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Christine Cocker

To cite this article: Christine Cocker (2023) Social Work Teaching Partnerships: Changing Landscapes in Social Work Education, Practice, 35:1, 1-4, DOI: [10.1080/09503153.2022.2139367](https://doi.org/10.1080/09503153.2022.2139367)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09503153.2022.2139367>



Published online: 01 Nov 2022.



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Social Work Teaching Partnerships (SWTPs) were developed by central government (Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care) to transform the quality of education and experience received by social work students and practitioners in England. The principal aim of the programme was to, ‘formalise collaborative working to raise the quality of social work, by attracting high quality students into the profession and ensuring students and existing social workers have the necessary knowledge, skills and values to practice effectively - and to improve workforce planning and development to address retention and recruitment issues.’ (Interface Associates 2019, p4).

The programme, which began in 2015, now includes 113 local authorities, 54 higher education institutes (HEIs), and 32 private, voluntary and independent partners, which affects 70% of all HEIs offering social work education. Early findings reported positive stakeholder engagement with SWTPs. However, there has been relatively little else published in addition to the evaluation studies (Berry-Lound, Tate, and Greatbatch 2016; Interface Associates 2019, 2020). One notable exception is the paper by Baginsky, Manthorpe, and Hickman (2019). The purpose of this Special Issue is to showcase some of the work that has been done by Teaching Partnerships up and down the country to enable further discussions about the impact of SWTPs on social work education in England that are much broader in content than the Department for Education sponsored evaluation report.

Following a call for papers, I received a large number of abstracts from many different Teaching Partnerships. There were too many to include in this Special Issue, but they did show the richness of partnership working in social work education that Teaching Partnerships were keen to capture. In order to showcase as much work as possible, I made the decision to limit the word-count for the substantive articles I commissioned, and to commission a number of smaller articles that demonstrated specific knowledge and skills developed

by a number of Teaching Partnerships. In this regard this Special Issue acts as a record of activity of the work undertaken by Teaching Partnerships in relation to work with and between various stakeholders to improve social work education. I have used the work of as many different Teaching Partnerships as possible.

The aims of this themed issue of the Journal are to:

- Discuss the contribution and impact that the SWTP initiative has had for social work education and the profession generally;
- Provide examples of Teaching Partnership activities which have enhanced the provision of social work education, whether by service user involvement, practitioner involvement or placement/curriculum innovation or other means;
- Identify how novel stakeholder partnership activities have enhanced relationships within the regions;
- Comment on the sustainability and legacy of the SWTPs for key stakeholders and the profession.

Each of the articles included in the issue addresses at least one of these areas. We begin with Erin King and Patricia Cartney, who begin their article by setting the scene for Teaching Partnerships as the latest innovation in a long line of initiatives that have had an effect on social work education. The authors report on the results of an online survey examining partnership working from the perspective of universities in teaching partnerships in different parts of the country, exploring how the broader political and policy context influences the operationalisation of partnership working within SWTPs.

The second article continues with the theme of partnership working. Ruth Hamilton, Sharon Vincent, Suzie Cooper, Steph Downey, Tracey Horseman and Lynn Stoneley offer their perspective on partnership working within their local Teaching Partnership in the North East. They explore structural and operational relationships that have most affected partnership working and conclude that their work over the last four years has brought about enhanced relationships between higher education institutions and their stakeholders, although they also acknowledge the tensions and disparity between partners too, particularly given the competitive nature of Higher Education.

Turning to placements as a core part of a qualifying student's learning, the next two articles explore current practices. David Lane's research into Practice Learning in one specific Teaching Partnership area provides a snapshot of current demands, challenges and complexities of the realities of frontline practice, as perceived by the research participants through their respective roles. He recommends the need for a 'seamless integration of academic input and practice learning at every stage of the student's journey through social work qualifying programmes, ensuring academic input is informed by the principles of best practice and best practice is informed by relevant and up-to-date literature and research.'

The second article on the topic of placements, by Alma Repesa, Alison Rawlins, Sara-Eden Ludwell and Liz Maslen, discusses the development of practice education within their Teaching Partnership, by revising the placement quality assurance system used nationally (Quality Assurance in Practice Learning or QAPL). Their new Placement Learning System enabled a significant amount of data to be gathered about the quality of placements at key stages throughout a placement, not just at the end.

The final article in the first section by Gillian Buck, Nicola Whiteside, Andrea Newman, Helen Jones, Selwyn Stanley, Julie Feather and Wayne Millard examines the innovative way that one Teaching Partnership developed practitioner research over a three-year period. A total of 17 small-scale studies were funded over this time and the article reports on the processes used to fund and support these projects as well as the benefits and challenges of doing so.

Five shorter articles of around 1000 words each, make up the rest of the Special Issue. These pieces cover innovations in Teaching Partnerships.

Lucille Allain, Helen Hingley-Jones, Mary Hartog and Julie Haddock-Millar write about how their Teaching Partnership commissioned a MA/MBA Social Work Programme, to build leadership capacity in their region.

Carrying on the workforce development angle, Kate Leonard, Karl Mason, Jill Pearce and Cleve Jackson discuss the development of a work-based course to prepare members of the social care workforce for social work training. This was an area of need identified because of difficulties in recruiting social workers across those local authorities in this Teaching Partnership.

Iain Moody, Katherine Huby-Ayers and Sarah Taylor look at how to effectively prepare social work students for the realities of practice through a social work simulation experience. This was developed by both practitioners and academics and involves a separate simulation of practice for children and families and adults. These simulations run before the final placement and support skills days, the hope being that by helping students understand the different contexts of practice, it will lessen the anxiety of transition into the final placement.

Ruth Bastin and Marelize Joubert continue with the theme of 'skills days' and talk about how their Teaching Partnership used a part time secondment of a Practice Consultant to strengthen student teaching about report writing and court work.

Finally, LeeAnne Olivant and Eric Greenwood discuss the benefits of Lecturer Practitioners employed by their Teaching Partnership to bring together academic study and practice which are fundamental for the development of confident and competent social work practitioners. The use of such posts is not new. My own journey into academia started in this way over 20 years ago. Olivant and Greenwood succinctly outline the strengths of this role for students and the Teaching Partnership as well as cover the challenges for the Lecturer Practitioners working in two distinct organisations.

In summary, this collection of articles captures the benefits of SWTPs for Social Work Education in England in relation to a number of areas, including: workforce development and CPD opportunities; practice learning; curriculum development; partnership working; and research and scholarship. These innovations across the SWTP regions capture the best of what is possible with good partnership working. Issues around ongoing sustainability are important to unpick too, particularly given the increase in funding awarded to the Government-funded fast-track programmes, which has not been replicated in Teaching Partnerships. Arguably the SWTP networks cover a wider geographical area and involve many more partnerships than fast-track programmes, delivering value for money at a time where all public sector funding is being squeezed. This work should not be lost.

ORCID

Christine Cocker  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4188-2316>

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Dr Christine Cocker is a Professor and the Head of School of Social Work at the University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK. Email: christine.cocker@uea.ac.uk