

The Social Service Professions and Occupations Bill and the Social Service Professions Policy

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Since the start of 2010 there have been two significant developments in the process of drafting the Social Services Professions and Occupations Bill. Firstly, the Department of Social Development has announced that it will write a Social Service Professions Policy this year and secondly that the work on the Bill will be postponed until the policy is complete.

Development Of The Social Service Professions Policy

The national Department of Social Development and the Council published an advert calling for an appointment of a service provider to develop the Social Service Professions Policy on behalf of the Department and the Council. The Constitution obliges the government to take steps to consult the public whenever it is drafting policy: Section 195 (1) (e) states "People's needs must be responded to, and the public must be encouraged to participate in policy-making." Recognising that members of the Social Service Practitioners Advocacy Network (SSPAN) are deeply affected by this policy and have an interest in its development; members of the SSPAN Steering Committee wrote to the Department of Social Development in September 2009 to call for public consultation on this important policy.

The terms of reference for the service provider were published on the SACSSP's website and they included:

3.1 Review the following:

- *The current Social Service Professions Act, 110 of 1978, as amended, and identify areas that require policy changes.*

- *Documents that guided the process of the review of the Act and make a summary thereof.*
- *The Social Service Professions Bill to ensure that identified challenges/shortcomings are covered.*

3.2 Develop a Policy on the Social Service Professions and ensure that its provisions are responsive to the needs of all social service professionals and practitioners.

3.3 Interview/ Consult relevant stakeholders in ensuring that all aspects of the social services policy are included.

3.4 Participate in National consultative workshops arranged by National Department of Social Development and the SACSSP.

3.5 Provide feedback to the National Department of Social Development and the SACSSP, responsible for the process after every deliverable.

The closing date for submission of a proposal by a service provider was the 31 January 2010 and the project was to be completed by 31 March 2010. While the TOR calls for a policy that is 'responsive to the needs of all social

service professionals and practitioners' and requires the service provider to consult stakeholders, the short-time frame would have given the service provider less than two months to develop the policy. It is questionable how consultation of all relevant stakeholders and civil society could be done in less than two months. The Department informed us in mid March that they had not yet finalised the service provider appointment yet were still expecting delivery of the first draft of the policy by the end of March. We have written a letter to the Department requesting clarity on the policy development process and the consultation opportunities.

Update On The Social Service Professions Bill

The national Department of Social Development presented their strategic plan to the Portfolio Committee for Social Development on the 2nd March 2010. The strategic planning document says that the Social Service Professions Bill will be re-drafted in 2012 and tabled in parliament in 2014. If this is accurate, this would therefore mean that the bill is "on ice" until the policy process described above is successfully completed.

This change in the time table for the Bill means that SSPAN members have

to re-strategise. The SSPAN Steering Committee recommends that for 2010 SSPAN members should focus on:

- actively participating in the policy development process (we will be advocating for consultative workshops to be organised by the Department and SSPAN will be able to pay the travel costs of some SSPAN members to attend these workshops)
- engaging pro-actively with members of parliament and executive officials who will be responsible for making the decisions on the policy and the bill (e.g. taking them on tours to see different types of social service practitioners in

action, inviting them to workshops and conferences where the issues will be discussed)

Please let us know if you have any ideas for site visits for decision makers or upcoming workshops to which decision makers could be invited.

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Professions Bill and the new policy development process.

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For more information on any of the above topics please call Lucy Jamieson on 021 689 5404 ■

Tomorrow is another place "It is better to know some of the questions than all of the answers."

By James Thurber

We who work with children, youth and families are probably reasonably oriented within our own life circumstances. We know our way around, we know enough to come in out of the rain, we know who's who in the zoo. We can be tempted to believe that having reached this personal zone of achievement and comfort qualifies us to be useful and helpful to others. We couldn't be more wrong.

Our clients are not us. They are not like us. They have lived different lives in different circumstances. They speak different languages, if not literally then conventionally. They will go on to live in different cultures, in different families, in different places – and in an age of which we have no experience whatever.

We betray them when we seek only their compliance with our own methods and customs, with our own adjustments and solutions. Decades ago Toffler warned us that facts are ephemeral, and that more than anything human beings must be adaptable. Jeffery Leach, in a review of Toffler's 1970 book, likens future shock to "the same sort of disorientation that a person experiences when he moves to a new area, or a new country, and suffers a severing of all he has known."

(Of course there are a number of enduring values and principles which we feel may inform good decision-making in the future, and we offer what we can of these, though even these may change over time.)

For us this means that rather than giving people knowledge and information today, we prepare them to be able to find guidance and information wherever and whenever they may need it. Imagine our own youngster leaving for a far-off country of which we have only the vaguest knowledge – we would have little to offer except perhaps how to find the signposts which might help to them make sense of their new environment and adequately negotiate whatever demands and challenges they find when they get there.

We are talking here of a style of practice in which we resist giving kids brownie points for listening to us and, rather, teach them to develop their own questions to which they may find their own answers. "Do this" is replaced by "What do you think you could do about that?" Instead of "Here is the information you want," we say "Where could we find out about that?" Giving young people practice in evaluating situations and being able to come up with their own solutions is the truly helpful resource we can offer for their tomorrows. ■

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