

Reframing des Sozialen

Reframing dell Sociale

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**Contribution by
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John Waterhouse spoke from his experience as a social worker, academic, and government adviser and inspector.

In response to the presentation of Professor Hans Uwe Otto he commented that, from the perspective of an inspector, the question of 'what works' was a legitimate one. It was also reasonable to ask how an intervention worked. The issue of efficiency should also not be ignored. The most expensive services were not always the best services. He said that, in Scotland, service standards had been set for a range of social work and social care services. These described what the users of services should expect and what the outcomes of services should be for them. The standards formed a baseline for inspections. The inspection process itself was orientated towards service improvement rather than service control.

Mr Waterhouse went on to describe reforms in social work education in Great Britain. Social work qualification was now linked to a BA. To qualify, students had to satisfy the examiners in the three areas of academic study, practice competence and professional awareness. In drawing up the degree programme a range of interests had been consulted including employers, professional associations, academics and, last but not least, the general public. The regulations for the degree state that 'academic learning must support practice'. Students must study Law, Human Growth and Development and Mental Health and Disability. Social Policy and Sociology are not compulsory although they are usually incorporated into the curriculum. Students must demonstrate six 'core competences' in their practice. These focus on assessment, planning, intervention and evaluation, supporting service users, managing risk and being accountable for what they do.

This competence based approach has been criticised for being too mechanistic and routinised, reducing practice skills to the lowest common denominator. Critics say

that it fails to stimulate creativity and that it does not challenge students or help them to use research in their work and to deal with complexity.

Mr Waterhouse said that his experience as an inspector had shown him that how a social worker worked with a client could make a real difference and that the ways in which social workers worked with clients was important. He said that he thought that education must find the right balance between theory and practice. There must be a 'third way' between a too academic approach to theory and a too routinised and unimaginative approach to practice.

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