

## **Education and Training Committee, 12 June 2012**

### **Criteria for approving Approved Mental Health Professionals programmes**

#### **Executive summary and recommendations**

##### **Introduction**

The General Social Care Council (GSCC) currently has a statutory responsibility to approve Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP) programmes in England.

Under the Health and Social Care Act (2012), we will take on responsibility for approving these programmes in England when the regulation of social workers in England transfers from the GSCC to ourselves. The Act gives us powers to set separate criteria for approving AMHP programmes, to publish those criteria and to communicate the criteria to education providers.

The Committee considered a paper on AMHPs at its meeting in June 2011. The Committee agreed that we should not annotate the Register to show where individuals had completed the AMHP programmes, but that we should manage our responsibilities to approve the programmes appropriately.

This paper sets out interim arrangements for managing changes to and approving the programmes and sets out a plan to develop the stand-alone criteria we will use to approve AMHP programmes.

##### **Decision**

The Committee's decision is set out in section six of the paper.

##### **Background information**

The Committee previously discussed AMHP training at its meeting in June 2011. A copy of the paper can be found here: <http://www.hpc-uk.org/assets/documents/1000354520110609ETC12-AMHPs.pdf>

##### **Resource implications**

The resource implications include work to draft the criteria for approving AMHP programmes and subsequent consultation on the criteria. The resource implications are included within the Policy and Standards workplan for 2012/2013.

## **Financial implications**

The financial implications include the cost of the stakeholder meeting to discuss the draft criteria and the mailing of the consultation documents. The financial implications are included within the Policy and Standards budget for 2012/2013.

## **Appendices**

- Appendix one – Revised post qualifying framework for social work education and training
- Appendix two – Specialist standards and requirements for post qualifying social work education and training – Social work in mental health services

## **Date of paper**

29 May 2012

## **Criteria for approving Approved Mental Health Professionals programmes**

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The General Social Care Council (GSCC) currently has a statutory responsibility to approve Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP) programmes in England.
- 1.2 Under the Health and Social Care Act (2012), we (the HPC) will take on responsibility for approving these programmes in England when the regulation of social workers in England transfers from the GSCC to ourselves. The Act gives us powers to set separate criteria for approving AMHP programmes, to publish those criteria and to communicate the criteria to education providers.
- 1.3 The Committee considered a paper on AMHPs at its meeting in June 2011. The Committee agreed that we should not annotate the Register to show where individuals had completed the AMHP programmes, but that we should manage our responsibilities to approve the programmes appropriately.
- 1.4 As part of the preparations for the transfer, the GSCC has re-approved all AMHP programmes to ensure the programmes meet the GSCC's requirements. As a result, it is likely that the confirmation of ongoing approval for these programmes will be a lower priority for visits. It is likely that we will not visit these programmes until the 2013/2014 academic year at the earliest. Council will consider a paper on visits to social work programmes at its meeting on 19 June.
- 1.5 This paper sets out interim arrangements for managing changes to and approving the programmes and sets out a plan to develop the stand alone criteria we will use to approve AMHP programmes.

## 2. Background

### About AMHPs

- 2.1 AMHPs exercise functions under the Mental Health Act 1983 (amended by the Mental Health Act 2007). Those functions relate to decisions made about individuals with mental health disorders, including the decision to apply for compulsory admission to hospital.
- 2.2 Social workers, mental health and learning disabilities nurses, occupational therapists and practitioners psychologists, registered with their respective regulator, can train to become AMHPs.
- 2.3 The link between successfully completing AMHP programmes and performing the functions of an AMHP is not absolute. In addition to completing the programmes, an individual has to be approved by a Local Services Authority (LSSA), before they can act as an AMHP.

