

## PRELIMINARY REPORT

### INTRODUCTION

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Lancaster University's Social Work Visioning Project aims to bring together representatives from the 'whole social work system', in order to vision and plan for the future of the profession. Through this project, those with a stake in social work; 'the stakeholders' will have opportunities to share opinions, identify commonalities and develop a vision for social work in the region.

In order to broaden the scope of the project, a series of half day practitioner visioning workshops were held throughout the region bringing together practitioners to start to vision, identify opportunities and challenges and actions. These were held at Blackburn, Preston, Penrith, Barrow in Furness and Lancaster and brought together over 80 practitioners.



*The closing session at the Visioning Day: March 29<sup>th</sup>*

Our hope is that through this process, together, we and other stakeholders in the social work system will have the space to think through our visions and take action.

### APPROACH

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The visioning project followed a number of stages:

1. Planning meetings with Lancaster University's Department of Applied Social Sciences: Social Work Group and community engagement specialist Peter Bryant.
2. A series of meetings with University staff and social work strategic leads across the region in order to gain their commitment for the project.

3. A series of consultations with service users and carers groups and forums in the region<sup>1</sup>

Representatives from each of the practitioner workshops were invited to the Visioning event at the University on March 29<sup>th</sup>. Eighty six people attended the event from across the region from the following regional stakeholder groups:

- Service user and carer representatives
- Practitioners
- Lancaster University Department of Applied Social Science staff
- Work force leads

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<sup>1</sup> Further information on the practitioner workshops and service and carer user groups can be found at [http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/projects/future\\_for\\_socialwork/](http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/projects/future_for_socialwork/)

- Lancaster University Social work students
- Strategic leads from voluntary and independent sector organisations
- Strategic leads from Local Authority Children's and Adults Social Care Directorates

Participants spent the day working through a number of activities working both within their own stakeholder and mixed stakeholder groups, enabling them to hear from a diversity of opinions. Activities included;

1. Visioning
2. An examination of the opportunities and challenges affecting social work
3. An exploration of what action needs to be taken.

The visioning day was designed and led by Peter Bryant (facilitator) in conjunction with Claire Mason and Corinne May-Chahal (Lancaster University) and facilitated by a team of six facilitators from CETAD <http://cetad.lancs.ac.uk/> and one from Shared Future <http://www.sharedfuturecic.org.uk/>

## VISIONING

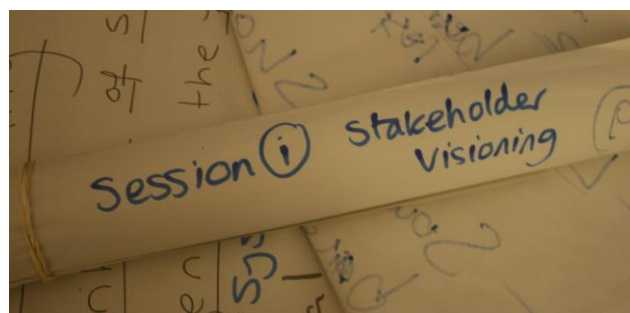
Participants worked in stakeholder groups to answer the following question: *What is the meaningful contribution social work can make to citizens in the future?*

### Practitioners (Group 1)

1. To empower
2. To help people realise their potential
3. To help develop a greater sense of community
4. To be a voice to inform policy
5. To help enable citizens participation in decision making
6. To challenge inequality and give a voice to excluded people
7. To bring different parts of society together

### Voluntary and independent sector strategic leads

1. To build resilience
2. To be enablers
3. To challenge prejudice
4. To work with service users to co-produce services
5. Shaping legislation and being a voice for the service user
6. Being an honest broker
7. Empowering the individual



### Workforce leads

1. Safeguarding
2. Giving people a voice
3. Enabling people to take responsibility for themselves
4. Providing skills knowledge and resources to help people help themselves
5. Enabling independence and enabling potential
6. Being proactive to promote and support responsibility across society.

### Lancaster University students

1. Enablers
2. Informers that help to clarify rights within service user groups
3. Bringing a social perspective and understanding of the person
4. Advocate and broker
5. Challenge and inform policy

### **Lancaster University staff**

1. Social justice
2. Social inclusion

### **Service users and carers**

1. Available when needed rather than part of life
2. Help people reach their full potential
3. Act as signposts
4. Moral compass to help achieve universal values of society
5. Advocates of clients needs
6. Provides support but does not take over, knows when to withdraw
7. Stability + continuity + time = good relationship and good communication = results, then social worker withdraws = closure.

