

# **Global standards for the education and training of the social work profession**

## **1. Standards regarding the school's core purpose or mission statement**

All schools should aspire toward the development of a core purpose statement or a mission statement which:

1.1 Is clearly articulated so those major stakeholders<sup>4</sup> who have an investment in such a core purpose or mission understand it.

1.2 Reflects the values and the ethical principles of social work.

1.3 Reflects aspiration towards equity with regard to the demographic profile of the institution's locality. The core purpose or mission statement should thus incorporate such issues as ethnic and gender representation on the faculty, as well as in recruitment and admission procedures for students.

1.4 Respects the rights and interests of service users and their participation in all aspects of delivery of programmes.

## **2. Standards regarding programme objectives and outcomes**

In respect of programme objectives and expected outcomes, schools should endeavour to reach the following:

2.1 A specification of its programme objectives and expected higher education outcomes.

2.2 A reflection of the values and ethical principles of the profession in its programme design and implementation.

2.3 Identification of the programme's instructional methods, to ensure they support the achievement of the cognitive and affective development of social work students.

2.4 An indication of how the programme reflects the core knowledge, processes, values and skills of the social work profession, as applied in context-specific realities.

2.5 An indication of how an initial level of proficiency with regard to self-reflective<sup>5</sup> use of social work values, knowledge and skills is to be attained by social work students.

2.6 An indication of how the programme meets the requirements of nationally and/or regionally/internationally defined professional goals, and how the programme addresses local, national and/or regional/international developmental needs and priorities.

2.7 As social work does not operate in a vacuum, the programme should take account of the impact of interacting cultural, economic, communication, social, political and psychological global factors.

2.8 Provision of an educational preparation that is relevant to beginning social work professional practice with individuals, families, groups and/or communities in any given context.

2.9 Self-evaluation to assess the extent to which its programme objectives and expected outcomes are being achieved.

2.10 External peer evaluation as far as is reasonable and financially viable. This may be in the form of external peer moderation of assignments and/or written examinations and dissertations, and external peer review and assessment of curricula.

2.11 The conferring of a distinctive social work qualification at the certificate, diploma, first degree or post-graduate level as approved by national and/or regional qualification authorities, where such authorities exist.

### **3. Standards with regard to programme curricula including field education**

With regard to standards regarding programme curricula, schools should consistently aspire towards the following:

3.1 The curricula and methods of instruction being consistent with the school's programme objectives, its expected outcomes and its mission statement.

3.2 Clear plans for the organisation, implementation and evaluation of the theory and field education components of the programme.

3.3 Involvement of service users in the planning and delivery of programmes.

3.4 Recognition and development of indigenous or locally specific social work education and practice from the traditions and cultures of different ethnic groups and societies, insofar that such traditions and cultures do not violate human rights.

3.5 Specific attention to the constant review and development of the curricula.

3.6 Ensuring that the curricula help social work students to develop skills of critical thinking and scholarly attitudes of reasoning, openness to new experiences and paradigms, and commitment to life-long learning.

3.7 Field education should be sufficient in duration and complexity of tasks and learning opportunities to ensure that students are prepared for professional practice.

3.8 Planned co-ordination and links between the school and the agency/field placement setting

3.9 Provision of orientation for fieldwork supervisors or instructors.

3.10 Appointment of field supervisors or instructors who are qualified and experienced, as determined by the development status of the social work profession in any given country, and provision of orientation for fieldwork supervisors or instructors.

3.11 Provision for the inclusion and participation of field instructors in curriculum development.

3.12 A partnership between the educational institution and the agency (where applicable) and service users in decision-making regarding field education and the evaluation of student's fieldwork performance.

3.13 Making available, to fieldwork instructors or supervisors, a field instruction manual that details its fieldwork standards, procedures, assessment standards/criteria and expectations.

3.14 Ensuring that adequate and appropriate resources, to meet the needs of the fieldwork component of the programme, are made available.

#### **4. Standards with regard to core curricula**

In respect core curricula, schools should aspire toward the following:

4.1 An identification of and selection for inclusion in the programme curricula, as determined by local, national and/or regional/international needs and priorities.

4.2 Notwithstanding the provision of 4.1 there are certain core curricula that may be seen to be universally applicable. Thus the school should ensure that social work students, by the end of their first Social Work professional qualification, have had exposure to the following core curricula which are organised into four conceptual components:

##### **4.1.1 Domain of the Social Work Profession**

- A critical understanding of how socio-structural inadequacies, discrimination, oppression, and social, political and economic injustices impact human functioning and development at all levels, including the global.
- Knowledge of human behaviour and development and of the social environment, with particular emphasis on the person-in-environment transaction, life-span development and the interaction among biological, psychological, socio- structural, economic, political, cultural and spiritual factors in shaping human development and behaviour.
- Knowledge of how traditions, culture, beliefs, religions and customs influence human functioning and development at all levels, including how these might constitute resources and/or obstacles to growth and development.
- A critical understanding of social work's origins and purposes.
- Understanding of country specific social work origins and development.
- Sufficient knowledge of related occupations and professions to facilitate interprofessional collaboration and teamwork.

