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Title: What is the 'social' in contemporary social work education?

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This paper examines the challenges for contemporary social work education in Europe, proposing that, rather than legitimise and professionalise social work, current trends in teaching and training could perpetuate a process of 'functionality' and conformity and de-professionalization of social work. Drawing on examples from England and Russia, it considers the challenges facing social work education, especially in meeting social policy agendas. Historical and contemporary developments in social work practice in the two countries will be outlined as responses to political and social imperatives. The very meaning of 'social' in social work is dictated by context-specific policy priorities and cultural understandings. This affects the content and values transmitted in social work education and also shapes opportunities for sharing knowledge and practice between countries. Ultimately, there is a risk that the academicisation of curricula and growth of social work education in both Britain and eastern Europe will paradoxically fail to promote empowerment, social justice and a commitment to social change.