EDITORIAL/REDAKSIONEEL

Social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments with the purpose to promote change in people as well as in society. The 1994 democratic elections in South Africa provided the opportunity to challenge the political processes of the past that had influenced and shaped all South African policies, including social welfare and social work. This challenge included the moulding of the social work profession and social work education, within a democratic, developing South Africa that upholds the principles of human rights and social justice. The extent of this challenge, however, can only be fully understood within the context of the historical development of social work education in South Africa.

In South Africa the 1920s and 1930s earmarked the beginnings of social work. The social work profession was born out of a concern for white poverty in the 1920s which culminated in an investigation by the Carnegie Commission of Enquiry into the 'poor white problem'. The results of this report were discussed at a National Conference on Social Work in 1936, which endorsed a social science-based, generic three-year training at university for social workers (McKendrick, 1998:101). At its inception, social work was primarily a white profession, which changed in 1959 through the Extension of University Education Act, when the National Party government created separate universities along racial lines (McKendrick, 1998:101). Many problems arose from this, not least of which were major differences in standards for social work education and disunity amongst social work practitioners that culminated in a deeply divided profession.

A study by Muller in the mid 1960s not only found that the existing professional education was generic in terms of the field of practice, but was driven by an emphasis on social casework, which prepared graduates for restorative and rehabilitative work with individuals and families. In addition, it was found that standards compared favourably with social work training in Britain and the Netherlands (McKendrick, 1998:101). This poses a serious question for the relevance of social work in South Africa.

In 1978 the Social and Associated Workers Act (Act 110 of 1978) was introduced and made provision for a statutory council to regulate the conduct, training and registration of social and associated workers. This statutory registration applied to social workers that had successfully completed the requirements for a Bachelor's degree or diploma including three (one-year) courses in social work and courses in either Sociology or Psychology. The Council had the power to regulate all aspects of the social work profession, and particularly to determine minimum standards for social work tuition and training (McKendrick, 1998:101). In 1987 the Council extended the period of the basic professional social work education to four years and from 1991 the four-year Bachelors degree or diploma was the only recognised basic social work qualification. A major hallmark for social work education was achieved when the Council changed the registration eligibility requirements in respect of a major and a sub-major in Psychology and Sociology to a major and a sub-major in any of the social or economic sciences.

Despite these efforts at transformation, nothing had changed with regard to the minimum standards and accreditation of social work education. Attempts to develop minimum standards for social work tuition failed because the Council chose the criteria for course accreditation as the eligibility variables formulated by the Council on Social Work Education in the USA which were inappropriate for a developing, industrialising and modernising South Africa (McKendrick, 1998:103). This author continues by stating that, although there were a number of universities that reoriented their courses towards non-discriminatory social work, social development and developmental practice, change could only be enacted through social policy. The White Paper for

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Social Welfare (1997) paved the way to bring social work in alignment with national and international goals and position social work within a democratic society.

With the adoption of the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997), social work practice and education had a platform for genuine transformation. On a professional level, the Interim Council for Social Work was established in 1996 to investigate the transformation of the social work profession and education. This transformation process culminated in 1999 with the South African Council for Social Service Professions and its mandate to seriously investigate the future direction of the social work profession and social work education.

Although the White Paper included strategic directions for transformation of social work education, it was not sufficient to effect changes in social work education. What was missing were guidelines to effect these changes within a higher tertiary milieu. For this purpose, Government introduced The National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) in February 2001 as the building stone for the comprehensive reform of South Africa's tertiary education system. The core drivers of the newly instituted education and training dispensation are the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), National Standards Bodies (NSBs) and Education and Training Quality Assurance (ETQA) bodies. The SAQA Act (1995) enables South Africa to develop its own integrated National Qualifications Framework (NQF), accompanied by a supporting quality assurance system. The SAQA Act (1995) and its Regulations (1998:17) also make provision for the establishment of Standards Generating Bodies (SGBs) to develop standards and qualifications. Consequently, an SGB for Social Work was established in order to generate standards and qualifications for Social Work, including Social Auxiliary Work.

Through the SGB, social work education embarked on the final transformation journey to meet the challenge of positioning social work education within a democratic, developing society. The SGB for Social Work developed 5 qualifications for submission to NSB 09 and SAQA for registration with the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). These included the FET Certificate in Social Auxiliary Work, the Bachelor of Social Work (B SW), Structured Master of Social Work (SM SW), Research Master of Social Work (RM SW), and Doctor of Social Work (Ph.D. (SW).

SAQA's mission is to ensure the development and implementation of an NQF that contributes to the full development of each learner and to the social and economic development of the nation at large. The qualifications were developed, therefore, within a developmental paradigm and in line with the national goals for social workers, namely to act as advocates and watch dogs for the poorest and most marginalised members of South African society; to help people identify the impact of social and economic oppression and exclusion; and to engage people in social action to alter socio-economic structures and to improve their life circumstances. However, social work plays a major role in addressing the needs of individuals, families, groups and communities which implies that therapy remains relevant in a developmental social work context. Thus, the written social work qualifications reflect a balance between therapeutic and developmental methodologies.

The submitted social work qualifications and standards are embedded in the overarching values that guide social work education and training, namely social justice and respect for all. The standards reflect minimum standards, which provide sufficient space for the unique focus of various training institutions' learning programmes. The social work qualifications recognise the link between welfare and economic development, a shift from a rehabilitative focus to a developmental one with an emphasis on a people-centred approach and are designed to enable learners to pursue further personal and professional development and to promote life-long learning. The wide spectrum of elective credits has also opened up the opportunity for social work students to be trained in a wide spectrum of South African contexts. The entry level to a basic

social work qualification can also now be accessed through a certificate in social auxiliary work as opposed to purely a matriculation certificate.

Not only were the Social Work qualifications the first whole qualifications submitted to NSB 09 and SAQA, but Social Work was also the first of the health and social service professions in South Africa to submit its qualifications. The Social Work profession has paved the way for other professions to submit their qualifications for registration on the NQF. By being proactive in registering Social Work qualifications timeously with the NQF, providers will have ample time to benchmark their current qualifications against the outcomes of the social work qualifications and then redesign their programmes and channel them through the processes for registration at SAQA by June 2006.

Although the registration of Social Work qualifications on the NQF is required by SAQA, it primarily signifies a unique achievement by the social work profession. It is an historic event for Social Work in South Africa that standardised qualifications are in place that meet the demands of a democratic South African society.

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