- Knowledge of social welfare policies (or lack thereof), services and laws at local, national and/or regional/international levels, and the roles of social work in policy planning, implementation, evaluation and in social change processes.
- A critical understanding of how social stability, harmony, mutual respect and collective solidarity impact human functioning and development at all levels, including the global, insofar as that stability, harmony and solidarity are not used to maintain a status quo with regard to infringement of human rights.

#### 4.2.2 Domain of the Social Work Professional:

- The development of the critically self-reflective practitioner, who is able to practice within the value perspective of the social work profession, and shares responsibility with the employer for their well being and professional development, including the avoidance of 'burn-out'.
- The recognition of the relationship between personal life experiences and personal value systems and social work practice.
- The appraisal of national, regional and/or international social work codes of ethics and their applicability to context specific realities.
- Preparation of social workers within a holistic framework, with skills to enable practice in a range of contexts with diverse ethnic, cultural, 'racial'<sup>7</sup> and gender groups, and other forms of diversities.
- The development of the social worker who is able to conceptualise social work wisdom derived from different cultures, traditions and customs in various ethnic groups, insofar that culture, tradition, custom and ethnicity are not used to violate human rights.
- The development of the social worker who is able to deal with the complexities, subtleties, multi-dimensional, ethical, legal and dialogical aspects of power.

#### 4.2.3 Methods of Social Work Practice:

- Sufficient practice skills in, and knowledge of, assessment, relationship building and helping processes to achieve the identified goals of the programme for the purposes of social support, and developmental, protective, preventive and/or therapeutic intervention – depending on the particular focus of the programme or professional practice orientation.
- The application of social work values, ethical principles, knowledge and skills to confront inequality, and social, political and economic injustices.
- Knowledge of social work research and skills in the use of research methods, including ethical use of relevant research paradigms, and critical appreciation of the use of research and different sources of knowledge<sup>9</sup> about social work practice.
- The application of social work values, ethical principles, knowledge and skills to promote care, mutual respect and mutual responsibility amongst members of a society.

\*Supervised fieldwork education, with due consideration to the provisions of Item 3 above.

#### 4.2.4 Paradigm of the Social Work Profession:

- Of particular current salience to professional social work education, training and practice are the following epistemological paradigms (which are not mutually exclusive), that should inform the core curricula:
- An acknowledgement and recognition of the dignity, worth and the uniqueness of all human beings.
- Recognition of the interconnectedness that exists within and across all systems at micro, mezzo and macro levels.
- An emphasis on the importance of advocacy and changes in socio-structural, political and economic conditions that disempower, marginalise and exclude people.
- A focus on capacity-building and empowerment of individuals, families, groups, organisations and communities through a human-centred developmental approach.
- Knowledge about and respect for the rights of service users.
- Problem-solving and anticipatory socialisation through an understanding of the normative developmental life cycle, and expected life tasks and crises in relation to age-related influences, with due consideration to socio-cultural expectations.
- The assumption, identification and recognition of strengths and potential of all human beings.
- An appreciation and respect for diversity in relation to 'race', culture, religion, ethnicity, linguistic origin, gender, sexual orientation and differential abilities.

## **5. Standards with regard to professional staff**

With regard to professional staff, schools should aspire towards:

5.1 The provision of professional staff, adequate in number and range of expertise, who have appropriate qualifications as determined by the development status of the social work profession in any given country. As far as possible a Masters level qualification in social work, or a related discipline (in countries where social work is an emerging discipline), should be required.

5.2 The provision of opportunities for staff participation in the development of its core purpose or mission, in the formulation of the objectives and expected outcomes of the programme, and in any other initiative that the school might be involved in.

5.3 Provision for the continuing professional development of its staff, particularly in areas of emerging knowledge.

5.4 A clear statement, where possible, of its equity-based policies or preferences, with regard to considerations of gender, ethnicity, 'race' or any other form of diversity in its recruitment and appointment of staff.

5.5 Sensitivity to languages relevant to the practice of social work in that context.

5.6 In its allocation of teaching, fieldwork instruction, supervision and administrative workloads, making provision for research and publications.

5.7 Making provision for professional staff, as far as is reasonable and possible, to be involved in the formulation, analysis and the evaluation of the impact of social policies, and in community outreach initiatives.

