Social Work Reform Board

Building a safe and confident future: One year on

Developing a coherent and effective framework for the continuing professional development of social workers

December 2010

Developing a coherent and effective national framework for the continuing professional development of social workers

Summary

In its final report, **Building a safe, confident future**, the Social Work Task Force recommended:

A more coherent and effective national framework for the continuing professional development of social workers, along with mechanisms to encourage a shift in culture which raises expectations of an entitlement to on-going learning and development **(Recommendation 9)**

1.1 Social workers, as professionals, have a responsibility to continuously develop their practice. The ultimate purpose of professional development is to contribute to high quality support for children, adults and families; it is also shown to reduce burn-out and improve retention.

1.2 In order to raise standards in the profession, it is vital that we develop the capacity and improve the skills of existing social workers, alongside making longer term changes to the social work degree. Continuing professional development (CPD) is one of the primary means of achieving this. The new framework will encourage social workers to take responsibility for improving their practice and help to create workplaces in which they will be supported and encouraged to do so. The framework seeks to ensure that opportunities for learning are meaningful, plentiful and suited to the needs of the social worker and their area of work, whilst being consistently recognised across the country.

1.3 CPD should be based on the new **Professional Capabilities Framework** and should support social workers to:

- Demonstrate that they are maintaining and improving their skills
- Extend and deepen specialist skills and knowledge
- Acquire knowledge and understanding of, and contribute to, research which informs evidence-based practice
- Develop as leaders and managers both within their own organisations and within the social work profession;
- Become more confident, emotionally resilient and adaptable to the changing demands of social work
- Play an effective role in developing other social workers, (e.g. as practice educators, mentors for NQSW)
- Become the next generation of social work academics and researchers where appropriate.

1.4 We welcome your views on the guiding principles set out below and will take these on board in developing detailed proposals on the CPD Framework over the course of the coming year.

1.5 In producing the principles we have drawn on:

- a review of relevant CPD literature and research, (including other professions and other countries)[1];
- an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of current CPD arrangements; and
- the expertise of a range of employers (local authority, private, voluntary and independent), BASW and the Unions, higher education providers, social workers, social work students and the views of service users.

Papers have been circulated amongst networks and presented and discussed at seminars, conferences and workshops. Details are available on request.

The key principles of a new CPD framework

1.6 A new CPD framework should:

1. Support social workers to maintain and develop minimum standards for re-registration set by the regulatory body, and further develop their professional skills in relation to the Professional Capabilities Framework.
2. Encourage and motivate social workers to improve their practice through a wide range of learning opportunities which are supported by employers and valued locally and nationally. CPD should be based on an analysis of each social worker's individual needs, ambitions, career stage and personal learning style.
3. Be underpinned by annual appraisal cycles in which learning and development needs can be identified and achievement recorded.
4. Be simple to access and represent value for money. There should be appropriate opportunities to gain nationally recognised qualifications and accreditation of a range of learning outcomes.

Proposed changes to CPD

1.7 We are recommending retaining a hybrid model of CPD, which supports social workers to access a wide variety of learning and development opportunities, dependent on individual learning needs and styles, throughout their careers, with national recognition and portability. The model will:

- value and strengthen the range of professional development opportunities that exist outside academic qualifications, e.g. through short courses and informal learning; and
- enable social workers to gain specialist higher level qualifications through a Masters level pathway within a simple, modular structure.

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[1] *Overview of existing good practice/resources in CPD,* **www.education.gov.uk/swrb/cpd.shtml**

What can you do?

We would like to know what you think about our proposals on CPD:

Q1. Will these proposals improve the ability of social workers to work effectively with the children, adults and families who use services and become more confident, competent practitioners?
Q2. Will the proposals be effective in all social work settings?
Q3. Will the proposals support all social workers' individual needs, ambitions and learning styles at each stage in their careers?
Q4. How can we achieve these changes at a time of funding constraints on local authorities, other delivery organisations and higher education?

You can express your views on the proposals within this report by:

- Emailing the Social Work Reform Board at **information.swrb@education.gsi.gov.uk**
- Contributing to national and regional meetings, workshops and conferences, details of which will be posted on our website and in our newsletter
- Sending your comments to your representative organisations and asking them to submit this feedback to the Reform Board.

Developing a coherent and effective national framework for the continuing professional development of social workers

Introduction

2.1 These proposals have been developed by the Careers Working Group which was set up by the Social Work Reform Board. The group has included representatives from a range of organisations and groups with an interest in social work. Members have communicated and consulted regularly with their networks about the proposals, and their work has been informed by evidence from research and discussions.