### **Local authority strategic leads**

1. Help service users make things better for themselves and improve their quality of life
2. Improve individual and population outcomes
3. Empowerment
4. Keep people safe
5. Provide an individual and community focus
6. Enable
7. Coordinate

### **Practitioners (Group 2)**

1. Help communities come together
2. Empower the individual and the community
3. Understand the person in their environment
4. Challenge oppression
5. Profession that is seen as part of the solution
6. Being a lynch pin for others

Following this, participants moved into mixed stakeholder groups where they tried to identify some of the things that their visions had in common.

### **Group 1**

1. Enablers
2. Promoting social justice and social inclusion
3. Informing and influencing government policy and public perception
4. Forming relationships to empower

### **Group 2**

1. Facilitating positive change
2. Working with honest relationships
3. Forming relationships with communities and individuals

### **Group 3**

1. Proactive enablers / empowerment
2. Advocating and standing alongside
3. Being creative and innovative and challenging the status quo
4. Enabling people to take positive risks

### **Group 4**

1. Enabling and empowering partnerships with clients
2. To safeguard people and to enable society to take responsibility
3. Broad prevention not fire fighting
4. Coordinators

### **Group 5**

1. Improving outcomes for service users
2. Social workers as part of communities
3. Supporting others to take on their responsibility
4. Lobbyists for service users rights
5. Protectors of the vulnerable
6. Enablers

## Group 6

1. Work for social justice and challenge oppression
2. To inform policy and legislation
3. To empower the service user
4. To enable citizens to become and remain independent
5. Focus on collaboration and strengths not deficits
6. Promote the social model, challenge media stereotypes.

## OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES AFFECTING SOCIAL WORK

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Those taking part then returned to their stakeholder groups to discuss the current and future challenges and opportunities facing the social work profession. This was completed through a series of mind maps

Each group explored the opportunities and challenges and these were recorded upon their stakeholder mind map. Participants were then asked to consider which opportunities / challenges they felt were the most important and to prioritise (by voting with sticky dots).



Some of the key opportunities and challenges that stakeholders talked through and prioritised were as follows:

### Service user and carer representatives

- The opportunity to reclaim and redefine social work,
- The need for positive role models, champions and success stories to change perceptions and the image of social work.
- The lack of resources and funding
- The needs to have access to a wide range of training.

### Practitioners (Group 1)

- The challenge of getting a manageable case load,
- The need to celebrate our successes
- The challenge of changing the public perception
- The need for University courses to be practical, relevant and value based.
- The financial restrictions faced by services
- The lack of time available to reflect on their practice.



### Practitioners (Group 2)

- National government policy – lack of value for people in lower/middle classes
- Professionalization of profession
- Conflict of proceduralisation and professional autonomy
- Morale within social work workforce
- Strong voice through the College of Social Work

### **Lancaster University staff**

- The challenge of surviving and developing in a more commercially driven environment
- The impact of the global political and economic climate
- How to ensure consistency of quality in social work education.

### **Work force leads**

- The challenge of developing the workforce to meet the future social work challenges,
- The need to evidence the impact of practice and its outcomes,
- To work in partnerships
- The importance of service user involvement in service development.

### **Lancaster University social work students**

- Getting into a social work job
- The opportunity provided by The College of Social Work- to give a professional voice and represent social workers
- The need to change the negative perception of social work.
- The danger of crisis intervention rather than prevention
- The challenge of having 'no time for reflection and training.

### **Voluntary and independent sector strategic leads**

- Adapting to personal budgets
- Co-production of policy and practice via engagement between practitioner, customers/clients and policy makers and other groups
- Enabling independence and choice and control for customers,
- Time and work load
- The challenges of building relationships with people.

### **Strategic leads**

- Lack of understanding and influence
- (Need for) political ownership at a national and local level.
- Integration of health and social care.

- The role of the College of Social Work in giving one voice, and promoting professionalism.
- Cultural defensiveness i.e. a tendency for 'victim mode'
- More time with children and families and less time on the computer
- The need to keep abreast of practice when things change so quickly.