## **6. Standards with regard to social work students**

In respect of social work students, schools should endeavor to reach the following:

6.1 Clear articulation of its admission criteria and procedures.

6.2 Student recruitment, admission and retention policies that reflect the demographic profile of the locality that the institution is based in with active involvement of practitioners and service users in relevant processes. Due recognition should be given to minority groups<sup>10</sup> that are under-represented and/or under-served. Relevant criminal convictions, involving abuse of others or human rights violations, must be taken into account given the primary responsibility of protecting and empowering service users.

6.3 Provision for student advising that is directed toward student orientation, assessment of the student's aptitude and motivation for a career in social work, regular evaluation of the student's performance and guidance in the selection of courses/modules.

6.4 Ensuring high quality of the educational programme whatever the mode of delivery. In the case of distance, mixed-mode, decentralised and/or internet- based teaching, mechanisms for locally-based instruction and supervision should be put in place, especially with regard to the fieldwork component of the programme.

6.5 Explicit criteria for the evaluation of student's academic and fieldwork performance.

6.6 Non-discrimination against any student on the basis of 'race', colour, culture, ethnicity, linguistic origin, religion, political orientation, gender, sexual orientation, age, marital status, physical status and socio-economic status.

6.7 Grievance and appeals procedures which are accessible, clearly explained to all students and operated without prejudice to the assessment of students.

## **7. Standards with regard to structure, administration, governance and resources**

With regard to structure, administration, governance and resources, the school and/or the educational institution should aspire towards the following:

7.1 Social work programmes are implemented through a distinct unit known as a Faculty, School, Department, Centre or Division, which has a clear identity within the educational institution.

7.2 The school has a designated Head or Director who has demonstrated administrative, scholarly and professional competence, preferably in the profession of social work.

7.3 The Head or Director has primary responsibility for the co-ordination and professional leadership of the school, with sufficient time and resources to fulfil these responsibilities.

7.4 The school's budgetary allocation is sufficient to achieve its core purpose or mission and the programme objectives.

7.5 The budgetary allocation is stable enough to ensure programme planning and sustainability.

7.6 There are adequate physical facilities, including classroom space, offices for professional and administrative staff and space for student, faculty and field- liaison meetings, and the equipment necessary for the achievement of the school's core purpose or mission and the programme objectives.

7.7 Library and, where possible, internet resources, necessary to achieve the programme objectives, are made available.

7.8 The necessary clerical and administrative staff are made available for the achievement of the programme objectives.

7.9 Where the school offers distance, mixed-mode, decentralised and/or internet- based education there is provision of adequate infrastructure, including classroom space, computers, texts, audio-visual equipment, community resources for fieldwork education, and on-site instruction and supervision to facilitate the achievement of its core purpose or mission, programme objectives and expected outcomes.

7.10 The school plays a key role with regard to the recruitment, appointment and promotion of staff.

7.11 The school strives toward gender equity in its recruitment, appointment, promotion and tenure policies and practices.

7.12 In its recruitment, appointment, promotion and tenure principles and procedures, the school reflects the diversities of the population that it interacts with and serves.

7.13 The decision-making processes of the school reflect participatory principles and procedures.

7.14 The school promotes the development of a cooperative, supportive and productive working environment to facilitate the achievement of programme objectives.

7.15 The school develops and maintains linkages within the institution, with external organisations, and with service users relevant to its core purpose or mission and its objectives.

## **8. Standards with regard to cultural and ethnic diversity and gender inclusiveness**

With regard to cultural and ethnic diversity schools should aspire towards the following:

8.1 Making concerted and continuous efforts to ensure the enrichment of the educational experience by reflecting cultural and ethnic diversity, and gender analysis in its programme.

8.2 Ensuring that the programme, either through mainstreaming into all courses/modules and/or through a separate course/module, has clearly articulated objectives in respect of cultural and ethnic diversity, and gender analysis.

8.3 Indicating that issues regarding gender analysis and cultural and ethnic diversity, are represented in the fieldwork component of the programme.

8.4 Ensuring that social work students are provided with opportunities to develop self-awareness regarding their personal and cultural values, beliefs, traditions and biases and how these might influence the ability to develop relationships with people, and to work with diverse population groups.

8.5 Promoting sensitivity to, and increasing knowledge about, cultural and ethnic diversity, and gender analysis.

8.6 Minimising group stereotypes and prejudices<sup>11</sup> and ensuring that racist behaviours, policies and structures are not reproduced through social work practice.

8.7 Ensuring that social work students are able to form relationships with, and treat all persons with respect and dignity irrespective of such persons' cultural and ethnic beliefs and orientations.

8.8 Ensuring that social work students are schooled in a basic human rights approach, as reflected in international instruments such as the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the UN Vienna Declaration (1993).<sup>12</sup>

8.9 Ensuring that the programme makes provision for social work students to know themselves both as individuals and as members of collective socio-cultural groups in terms of strengths and areas for further development.