Background and present situation

2.2 All social workers need to maintain and improve their own practice as well as take account of changes to the law, the evidence base on practice and changing societal needs. They will need to build on their initial qualifying courses to develop expertise and specialist skills appropriate to the settings in which they work now and throughout their careers.

2.3 Recent years have seen considerable work on developing and promoting post qualifying learning and skills development. The framework of Post Qualification (PQ) awards introduced in 2005, offered a valuable route to keeping knowledge and skills up to date through formal learning. However, take-up of PQ courses nationally has been patchy and many social workers have cited lack of time and support from employers as barriers to learning.

2.4 Despite these initiatives and significant funding for CPD, the Social Work Task Force said in its report in 2009 that '*CPD is not yet properly valued and supported in all places and organisations and the existing framework is not sufficiently coherent, effective, or widely understood, with weaknesses in choice, flexibility and relevance'.*

2.5 The first interim report by Professor Munro on child protection highlighted the need for a system that constantly looks to do things better. In practice, the current registration arrangements require a relatively low level of engagement with professional development through demonstration of a minimum time commitment.

2.6 There are already many good examples of professional development on which to build, including the recently introduced Newly Qualified Social Worker programme (NQSW), early professional development (EPD) scheme and Advanced Social Work Professional (ASWP) scheme. Groups of local authorities, working with local HEIs, such as the West London and West Midlands partnerships, have worked together to develop and deliver training, some of which is linked to academic awards, and the current PQ framework.

Principles for developing CPD

2.7 This paper proposes a number of principles which should underpin the development of a new CPD framework in England.

Principle One - Support social workers to maintain and develop minimum standards for re-registration set by the regulatory body, and to further develop their skills in relation to the Professional Capabilities Framework

2.8 The development of a new, coherent and effective CPD framework is inextricably linked to other proposals for reform. By setting out national expectations of social workers throughout their careers and enabling social workers to plan their progression at each career level, **the Professional Capabilities Framework** will inform the shape of CPD. Once agreed, it will help social workers and managers to identify particular learning needs based on improving skills and expertise in their area of practice.

2.9 CPD will be supported by the proposed **Standards for Employers and Supervision Framework** where the responsibilities of employers to provide resources, time and access to learning are clear. The design and delivery of CPD locally will be supported by proposed **partnership arrangements** between groups of organisations and HEIs.

Principle Two - Encourage and motivate social workers to learn through a wide range of learning opportunities which are supported by employers and valued locally and nationally. CPD should be based on an analysis of each social worker's individual needs, ambitions, career stage and personal learning style

2.10 A hybrid model of CPD will provide flexibility and choice, based on individual need, circumstances, learning preferences and career stage. It will enable social workers to learn and develop through a range of learning opportunities that will strengthen their evidence base, expertise and practice.

2.11 The new model will recognise the value of strengthening the range of professional development activity outside academic routes through in-house and short courses, as well as through both structured and informal practice learning. It will also provide opportunities for social workers to gain higher level academic qualifications.

Strengthening the opportunities for learning outside the academic framework

2.12 Much of the current CPD framework is built around PQ qualifications. Many potentially valuable in-house, locally provided courses or specialist courses that support improved practice are not nationally recognised. A new framework would assume a learning culture that values a much wider range of learning activities and provides for supervision within a safe environment for critical reflection and challenge.

2.13 We know that for many employers and social workers their first priority is to improve a social worker's range of skills so that they can identify and apply in practice the most appropriate interventions. This may be through on-the-job learning, including regular high quality supervision, rather than the acquisition of academic qualifications. Employers have told us that CPD should be delivered and accessed in diverse and

creative ways with an emphasis on shared learning amongst peers and developing reflective practice.

2.14 Moving towards an integrated, learner-led CPD framework opens up significant new opportunities for CPD activities. The recently introduced NQSW and EPD programmes, based on agreed national learning outcomes, are demonstrating the value of on-the-job and practice learning. Some local authorities have developed a menu of support and learning opportunities, including existing PQ modules or training courses which can be externally verified or moderated.

Examples of learning activity include learning from:
- the views of children, adults and families
- critical reflection and challenge through supervision
- critical incident analysis, analysing mistakes
- coaching and mentoring
- dialogue and discussion
- open and distance learning
- reflective learning
- empirical evidence and research
- observing and listening
- reading
- other professionals
- shadowing
- secondments
- workshops, training and development events and conferences

Academic learning

2.15 The Social Work Task Force wanted to enable and encourage those social workers who wish to do so, to achieve PQ awards at higher degree levels and to support the next generation of social work academics and researchers. Over 2,600 social workers have completed a PQ award since 2006 and over 6,000 social workers are currently studying towards one. Advanced study provides opportunities to engage in higher level critical reflection and to undertake research in practice which can directly improve services.

