

Interim Education Commission

June 2018

1. Context and rationale

The establishment of the interim Education Commission was announced in September 2017. The concept of the Commission was born out of many discussions between social work educators and the national associations of social work in the attempt to find solutions to a historic separation of the global profession when both IFSW and the schools of social work morphed from being working groups in 1928 to become independent bodies.

The overarching aim of the Education Commission is to create a single, vibrant and inclusive structure for the transfer of knowledge between social work education and practice where both are informed and learning from one another.

More specifically the objectives of our interim commission are to:

- Provide, within the structures of IFSW, a platform for all parties to work together at the national and global level, in accordance with the global principles, values and ethics as articulated in the Global Definition of Social Work.
- Agree on global minimum standards of social work curriculum and an internationally recognized policy framework.
- Develop a mechanism for IFSW endorsement of social work curricula who meet the global minimum standards and policy frameworks.
- extend support to social work programmes and educators when experiencing political or technocratic pressures to make “concessions” to the quality of education.
- Promote genuine participation of the people who use services.

The task of the interim commission is to present for approval to IFSW members at the next General Assembly in June 2018 a set of policies that determine the scope and function of the permanent commission.

2. Composition and membership

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3. The consultation

Since the announcement of the creation of the interim Education Commission, we have received overwhelmingly positive feedback from educators and practitioners across the world. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge, that some academics primarily affiliated to IASSW have expressed concerns about the long-term intentions of the commission.

The Co-commissioners has welcomed all meaningful feedback and has taken into consideration all different views in order inform its final report. With this in mind, we have initiated an extensive consultation and a participatory process encouraging dialogue with social work educators, representatives of people the use social services, the national associations of social work, employers and relevant government bodies. The consultation is still ongoing (See below).

The aim of the consultation is to establish agreement on minimum standards of social work education that support the development and capacity of training programmes, to co-create participatory models of education which ensure that curricula are consistent with the profession's global principles and definition. We also intend to explore the views of practitioners, academics, employers and service users on the scope and future activities of the Education Commission in order to ensure that the new structure will be vibrant, relevant and responsive to the complex needs and expectations of the global social work community.

The consultation has commenced with the launch of a survey addressing social work practitioners and academics globally. Once data from the survey are analysed, the second stage of our consultation will include focus groups and round tables with employers and service users who will be invited to share their views on the survey findings and the overall scope of the commission.

3.1 Preliminary findings.

The survey was launched electronically in November 2017 and remained open until February 2018. The response rate within this 3-month period has exceeded expectations (see below), making this process one of the most extensive consultations in the history of our profession and confirming the urgent need of all parties to engage with an all-encompassing discussion regarding the interrelation between theory and practice.

990 respondents shared their views electronically and an additional 38 participants (primarily from Japan) sent their responses separately.

Of the former group the geographic break-down was as follows:

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPO
Africa	67
Asia_Pacific	166
Europe	270
Latin America and Caribbean	129
North America	358
Total respondents	990

79% of the respondents identified as practitioners, 29.7% as academics, 6.45% as employers and 3.79% as service users. Almost three quarters of the respondents identified with more than one category (primarily as both practitioners and academics), a finding which is in line with the frontline experience of both practitioners and academics and highlights the dynamic nature of the profession. This finding also confirms the *de-facto* intersection of education and practice; a reality that has long been ignored at a global level and exacerbated through the historic separation in the leadership of the profession.

A relative majority (45.4%) of respondents described their “field placement” as the most effective aspect of their curriculum and one that prepared them best for practice. Also, 38.49% of respondents referred to social work theories and methods with a particular focus on social justice, law, human rights, ethics, sociological and psychological perspectives as the most important aspect of their curriculum. Nearly 1 in 5 participants commended the role of “teachers” as a source of inspiration and knowledge. It is important to mention that in the qualitative element of the survey (open ended questions) the definition of the term “teacher” was dynamic including both practice supervision and lectures. The dynamic nature of social work education and the need for a balance between academic qualifications and practice experience was also reflected in the follow up question in relation to lecturers’ qualifications. Agreement with the statement that “teaching staff should have practice experience” attracted a 3.76 score (in 0 to 5 scale). Respondents also agreed (3.47) that people who use social work services must be involved in the formation and delivery of social work education. The relatively moderate agreement with this statement may suggest that is still a lot that needs to be done with regards to inclusion of service users in education. Our analysis will also attempt to determine which regions have engaged more proactively with service user inclusion in education.

With regards to Social Work curricula, there has been an overwhelming agreement with the statement that “*Social work schools or departments should develop and teach curriculum that is consistent with the global definition, the statement of ethical principle and policies developed by the global profession*” (4.21 in a 0 to 5 score) and the need for social work

education to reflect the culture of social work practice through engaging in relevant social work practice activities (4.41).

The above findings are preliminary and refer to a relatively limited section of the survey. We are still in the process of data analysis and preparation for the next stages of our consultation (cross-checking findings, triangulation and inclusion of focus groups). However, even at this stage we could confidently highlight three main aspects that have emerged through the initial stage of the consultation:

1. There is an urgent need for a platform that facilitates discussion and transfer of knowledge between education and practice.
2. The “realities on the ground” suggest that the dichotomy between theory and practice is artificial and social work curricula need to ensure a meaningful and dynamic synthesis between both elements.
3. The global definition, the statement of ethical principle and policies developed by the global profession are the main pillars for the development of social work education.

4. Recommendations

On the basis of the preliminary findings of the consultation, the rationale behind the creation of the interim Commission, the strategic direction of IFSW and the need for a strong and united voice for the social work profession **we recommend that the General Meeting formalises the Education Commission.**

The main aims of the Education Commission should be those described in the section 1 of the current report (page1).

The functions of the Education Commission shall be carried out through its membership who will represent IFSW’s regions and include the *ad hoc* participation of other stakeholders such as IASSW and service users. The duration and nature of the *ad hoc* participation should be consistent with the constitution of IFSW and will be determined by consensus between the permanent members of the Commission and our external partners. Members are expected to engage proactively with the work of the Commission, to the best of their ability, and act in accordance with its founding aims, objectives and strategic direction.

Upon formalisation of the Commission the plan for its activities in the next two years shall include the following:

- Complete the ongoing consultation and disseminate findings.
- Develop policies that relate to the work of the Commission and are consistent with its aims and objectives.
- Should the consultation reveal the need for the development of a mechanism that ensures consistency of social work curricula with the minimum global standards then the Commission will work towards the creation of a relevant process and infrastructure (endorsement- membership).
- Lead on the process of agreeing minimum global standards for social work education

- Represent IFSW in national, regional and global fora of relevance to social work education.
- Monitor the expansion of social work education globally and identify qualitative and quantitative trends
- Intervene in support of social work education when there is political or technocratic pressures to make “concessions” to the quality of education.
- Contribute towards the facilitation of events, publications and research projects that advance the inclusive, practice-based, holistic and participatory nature of social work education.