### **WHAT ACTION NEEDS TO BE TAKEN TO MOVE TOWARDS REALISING OUR VISIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK?**

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Participants worked in mixed stakeholder groups to answer the question '*What action needs to be taken to move towards realising our visions for social work?*' Each group was then asked to prioritise the actions i.e. '*Which of these issues would you like to talk about and plan action for this afternoon?*'

Facilitators themed the prioritised actions from all the groups, to give a final list of actions and issues for further discussion:

- 1. Changing the perceptions/ improve the image of social work**
- 2. Embedding reflective practice & learning in social work organisations**
- 3. Community based practice & prevention**
- 4. Improving professionalism**
- 5. Preparing students for practice (education & placements, qualifying level)**
- 6. Recruiting & keeping social work staff**
- 7. Influencing politics and national government policy**
- 8. Putting service user at the centre – hearing service user's voices**
- 9. Social work education, developing Continued Professional Development**

The following section gives examples of some of the actions that were generated by these disuse groups.

## Changing perceptions/ improving the image of social work

- a) Decide what we want the perception to be (skills and attitudes)
- b) Challenge and schmooze the media
- c) Research and promote success stories (as social worker and as service users), e.g. write a children's story where a social worker is the hero
- d) Develop professional voice for social work



## Embedding reflective practice & learning in social work organisations

- a) A supervision strategy to encompass critical reflective practice (including training, modelling good practice).
- b) Develop a nurturing and supportive but challenging culture
- c) Make space / protected time to think and reflect.
- d) Link with the University to encourage reflective learning.

## Community based practice & prevention

- a) Social workers to work more with local communities – to develop knowledge, share information etc by getting to know the neighbourhood better 'go to groups, walk the estate'.
- b) More imaginative / creative practice e.g. invest more in 'men's work',
- c) New students to challenge practice and explore new approaches ('explore

how I can have a positive influence when faced with custom and practice?')

## Improving professionalism

- a) Re-establish / re-visit codes of conduct (e.g. produce a discussion pack for social care staff to understand what standards means day to day).

- b) Promote what social work is good at / be less self effacing
- c) More partnerships between academics and practitioners (e.g. a regional Munro network)
- d) Use Appreciative Inquiry more – strengths based approach with practitioners

## Preparing students for practice (education & placements, qualifying level)

- a) Improvements in training for practice educators
- b) Advisory group for University + students + alumni with service user and carer involvement
- c) Review timing and supply of placements

## Recruiting & keeping staff

- a) Improving employability of students (Students feeling more prepared for

- job application process, better informed of where jobs are advertised, availability of volunteer opportunities etc)
- b) Consider how to increase numbers of Practice Educators and placements
  - c) Continued training opportunities (CPD linked to Professional Capabilities Framework)
  - d) 'We need experts' (need opportunities to link into Social Work research and to better disseminate research).



*One of the action planning groups*

Social work must influence politics and national government policy

- a) Improve connections between organisations that provide social work and universities (e.g. University to investigate idea of bringing together Advanced Practitioners to investigate more joint working including joint posts)
- b) Social workers need to understand the local political arena and elected members need to understand social work (e.g. invite elected members in to speak to practitioners)
- c) gather evidence to influence policy – move away from target driven research and show what's working

Put service user at the centre – hear service user's voices

- a) Active listening built into work plans (More partnership involvement in designing work plans)
- b) Using service users as a resource (Service users to make themselves available to develop and deliver training and to be valued in this role).
- c) Academic research with partners (develop a practitioner research group)
- d) Service users feel they can challenge the profession (Campaign to the social work ombudsman)

Social work education, developing Continued Professional Development

- a) University and employers consider how they can use practitioners within training / education (e.g. practitioners allowed to take days to teach on courses and in exchange University provides free places on CPD courses)
- b) Engaging service users in design and delivery and assessment of education, CPD, training etc. CPD from Higher Education Institutions to support practitioners to undertake research
- c) keep link with HEI as a newly qualified SW.

Where possible, participants were asked to identify one or more personal action steps which they wrote on postcards. These will be posted to them after the Easter break as a reminder of the commitment they have made.



*Some of the action step postcards completed by participants*

A full report from the project will be available at a later date from

[http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/projects/future\\_for\\_socialwork/](http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/projects/future_for_socialwork/)

Film of the event can be seen on the Policy Review TV website

<http://www.policyreview.tv/video/707/5287>