and stakeholder involvement; delivering teaching and the organisation and delivery of practice learning.

As an organisation, NOPT is committed to the promotion of good standards of practice teaching, education and training. This has included supporting the recent establishment of national minimum standards for practice educators (PEPS).

NOPT would now like to generate discussion as to how the *Professional Social Work Educators* developmental pathway at Advanced Social Worker Level (see the Professional Capabilities Framework, TCSW, 2014) can best be supported and developed, to ensure the pivotal role of practice educators and the quality of the practice placement learning experience as part of the education and training of social workers, is properly valued and recognised. The current low profile of practice educators is an issue that the Croisdale-Appleby review itself, recognises.

NOPT therefore supports the promotion of the practice educator role within the '*totality of educational provision of the HEI,*' (**Conclusion 47**) through the further development of the national standards (PEPS) for practice educators (**Recommendation 11**). However, whether CPD for practice educators should be situated solely within a formal framework of CPD needs further consideration.

In term of maintaining the quality and range of practice placements, NOPT would wish to support the maintenance of a wide range and size of placement settings (**Conclusion 32**), as this reflects the wide diversity of professional settings, organisations and contexts in which social workers are current employed. The existence of formal practice learning agreements between HEI's and employers (**Conclusion 34**) would also be viewed as beneficial.

NOPT would broadly agree with **Conclusion 30** that supports the national standardisation of practice placement days (beneficial for regional and sub-regional planning and coordination of placements) whilst still allowing for flexibility of delivery and potential innovation in respect of the content of the *Developing Skills for Practice* module that helps to prepare students for their practice placements. The central importance of the quality of delivery of practice learning modules would also not be disputed (**Conclusion 31**).

In terms of the levels of funding available for practice learning, NOPT would support the recommendation (**Recommendation 19**) that the Education Support Grant be significantly increased, in order to support social care employers in ensuring the delivery of high quality practice placements and to help fund the specialised training

and ongoing support that needs to be offered to both practice supervisors and practice educators, to ensure good quality practice learning.

NOPT would therefore also support the allocation of additional funding for the 30 day *Developing Skills for Practice* module, as the costs in terms of time as well as financial and other resources to ensure meaningful service user, carer and stakeholder involvement in practice learning, is significant. Where NOPT would differ from the review however, is its conclusion regarding the channelling of funding from HEI's to placement providers, specifically the suggestion that all funding should be paid directly to the practice educator in the form an honorarium rather than being pooled by employers (**Conclusion 43**). NOPT would disagree with this view for the following reasons.

Practice learning co-ordinator posts have existed for many years within most medium to large size social care organisations. These co-ordinators have been pivotal in offering ongoing support, training and guidance to practice educators within their employing agencies. Co-ordinators currently play a key role in supporting ASYE; supporting, training and assessing practice educators; undertaking mentoring; attending regular HEI and sub regional and regional meetings related to the coordination of practice learning and in tracking the CPD of practice educators. This role clearly also matches the *Strategic Social Work Educator* pathway of expertise outlined in the PCF and should therefore be regarded as important role and supported as a future career pathway for social workers, alongside the manager and advance practitioner pathways.

Having an experienced practice educator and HCPC registered social worker undertaking a co-ordinating role in respect of practice placements is key to sustaining positive relationships and collaborative working between HEIs' and social work employers; in delivering practice placements and in supporting (together with HEI's) the skills development and CPD of practice educators. However, undertaking these various roles has a financial cost, over and above the cost of the practice learning co-ordinator post itself. This role therefore needs to be financially supported.

The NOPT Consultation on PEPS found that what practice educators asked for most was not more money (in the form of an honorarium) but for work load relief and supervisory support, in relation to supporting a student on placement. The funding provided by the ESG, when used flexibly, can allow for support for practice educators to be strategically developed according to local needs. NOPT would therefore support a system of local employer/HEI agreement in respect of how best to distribute ESG funding to support a high quality of practice learning (**Conclusion 46**).

In relation to the quality assurance of practice placements, although NOPT would support the development of a more rigorous audit and quality assurance process for placements (**Recommendation 17**), the scale of this task need to be properly

recognised and appropriate levels of support and funding put in place, to support effective delivery of this.