### Approval of AMHP programmes

- 2.4 The GSCC currently has statutory responsibility to approve AMHP programmes in England. AMHP programmes must currently meet the following requirements for the GSCC to approve the programmes:
  - the generic requirements of the Post-Qualifying framework;<sup>1</sup>
  - the GSCC's specific requirements for AMHP education programmes;<sup>2</sup> and
  - the core mental health specialist requirements and standards set out in the requirements for AMHP education programmes.<sup>3</sup>
- 2.5 The GSCC's specific requirements for AMHP programmes combine areas covered by our standards of proficiency and standards of education and training. Copies of the above documents are appended to this paper.
- 2.6 We will draw on these three documents to set interim criteria for monitoring AMHP programmes and to develop our own criteria to approve these programmes.

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<sup>1</sup> GSCC 'Revised post qualifying framework for social work education and training'  
<http://www.gsc.org.uk/cmsFiles/Education%20and%20Training/PQ%20documents/PQ%20framework%20Revised%20June%202009.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> GSCC 'Specialist standards and requirements for post qualifying social work education and training – Social work in mental health services', section three  
<http://www.gsc.org.uk/cmsFiles/Education%20and%20Training/PQ%20documents/Social%20work%20in%20mental%20health%20services%20revised%202010.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> GSCC 'Specialist standards and requirements for post qualifying social work education and training', section two

### **3. Criteria for approving AMHP programmes**

- 3.1 The Health and Social Care Act (2012) gives us powers to set separate criteria for approving AMHP programmes in England, to publish those criteria and to communicate the criteria to education providers.
- 3.2 Importantly, the power to establish standards of proficiency and standards of education and training does not apply to AMHP programmes. In addition, AMHP programmes are not considered post-registration qualifications as defined under the Health Professions Order (2001).
- 3.3 The next two sections set out our proposed approach to developing criteria for approving AMHP programmes.

## 4. Interim proposals

- 4.1 The Committee agreed at its meeting in June 2011 that we should develop interim arrangements for monitoring AMHP programmes, which we can use whilst we develop our own criteria.
- 4.2 The GSCC have recently approved AMHP programmes, ensuring the programmes meet the GSCC's requirements. Subject to the Committee's agreement, the interim criteria would be in place for approximately 18 months, before being replaced by our own stand alone criteria.
- 4.3 We would use the interim criteria to consider major changes to AMHP programmes and to approve any new AMHP programmes. It is important therefore, that the interim arrangements are reasonable, proportionate, and do not impose unnecessary burdens on education providers or ourselves.
- 4.4 The Executive believes that a reasonable and proportionate approach would be to draw upon the GSCC's existing frameworks (appended to this paper), combined with our standards of education and training to establish the interim arrangements. This approach is discussed in more detail below.

### The standards of education and training

- 4.5 The standards of education and training are generic standards which we currently use to approve and monitor all education programmes. As the standards are generic and set similar expectations to the GSCC's frameworks, we can use them on an interim basis to approve and monitor AMHP training programmes, with the following caveats.

#### **SET 1: Level of qualification for entry to the Register**

- 4.6 This standard sets out the threshold level of qualification for entry to the Register in a particular profession. As professionals complete AMHP programmes post-registration, this standard is not relevant for programme approval.

#### **SET 2.3: The admissions procedures must apply selection and entry criteria, including criminal convictions checks.**

#### **SET 2.4: The admissions procedures must apply selection and entry criteria, including compliance with any health requirements.**

#### **SET 3.16: There must be a process in place throughout the programme for dealing with concerns about students' profession-related conduct.**

- 4.7 These three SETs ensure that only students who meet our health and character requirements complete the programme and are then eligible to apply for registration.
- 4.8 These standards are not appropriate to programmes which are completed after registration, where the professional on the programme would be subject to our requirements, or those of the Nursing and Midwifery Council

(NMC) (in the case of mental health and learning disabilities nurses) already. In addition, concerns about their conduct on their programme would be addressed through either our or the NMC's fitness to practise process if appropriate.

