

SYMPOSIUM: The role of the academy in the future of social work

**Martin Webber¹, Ian Shaw¹, Mark Hardy¹, Simon Cauvain¹, Aino Kääriäinen², Mirja Satka²,
Laura Yliruka²**

¹University of York, United Kingdom

²University of Helsinki & Heikki Waris Institute SOCCA, Finland

As an applied social science the discipline of social work straddles the realms of academy and agency. It is concerned with applying knowledge derived from the social sciences to the practical resolution of social problems. Its foundation in social theory and social research means that social work practice is inextricably connected to the academy from which it is derived. Or is it?

Social work graduates commonly talk of a gap between university social work programmes and the reality of social work practice. They argue that theory taught on programmes is not applicable in practice settings, for example. Their employers frequently complain that graduates are not ready for practice and that lecturers are out of touch, suggesting a separation of the academy and the agency in social work.

Non-academic routes into social work may be just around the corner. Non-governmental organisations provide the bulk of social care training in the UK and it is possible that they may develop social work degree programmes in an increasingly diverse higher education market. Whilst universities add value to social work education through the practice-relevant research conducted by faculty members, unless adequate opportunities are provided for students to immerse themselves in research or for faculty members to undertake research, social work could be removed from the academy entirely.

This symposium will explore these questions through four brief papers and a panel discussion responding to delegates' questions and comments. It will explore the place of social work teaching, practice and research within the academy (Ian Shaw); consider the effectiveness of nursing education (which switched from vocational to academic training) and probation education (which made the opposite switch) to understand the possible impact of transferring social work training to the agency (Mark Hardy); the value of the academy in the recruitment and retention of children and families' social workers in the UK (Simon Cauvain); and the role of practice research in bridging the divide between the agency and the academy in Finland (Aino Kääriäinen & Mirja Satka & Laura Yliruka).

Keywords: education, practice research, Academy.