## **9. Standards with regard to values and ethical codes of conduct of the social work profession**

In view of the recognition that social work values, ethics and principles are the core components of the profession, schools should consistently aspire towards:

9.1 Focused and meticulous attention to this aspect of the programme in curricula design and implementation.

9.2 Clearly articulated objectives with regard to social work values, principles and ethical conduct.

9.3 Registration of professional staff and social work students (insofar as social work students develop working relationships with people via fieldwork placements) with national and/or

regional regulatory (whether statutory or non-statutory) bodies, with defined codes of ethics.<sup>13</sup> Members of such bodies are generally bound to the provisions of those codes.

9.4 Ensuring that every social work student involved in fieldwork education, and every professional staff member, is aware of the boundaries of professional practice and what might constitute unprofessional conduct in terms of the code of ethics. Where students violate the code of ethics, programme staff may take necessary and acceptable remedial and/or initial disciplinary measures, or counsel the student out of the programme.

9.5 Taking appropriate action in relation to those social work students and professional staff who fail to comply with the code of ethics, either through an established regulatory social work body, established procedures of the educational institution, and/or through legal mechanisms.

9.6 Ensuring that regulatory social work bodies are broadly representative of the social work profession, including, where applicable, social workers from both the public and private sector, and of the community that it serves, including the direct participation of service users.

9.7 Upholding, as far as is reasonable and possible, the principles of restorative rather than retributive justice<sup>14</sup> in disciplining either social work students or professional staff who violate the code of ethics.

## **Appendix A: the process of and underlying approach to developing global standards for the education and training of the social work profession**

The Global Minimum Qualifying Standards<sup>15</sup> Committee was formally established as a joint initiative of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) at the joint IASSW/IFSW Conference in Montreal, Canada in July 2000 (see Appendix C for a list of the Committee members). This discussion document was put together with the input of various Committee members, a review of relevant documents, e-mail consultations, and personal consultations with colleagues wherever possible

On the whole there was a favourable response to IASSW and IFSW developing a standards setting document that elucidates what social work represents on a global level. This document that identifies certain universals, may be used as a guideline to develop national standards with regard to social work education and training. Such a document should reflect some consensus around key issues, roles and purposes of social work. However, given the profession's historically fragmented strands; the contemporary debates around social work's intra-professional identity; its identity vis-à-vis other categories of personnel in the welfare sector such as development workers, child care workers, probation officers, community workers and youth workers (where such categories of personnel are differentiated from social work); and the enormous diversities across nations and regions, there was some scepticism about the possibility of identifying any such 'universal'. The suggestion was that such a document must be sufficiently flexible to be applicable to any context. Such flexibility should allow for

interpretations of locally specific social work education and practice, and take into account each country's or region's socio-political, cultural, economic and historical contexts while adhering to international standards.

The main reasons for the development of global standards were to (stated in no particular order of priority):

- Protect the 'consumers', 'clients' or 'service users' of social work services;
- Take account of the impact of globalisation on social work curricula and social work practice;
- Facilitate articulation across universities on a global level;
- Facilitate the movement of social workers from one country to another;
- Draw a distinction between social workers and non-social workers;
- Benchmark national standards against international standards;
- Facilitate partnerships and international student and staff exchange programmes;
- Enable IASSW and IFSW, in developing such guidelines, to play a facilitative role in helping those faculties, centres, departments or schools of social work that lack resources to meet such guidelines.
- Give practical expression to the aim of IASSW as some saw the formulation of international guidelines for social work education and training to be the core business of IASSW.

Clearly not all of the above expressed purposes are feasible, e.g. it is not feasible via such an endeavour to draw a clear distinction between social workers and non-social workers, neither might we be able to realise the objective of protecting 'clients' through the standards. Facilitating the movement of social workers from one country to another is a contentious issue in view of the direct recruitment of social workers from some countries to others, e.g. from South Africa and the Caribbean to the United Kingdom to the disadvantage of South Africa and the Caribbean. However, from an ethical point of view the migration of those social workers that wish to practice in another country should be enabled and not blocked. The retention of social work skills within countries is dependent on such factors as service conditions, salaries and validation of the profession which need to be addressed on national levels.

A few participants expressed the view that the document should go further to include more practical guidelines. These practical guidelines should include: a multi-tiered classification for the basic qualification, e.g. with a range from the number of years of basic schooling, plus at least one year of full time social work education to a degree with 3 or 4 years of social work education (the minimum period of practical training should be specified in such a classification); the acknowledgement and recognition of prior learning experiences; and the identification of core competencies, knowledge and skills as applied to context-specific realities. A very small minority went as far.