SCIE's profile and impact
Summary of findings and SCIE's response

social care
institute for excellence

scie

The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) was established by Government in 2001 to improve social care services for adults and children in the United Kingdom. We achieve this by identifying good practice and helping to embed it in everyday social care provision.

We work to:

- identify and analyse knowledge about social care provision
- create and disseminate knowledge-based good practice guidance
- involve service users, practitioners, providers and policy makers in advancing and promoting good practice in social care
- enhance the skills and professionalism of social care workers through our tailored, targeted and user-friendly resources.

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Introduction

In 2006/07, the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) commissioned a number of surveys to establish the organisation's current profile and impact, and to inform future development.

This document summarises the key findings from these surveys, and outlines SCIE's response to the issues raised.

The surveys included:
- a recognition survey
- a communications audit
- impact research, including fostering and social work education case studies
- an e-readiness review.

Background information on each survey is included in pages 8 and 9.

Summary

The key findings from the independent surveys into SCIE's profile and impact can be summarised as follows:

- People in touch with SCIE value the quality of SCIE's work, in particular the rigour that underpins SCIE's products, and report positive benefit from using SCIE resources.
- Whilst SCIE's recognition is steadily improving, there are still some parts of the sector where SCIE's profile is low – particularly within the private and voluntary sector.
- SCIE needs to improve the development, design and targeting of resources to different stakeholder groups and develop key messages as part of a communications strategy.
- The surveys strongly indicate the need for social care providers to be in some state of preparedness to use SCIE materials. SCIE needs to work with other key organisations to influence the environment in the sector, including at a regional level.
- Generally speaking the sector is more 'e-ready' than normally assumed. Employers tend to underestimate employees' capabilities and preferences.
- The format of SCIE's resources (eg online or in print) should reflect the preferences and access needs of different audiences.

As a result of the findings from these surveys, SCIE's Board has approved a programme of work to:

- develop a strategy for stakeholder management and identify key target audiences during 2007-11
- undertake a review of existing products and of options for new methods of delivery
- develop communications and implementation strategies
- review options for improving the SCIE website and Social Care Online.

Findings from the surveys

Quality and reputation

Recognition and appreciation of the quality of SCIE's work, in particular the rigour that underpins SCIE's products, is a consistent finding of the communications audit and the impact research. Between 60 and 70 per cent of impact research respondents say that SCIE's work as a whole is 'excellent' or 'good' in relation to quality, accessibility, usefulness, or being up-to-date, with nearly all the remaining respondents using a rating of 'OK'. Furthermore, over 90 per cent of people in touch with SCIE use our products. The impact research also shows the potential benefit to be achieved, as it reports a positive impact from using SCIE resources. This is highlighted in the case studies of increased confidence amongst practitioners and ability to advocate, and of achieving organisational impacts such as informing new provider contracts.

Recognition and profile

SCIE's recognition is steadily improving (for example web activity more than doubled between 2004/05 and 2005/06, with an eight-fold increase in visitors to Social Care Online and 24 times more visitors to the People Management website). There are, however, still some parts of the sector (eg the private sector, in particular frontline workers in residential or domiciliary care) where SCIE's profile is still low. There may also be ready audiences, whom SCIE should cultivate. For example, the recognition survey shows an interest and appetite for SCIE's work amongst commissioners. The communication audit recommends that SCIE should identify priority stakeholders with whom to build close partnerships, as well as priority audiences to target with our resources.

Targeting and delivery of resources

Both the impact research and the communication audit suggest that SCIE needs to improve the tuning and targeting of resources to different stakeholder groups. This is a complex task. The impact research provides evidence of who, amongst current users, uses which resources. It also highlights general satisfaction with the readability, layout and clarity of SCIE material, as well as suggesting improvements. The communication audit reports that the language of SCIE materials is too sophisticated and stresses the importance of having information that is simply presented and where the key messages can be easily communicated in face to face meetings. This was replicated in the **Supporting Induction in Social Care (SISCo)** practice audit. There is interest in user-friendly summaries, videos and non-text based material and a desire that materials should remain available in print. The **report on e-readiness** describes a higher than expected level of e-literacy within the workforce and this is confirmed by the **digital media survey** and the SISCo practice audit. These surveys found that staff are competent mobile phone users, likely to have a computer at home and managers regularly made use of the web in their work. Nonetheless there is a significant minority who do not like using computers, who are mostly older, lacking formal qualifications and have no computer at home.

The complexity of the picture and diversity of suggestions indicate that some experimentation is necessary. SCIE is therefore piloting a new approach to product development and marketing.

Organisational receptiveness

The surveys strongly indicate a need for service organisations to be in some state of preparedness to use SCIE materials.