2.16 A single, modular Masters-Level PQ award in specialist practice will be an integral part of the hybrid model. This Masters Level award would:

- be based on curricula and standards agreed by employers, educators and the profession, shaped by the Professional Capabilities Framework;

- be achievable through a range of learning methodologies, delivery arrangements and time-scales;

- make provision for accreditation of prior learning and in-house learning opportunities;

- build on and align to existing approved PQ courses;

- be capable of being studied by social workers with different educational backgrounds and at different stages of their social work careers;

- provide opportunities for practice-based research;

and may be:

- recognised and 'badged' by the College of Social Work.

2.17 The different stages of a Master's award would lend themselves to gradual attainment. It will also be important for social workers to be able to access and progress through the stages of the Masters award as suits their personal circumstances, preferences, learning needs and the demands of their job.

2.18 Some staff interested in specialist Masters level qualifications may need additional study and support. This could include through '*Return to Formal Learning'* modules. The increasing numbers of social workers entering the profession with a Masters level degree will also need support and incentives to undertake more specialist courses. Some social workers would also value the opportunity to undertake a Doctorate and should be enabled to do so.

2.19 Employers and social workers have told us that enabling continuing academic development would help to raise the status of the profession and mirror opportunities available for other professions. Opportunities for inter-professional learning, development and qualifications are also valuable for integrated practice contexts. Education and training for the roles of Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP), practice educator and on safeguarding are particularly valued by social workers and employers.

2.20 In meeting these aspirations we will need to consider the opportunities already available and the range of roles social workers perform, as well as the capacity of employers, HEIs and others to provide the desirable breadth of options.

Principle Three - Be underpinned by yearly appraisal cycles in which learning and development needs can be identified and achievement recorded.

2.21 CPD should become a continuous process, developed and reviewed as part of ongoing arrangements for managing performance and planning development. A social worker's aspirations should be discussed alongside organisational and local service needs and should be recorded in a development plan. There should be an annual planning cycle which considers CPD as well as the process of setting, implementing and evaluating objectives.

2.22 Social workers should record their CPD formally, but with minimum bureaucracy, in an agreed format. This could be built up over an individual's career and be nationally recognised. One option would be to use a career-long Personal Development Record /passport, building on those started through initial training and education and NQSW, to record achievements and CPD. This could be used regularly in supervision and performance appraisal.

Principle 4 - Be simple to access and represent value for money. There should be appropriate opportunities to gain nationally recognised qualifications and accreditation of a range of learning outcomes

2.23 For the new framework to be effective, it will be important for social workers and their employers to understand the range of learning and development opportunities available, and to know how to access these.

2.24 Employers and social workers have told us that the CPD framework should have consistent but relevant learning outcomes that are accepted across England, and that informal and non-accredited learning and academic learning should be equally valid and valuable. Once the Professional Capabilities Framework is in place, social workers and their employers can decide the best way for each individual to achieve these outcomes.

> Using the Professional Capabilities Framework as the basis for assessing learning outcomes for CPD, no matter how these are achieved, will provide national consistency, whilst retaining the flexibility of local arrangements.

Content of CPD

2.25 A key aim of CPD is that social workers can improve their practice and adapt to the changing demands of the complex task of social work. Training and education has always needed to respond to new policy requirements and emerging local delivery arrangements. The basis for the content of CPD will also be shaped by the outcome statements and thresholds in the Professional Capabilities Framework. A social worker's priorities for development will usually relate to the specialist area in which they work and should be based on an assessment of current needs. Partnerships between employers and HEIs can play a key role in planning, commissioning and delivering training in an area, and provide a more strategic approach to developing and updating practice.

Accreditation

2.26 Accreditation is a mechanism for recognising a wide range of development activities, so that the achieved outcomes are valued and portable. Not every form of learning will be capable of formal accreditation, but there are various ways that learning could be documented and validated against the learning outcomes of the Professional Capabilities Framework:

- A 'light touch' learner-led verification of learning e.g. the social worker recording their own reflective learning.
- Verification that agreed learning objectives have been achieved e.g. by a line-manager, mentor or training provider.
- External assessment/moderation of in-house or other learning.
- Formal accreditation of in-house learning and other CPD activities.

- Accreditation of learning by an HEI to accumulate credits towards an academic award.
- Accreditation of learning/HEI programmes by e.g. the College of Social Work.

2.27 Some HEIs already offer accreditation which enables appropriate learning credits to be awarded through assessment of reflective portfolios or other assessment activities (e.g. NQSW). It may be possible for other bodies such as the National Skills Academy or the College of Social Work to accredit or badge training. Such options would ensure some level of consistency and standardisation and allow recognition of a range of CPD.

