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Invited Guest Foreword

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I am delighted to have the opportunity to give this foreword to a special edition of the Irish Journey of Applied Social Studies. The focus of the edition is on the CORU Standards of Proficiency (SoP).

There have been many commentaries over the years on what is now the well-established profession of social care. Notwithstanding the many and varied views, it is evident from the quality of the papers that you will read here, that social care, as a profession, continues to evolve with welcome scrutiny along the way by practitioners and teachers. Such scrutiny is important for the members of the profession itself, both to challenge assumptions and to explore possibilities. When this is grounded in well researched and evidence-based argument, it adds to the maturity of the discourse.

As professions move through the process of professionalisation and as services move through the process of regulation, there are inevitable tensions and challenges which arise. It is important that we explore those, not in a binary way that seeks to assert that regulation is all good or all bad, but, more importantly, how does a profession retain its core values whilst embracing what is now a feature of the majority of public services, regulatory compliance. Perhaps the meeting of the two or the resolution of any contradiction rests in the most important variable, the public interest. That might well be a journal edition all in its own right!

Majella Mulkeen in this edition seems to reflect that tension or contradiction, as she explores the concept of care as a relationship-based profession set in the emerging registration requirement for social care work, where entry to that register will require 80 proficiencies characterised in five domains. The interface throughout the article of care concepts, definitions, reference to other professions and the *scholarship of care* are all thought provoking.

Social Care educators, Jennifer McGarr and Margaret Fingleton, focus heavily on the domain of safety and quality and the SoP for achieving this through assessment, intervention and evaluation. These become increasingly important as social care work has expanded in its remit to most of the care groups across the personal social service spectrum. Assessment, intervention and evaluation are core competencies, but all of which have a different application dependant on the care group. In my experience, as a senior manager, in every part of the public health service and now in the Child & Family Agency, I can assure the reader that while the care group context is different, the challenges are quite common, particularly when it comes to assuring quality and safety. The integrative tool put forward by these two authors is an excellent example of ensuring the person receiving the service is at the centre, and the person providing the service is and requires to be a reflective practitioner. Theory, legislation, policy and many other factors are critical but for the receiver and the giver of care, the relationship and ability to reflect on it are primary.

The shaping of an emerging profession is John McHugh's offering. With many thoughts on the professionalisation journey, he anchors the importance of policy from the global to the local and perhaps how that is what drives the profession. He turns this back to the profession, and presumably the professionals within it, by inviting all to reflect on the need to engage with and

influence policy. He is clear, and correctly so, that such engagement should have as its focus, the lived experience of people who use social care services.

Understanding the standards in their five domains using a very specific approach is the work of Susan Flynn. The importance of history and culture, how knowledge is understood, the relationship between knowledge and social action and the need to question that which is taken for granted are all elements of a theoretical analysis of the five domains. The all good, all bad reference that I made earlier, comes through in this article.

Who cares for the carer? This is a question in so many different debates over so many years and applied to both informal (family) carers and professions far and wide. There is no doubt that societal and where appropriate employer roles are important in addressing this question. Aoife Johnson and Debbie Long take an approach to it in the context of the SoP, the need for 'self-care' and how that might be achieved and supported in experiential group work for students. Whatever the model chosen, there is no doubt, in my experience, that young and trainee professionals, particularly those in the personal social service space, are driven by energy, commitment and a desire to give care or make change. Rightly so, but often there is little space for them to countenance the personal demands and impact of their work on themselves. That can follow through right into the most experienced of workers. Regardless of what any system can do, self-care is important. These authors take a well-considered approach by starting with students of the profession, hopefully, creating a lasting impact throughout their subsequent careers.

In the 80 proficiencies, one in creative and recreational skills is there. When you consider the day to day interactions in social care, it appears so obvious. Denise Mc Giolla Ri points to a knowledge gap in this area and attempts to fill some of that gap. Prompting further research in this area is as important a theme of this article, as the actual subject matter itself. From art and play to advanced therapy, through various forms such as music and the influence of the internet, there is little doubt that there is much to be considered. The challenges and opportunities for social care teachers and practitioners appear endless.

If you want to engage more on the 80 proficiencies, then the book preview by Denise Lyons and Teresa Brown is a snapshot of what is up ahead. This is an e-book with a chapter on each proficiency (that's a lot of reading), but it has all the hallmarks of being compelling because of the style of capturing the voice of social care workers with their understanding and experience of the proficiencies now set out to be achieved. That e-book might well be the basis within which the proficiencies, when they are reviewed, and no doubt they will be in the future, will be considered against that lived experience of the worker.

The worker has so much to achieve in this new set of proficiencies and professional registration status. There is little doubt it is a big ask from a profession that previously has been subject to service regulation rather than individual profession regulation. However, with challenge comes opportunity. The real benefit is when we can ensure that the challenge is understood and the opportunity exploited in that all-important variable, the public interest.

About the Author

Bernard Gloster has over 30 years of experience in the public service and is a former social care worker. For the past two decades, he has been a senior manager in every operational part of the health service, including community healthcare and hospital services. In September 2019, he took up the post of Chief Executive Officer with the Child & Family Agency (Tusla)

In addition to his social care training, he holds an MBA and an MSc in management practice. This foreword is written in a personal capacity.