The impact research offers some good examples of how people have used SCIE's work to make changes in practice, and of the organisational environment which facilitates this. Whilst it is important that SCIE improves its delivery range, this will not, on its own, solve the problem of receptivity. SCIE needs to develop a more strategic approach to implementation support, with a particular focus on the way in which we work with other key organisations to influence the environment in the sector. The communication audit cites support for engaging with this task on a regional basis. The audit also proposed that SCIE reviews its stakeholder management strategy and focuses on priority issues that the organisation wishes to influence.

Electronic resources

About 90 per cent of people in contact with SCIE, and with email addresses, visit the website, of whom only two per cent found it difficult to use. Both the communication audit and social work education case study - both of which included non-users of SCIE's resources - make suggestions for how the website might be improved. Evidence from the fostering case study is that some of our stakeholders may dislike using websites or find our website difficult to use. The social work education case study indicated that some students would prefer a more flexible way of using the website.

The picture from the impact research with regard to SCIE's online database of information on social care - **Social Care Online** - is more complex. About 60 per cent visited Social Care Online, 57 per cent of whom found it easy to use and only three per cent found it difficult to use. About 50 per cent of survey respondents not visiting Social Care Online say that they do not know about Social Care Online. The implication is that SCIE might want to consider whether it needs to improve dissemination of information about Social Care Online. If so, SCIE would need to find out the potential relevance of Social Care Online to non-users and further examine the implications in order to plan ongoing development and promotion.

Background to the surveys

The impact research

The impact research was commissioned from The Mersey Consortium, an independent research consultancy. It consisted of a survey of stakeholders with some level of contact with SCIE, and who have email addresses and access to the internet. This survey was primarily carried out online. 1,394 questionnaires were received, (a response rate of 34 per cent), from 13 different stakeholder groups (eg managers in voluntary sector providers or policy makers at national level).

In addition, case studies were carried out to investigate the impacts of SCIE's **fostering dissemination events** in 2005, the 'fostering collaboratives' action learning project with three fostering service providers, and SCIE resources promoting knowledge and best practice within **social work education** in five universities.

The survey provides quantitative evidence and tells SCIE about how widespread perceptions are amongst a large sample of people in contact with SCIE, and so can inform how much these perceptions should influence SCIE's strategy. The case studies provide in-depth qualitative evidence of processes of achieving impact and how SCIE can facilitate translation of its work into changed practice and learning/teaching.

The communications audit

The communications audit was commissioned from The Forster Company to review SCIE's current communications processes, products, channels and stakeholder perceptions in order to:

- establish SCIE's marketplace position
- establish its unique selling point(s) and key corporate messages
- prioritise stakeholder audiences
- consider current communications channels and assess potential additions.

The Forster Company conducted face-to-face and telephone interviews, focus group sessions and email questionnaires to provide internal and external perceptions on these questions. Twelve SCIE staff and 56 external stakeholders took part in a series of interviews, email questionnaires and three focus groups with providers in Cardiff, London and Leeds**.** Participants included statutory and independent sector providers, commissioners, colleagues in government, other national organisations, front line staff (primarily domiciliary care workers) and the media.

The audit provided a basis to inform SCIE's communications strategy, in particular about how to communicate and target work more effectively – a critical strand to strengthening SCIE's impact.

The recognition survey

The recognition survey was commissioned from Continental Research and fieldwork was carried out in April 2006. The survey provided quantitative information about SCIE's profile and recognition in the sector as a whole. It goes beyond people already in contact with SCIE and provided a baseline, by stakeholder group, and country, of SCIE's current recognition. The group focused primarily on social care provider organisations from the private, voluntary and statutory sectors. 925 telephone interviews were carried out with managers, practitioners, commissioners of services and other individuals in social care across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. This was complemented by the **Community Care survey** about recognition among its readership of SCIE, CSIP and IDeA.

Survey of e-readiness in the sector

As part of SCIE's initial work on e-learning, SCIE commissioned Ipsos MORI to carry out a research programme to establish the extent to which the social care sector is ready to maximise the use of e-learning with regard to available technology, organisational capability, skills and capacity within the workforce. E-learning is the use of information and communication technologies to support teaching and learning. This might mean learning through a CDROM, a DVD, from a web page, a blog, a mobile phone or a combination of any of these.

Although the focus was on e-learning, the study throws light on e-readiness and ICT (information and communications technology) use as a whole. The research consisted of a literature review, a survey of 516 social care employers and 994 social care staff (largely women, with two in five being frontline workers) and four focus groups. It provides quantitative evidence about the extent of and attitudes to ICT (in particular e-learning) use within the sector, which is complemented by qualitative evidence from the focus groups which further addressed questions of attitude and motivation.

Two other studies on the feasibility of **using digital media in care homes** to access information and good practice for care staff and the practice audit for the SISCo (**Supporting Induction in Social Care**) project contribute additional qualitative findings. Both studies involved in-depth interviews and observation of working practices with 26 employers – mostly small or medium-sized enterprises.

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