2.28 It is recognised that systems that accredit all types of CPD may not be viable or affordable. We need to avoid imposing recording and "accreditation" mechanisms which place additional burdens on social workers, employers and providers of CPD.

Funding

2.29 The development of cost-effective courses will be important. Where employers fund training they will expect to see learning linked to practice needs, showing clear benefits to the organisation from the investment.

2.30 The hybrid model, which includes a range of ways of learning, could provide cost effective ways to achieve CPD. As part of some initiatives, such as those in the West Midlands and West London, social service departments are collaborating across authorities to commission tailored programmes to meet their needs; in some cases university educators, employer trainers and in-house social workers work together to deliver courses within the workplace or accredit in house provision. We aim to establish a partnership framework to support and facilitate arrangements for qualifying training and CPD.

2.31 Currently employers can claim funding from the Children's Workforce Development Council or Skills for Care to support their NQSW programmes and the EPD and ASWP schemes. Targeted funding from CWDC and Skills for Care has also supported collaborative regional developments. These projects have been successful, and have been helped by the additional funding. It is important that these projects can be built on, with funding distributed more equitably across the country.

2.32 Current HE funding arrangements mean HEFCE is not funded by Government to support students studying qualifications at an equivalent or lower level to their existing qualification, which affects those with a Masters or PQ award. It is not yet clear how proposed changes to funding for university courses will affect future take up of PQ courses.

Next steps - implementation and ownership

2.33 We have heard that at times of stress and pressure it is even more difficult for social workers and employers to do more than the minimum CPD required for re-registration. This is because the long term benefits of CPD may take second place to delivering essential front line services with decreasing resources. We therefore sought

the views of a wide range of employers and social workers about what would make a successful CPD framework in a climate of structural change and funding pressures.

2.34 We were told that the framework should be simple and flexible with protected time to learn and reflect within social work practice, as emphasised by the first Munro report.

2.35 The proposals for a new CPD framework will need to be refined and developed to take account of changes. These will include any recommendations made by the Munro Review and the Family Justice Review in 2011.

2.36 The College of Social Work intends to help social workers to meet the regulator's standards for CPD, and will wish to ensure CPD is available to develop and support high professional standards. The College will work with the profession, employers and educators to confirm the Professional Capabilities Framework outcomes and thresholds that will determine the content of CPD and may wish to take the CPD framework forward. The College may choose to promote training on priority topics arising from policy and practice imperatives, and may also consider that it has a role in approving/badging some of the formal learning available to social workers.

2.37 Further work is needed to transform the principles set out in this document into a workable operational framework. Lessons learnt from strengthening learning through social work practice, and other initiatives, will inform the future framework.

Annex A

Membership of the Social Work Reform Board

The Social Work Reform Board met for the first time in January 2010 and is chaired by Moira Gibb CBE, who also chaired the Social Work Task Force. The member organisations on the Reform Board bring together representatives of social workers, employers, educators and service users to plan how, together, they can make reforms happen and report to government on progress.

The Social Work Reform Board has formed three main working groups to bring together relevant parties to develop plans to make the Social Work Task Force recommendations a reality. The working groups involve the different stakeholders interested in the social work reform programme. Their role is to inform and develop the recommendations and draft proposals for consultation to ensure that final arrangements work in practice. The main working groups focus on education, career development and standards for employers.

The Social Work Reform Board is also informed by the Social Workers' Reference Group, which ensures that the views and perspectives of social workers are at the forefront in developing the reform programme.

The following organisations send representatives to attend Social Work Reform Board meetings:

- A National Voice
- Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS)
- Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS)
- Association of Professionals in Education and Children's Trusts (Aspect)
- Association of Professors of Social Work (APSW)
- British Association of Social Workers (BASW)
- Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Services (CAFCASS)
- Children England
- College of Social Work
- Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)
- Department for Education (DfE)
- Department of Health (DH)
- General Social Care Council (GSCC)
- Health Professions Council (HPC)
- Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Social Policy & Social Work (SWAP)
- Joint University Council – Social Work Education Committee (JUC-SWEC)

- Local Government Association (LGA)
- Local Government Employers (LGE)
- Mind
- NHS Confederation
- Princess Royal Trust for Carers
- Shaping our Lives
- Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE)
- Unison
- Universities UK (UUK)

Government officials from the Devolved Administrations have observer status on the Social Work Reform Board and the following organisations also attend its meetings:

- Care Quality Commission (CQC)
- Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC)
- Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)
- Ofsted
- Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)
- Skills for Care (SfC)
- Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE)