

# Rebirth of a profession



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The article 'Rebirth of a Profession' discusses the new Codes of Practice for social care workers and their employers, together with the accompanying register, which were published in September 2002 by the General Social Care Council (GSCC). It puts forward the view that this is the culmination of a twenty-year-old dream and the fulfilment of social worker's hopes. Within this assignment the author's reasons for this view and the quality of the argument will be analysed and evaluated using the processes of critical thinking.

In order to do this thoroughly Damer's (1995, cited by Gibbs & Gambrill, 1999, p206) four criteria of a good argument will be heeded. If any of these are violated, he states, then the argument is flawed. The criteria require that the reasons must be relevant, acceptable and constitute sufficient grounds for the truth of the conclusion. Finally the reasons should provide effective rebuttal to all reasonable challenges to the argument. Before this can be achieved, consideration of what critical thinking is and its' relevance to social work needs to be undertaken.

Critical thinking involves the critical appraisal of beliefs, arguments and claims in order to arrive at well-reasoned judgements. " (Gibbs and Gambrill, 1996, p. 3). Whilst this definition is not absolute it provides a sound basis from which to commence and points to it's application to social care. Social care staff frequently need to evaluate information to solve problems effectively and come to well-developed decisions. Swartz & Parks (1994, p. 338) argue that assessing the reasonableness of ideas is crucial and failing to do so runs the risk of acting on ideas that are incorrect and may lead to harm.

The article tries to convince the reader that the codes are a 'dream come true' because they will give social care staff increased status, raise standards of care and increase shared responsibility between workers and employers.

The actual codes are not given, perhaps based on the assumption that readers of *Community Care*, a specialist magazine for social care staff, are already familiar with them. The reasons, given above, fulfil the relevance criteria in that if accepted they contribute to the truth of the conclusion.

Whether they are acceptable will be examined later.

The fifth paragraph offers an analogy with the Nurse's Code, though the work of nurses is not strictly analogous to that of social care staff. Relevant similarities exist - they both deal with vulnerable people, are working to achieve the best possible outcome for the service user and in both cases a mistake could result in serious consequences. The differences, however, question the value of the analogy as evidence (Brink-Budgen, 2000, p. 53). Nursing is a more structured profession and focuses on the 'medical model' whereas social work deals with a number of different perspectives and models and thus is harder to define.

Furthermore, as is stated in the article, the new social work code applies to a range of social care jobs. Therefore it is dubious as to whether the nurses code is relevant or comparable. Fallacies and assumptions, apparent in the reasoning, detract from the acceptability of the argument. Emotional language is used to divert the reader's attention from the real issues. This is illustrated in the first two sentences of the article; the first sentence evokes feelings of pathos followed by the second, which raises the reader to a sense of elation and optimism on behalf of social care staff.

In order for the claim that the code will increase successful recruitment to be true, it is necessary to assume that difficulties in recruiting social care staff are due to a previous lack of standards. However there is no consideration given to alternatives such as salary, nor is there evidence to support this assumption. Brookfield (1987, p. ) states that identifying and challenging assumptions is central to critical thinking and develops our contextual awareness. Omissions in the article contribute to a permeating sense of vagueness and lack of clarity.

Little evidence/research is presented for the claims made that could be considered to be of reliable quality or easily testable. Instead words such as 'many', 'often' and 'most' are used to precede a claim duping the reader into accepting the claim as truth. For example how many social workers see the nurses code as 'an enviable badge of professionalism'? On what has the author based the claim that most social workers have this view? Likewise, nowhere in the article is evidence or service user perspectives indicated to support the claim that the code represents 'a major gain' for them.

Considering that the service user is central to social care and the current trend is towards increased service user consultation this is a glaring omission (Lloyd, 2002, p. 164). Compounding the tone of vagueness are unexplained terms and concepts, used within the article, which without resort to further information, leads to a difficulty in deciding whether the premises are sound (Browne & Keeley, 2001, pp. 41-58). For example - How will the special health hearings work? What sorts of health issues are included?

Because this is not determined, it seems alarmist and raises questions of possible discrimination in the workplace. This is particularly damaging in that anti-discriminatory practice is a core value of social work, which should constantly underpin practice. The issue of accountability is also ambiguous and concerning - what is meant by the term 'individually accountable'?

Davies (ed. , 2000) states that " Accountability... at first... a simple concept, is in reality complex when applied to the practice of social work.

There are at least four answers to the question: 'to whom is the social worker accountable for her or his actions? ". Accountability also holds connotations of blame (Banks, 2002, p. 30) which further demonstrates the importance of clear and unequivocal language (Adams et al. , eds. 2002). Having examined Damer's (1995) first three criteria the 'rebuttal criterion' will now be attended to. In order for this to be fulfilled the author should acknowledge any counter arguments and respond to them in a reasonable and straightforward way. Let us come back to the analogy with the nurse's code.

On the surface it appears to be a reasonable counter-argument, pointing out that the nurse's code has not fulfilled expectations although it is 'a useful guide'. In my opinion, however, it is a thinly veiled attempt to discredit the nurse's code as inferior to the new social work code - partly on the basis that the nurse's code does not include employers (paragraph ten) although the previous paragraph seems to contradict this point. In paragraph eleven the author raises questions which allude to possible negative effects of the code but these are skimmed over and the information that follows seems purposefully vague.

This assignment set out to examine the article using critical thinking skills and this has been achieved through the use of questioning and paying attention to problems in the reasoning, arguments and claims made. Unfortunately it has not been possible to raise everything discussed in the article. However, it has considered the strength of the article based on Damer's (1995) four criteria and been found lacking. Therefore, without clarifications and resort to further information, I can only conclude that the argument is flawed and, at this point, reject it as incomplete.