In The Year 2025 – Looking Backwards At The Future of Social Work Education

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David McNabb & Catherine Hughes
Department of Social Practice, Unitec, Auckland
I HAVE SEEN THE FUTURE
GO BACK!
Social Work Education:
• Degrees: 4 year standard for non university, university strengthened Masters level
• Curriculum: online, sharing amongst providers
• Research and publications: grown
• Social work sector: collaboration
• Educators: organised, political voice..
• Students: diverse..
It’s 2025...

Social work education...
- SWRB
- Employers
- Unions and consumers
- Government: ministers and agencies – TEC

How did we get there?

What could have gone wrong?
Avalanche!
An Avalanche is Coming

An Avalanche is Coming: Higher education and the revolution ahead (UK)
Michael Barber, Katelyn Donnelly, Saad Rizvi, March 2013
• Based on quote from Norman Davies about education: ‘Historical change is like an avalanche. The starting point is a snow-covered mountainside that looks solid. All changes take place under the surface and are rather invisible. But something is coming. What is impossible is to say when’ (P.7)
• Developments in education policy and social work policy in Aotearoa, Australia, UK.
How did we get there?

- Globalisation – working with the diversity of students, placements, partnering with overseas providers
- Technology – making the most of e-learning and online resources for efficiency and breadth of learning
- Economy – becoming more efficient, less government money
- Students – higher expectations met with better use of relationship management and peer work
- Government – developed a sector wide relationship with government; cross sector plan with a workforce development strategy and development funding (e.g. mental health sector)
- Accessibility – equity provisions for disadvantaged students; targeting our student cohort to reflect society and the workforce we need (Pearce et al)
How did we get there?...

• Society – better communication about value of social work, e.g. social work in schools development
• Social justice – education as a public good and a means to transform society; social work education as a means to achieve this goal
• Professional development – clear role for social work education in lifelong professional learning
• Degrees – universities strengthen MSW applied programmes with non universities running 4 year undergraduate programmes
• Providers – the diversity of providers allowing a wide range of students to access education; collaboration incl. large and small..
• Educators – workforce development planning to ensure a mix of staff that reflect the student and clientele makeup: practice base, higher qualifications, teaching qualifications, leadership, profession and community engagement
How did we get there?...

• Employment – high graduate employment through responsive curriculum, quality fieldwork, marketing of profession, collaboration with government on social work role
• Registration – mandatory registration strengthening first professional qualification requirement and CPD development
• Unbundling education – more flexible teaching, research, assessment, qualification awarding, CPD options
• Teaching and learning – co creative process, good use of e-learning, digital resources, student peer learning..
• Tiriti o Waitangi, Tangata Whenua, Pasifika, diverse populations – intercultural practice (SWRB and ANZASW comps) – student success targets from TEC
How did we get there?...

• Research – research informed curriculum, active academy and practitioners, knowledge production, promote profession and societal engagement/activism
• Fieldwork – student hubs
• First year of practice – UK model, internship in mental health model based on nursing
• Community of practice – seamless move from student, graduate, maturing practitioner, leader, cross sector, CPD, research, academics
• International – strong international social work bodies IFSW, IASSW, ICSW – global agenda, definition, ethics, standards, promotion, advocacy, interchange
Future nightmare..

What if we have a worse case scenario?

- Programmes fold as economically unable to continue and quality diminishes
- Loose diverse range of students as poorer students can’t afford study
- Drop in student numbers as social work seen as an uneconomic career with low salaries meaning longer term debt repayment, jobs dry up
- Poorer quality graduates as programmes can’t find business model to support quality teaching and research
- Fragmented sector with limited collaboration, ‘picked off’ by competitor programmes, professions and policies
Future nightmare.

- Drop in post qualifying programmes and CPD options
- Crisis in fieldwork as agencies manage their own economic and quality issues
- Economic depression and government cut backs in funding social work and education
- The whole profession suffers and the social work mission to promote human welfare is compromised
Conclusion

We have good prospects for a vibrant social work education sector in the future if we:

• Collaborate within social work education
• Work well across the social work sector and beyond to key stakeholders
• Keep at the front edge of challenges within the education sector
• Promote the contribution of the profession to funders and wider society
• Ensure quality practice, life long learning, and a strong community of practice