**SET 4.1: The learning outcomes must ensure that those who successfully complete the programme meet the standards of proficiency for their part of the Register.**

- 4.9 This SET ensures that students who complete a particular programme can meet the standards of proficiency for their profession. There are no standards of proficiency for AMHP programmes, but it is important that we set out the competencies professionals should achieve once they have completed their AMHP training.
- 4.10 The Executive has reviewed the GSCC's frameworks used to approve post-qualifying training (listed in paragraph 2.4 above and appended to this paper). Some sections set expectations for the education providers and do not therefore set out competencies expected of individual AMHPs. However, paragraphs 57 and 59 of the GSCC's specialist standards and requirements for post qualifying social work education and training (social work in mental health services) set out the knowledge base and competencies expected of AMHPs.<sup>4</sup>
- 4.11 The standards of proficiency set out what a student must know, understand and be able to do on entry to the Register. Paragraphs 57 and 59, in setting out the knowledge base and competencies expected of AMHPs, are broadly equivalent to the standards of proficiency. It would therefore be appropriate to expect AMHP programmes to meet these sections in place of standards of proficiency, so that we can be confident that individuals completing the AMHP programme have the knowledge and skills necessary to be able to practise safely and effectively.

**SET 4.2: The programme must reflect the philosophy, core values, skills and knowledge base as articulated in any relevant curriculum guidance**

- 4.12 This standard makes sure that education providers reflect the philosophy, core values, skills and knowledge base of the relevant profession. There is currently no curriculum guidance for AMHP training, as the role was filled by the requirements set by the GSCC.
- 4.13 Section two and section three of the GSCC's specialist standards and requirements for post-qualifying social work education and training (social work in mental health services) set out expectations around values, philosophy, knowledge and skills for AMHPs. These sections are therefore able to act as curriculum guidance.

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<sup>4</sup> GSCC 'Specialist standards and requirements for post qualifying social work education and training – Social work in mental health services', section three  
<http://www.gsc.org.uk/cmsFiles/Education%20and%20Training/PQ%20documents/Social%20work%20in%20mental%20health%20services%20revised%202010.pdf>

**SET 4.5: The curriculum must make sure that students understand the implications of the HPC's standards of conduct, performance and ethics.**

4.14 This standard makes sure that students understand our ethical expectations. Most of the professionals eligible to become AMHPs are drawn from the professions we regulate. However, as mental health and learning disabilities nurses can also complete AMHP training, the education provider should also ensure that nurses understand the implications of the NMC's Code: Standards of conduct, performance and ethics for nurses and midwives.

**SET 6.1: The assessment strategy and design must ensure that the student who successfully completes the programme has met the standards of proficiency for their part of the Register.**

4.15 As with SET 4.1, this standard ensures that students who complete a particular programme can meet the standards of proficiency for their profession. To ensure consistency with the proposed approach to SET 4.1, the Executive proposes that paragraphs 57 and 59 of the GSCC's specialist standards and requirements for post qualifying social work education and training (social work in mental health services) should be used in place of standards of proficiency.

## Summary

4.16 In summary, the Executive proposes that the following interim arrangements should be adopted to manage AMHP programmes. AMHP programmes should meet all the following SETs, with some caveats:

- SET 1, 2.3, 2.4 and 3.16 do not apply to AMHP programmes;
- paragraphs 57 and 59 of the GSCC's specialist standards and requirements for post qualifying social work education and training (social work in mental health services) should be used in place of the standards of proficiency so that AMHP programmes can meet SET 4.1;
- section two and section three of the GSCC's specialist standards and requirements for post qualifying social work education and training (social work in mental health services) should be used in place of the curriculum guidance so that AMHP programmes can meet SET 4.2;
- in meeting SET 4.5, the education provider should also ensure that mental health and learning disabilities nurses understand the implications of the NMC's Code; and
- paragraphs 57 and 59 of the GSCC's specialist standards and requirements for post qualifying social work education and training (social work in mental health services) should be used in place of the standards of proficiency so that AMHP programmes can meet SET 6.1.

4.17 We have a statutory obligation under the Health Professions Order to consult before establishing any standards or guidance. This obligation does not apply to the criteria we produce to approve AMHP programmes (although as a matter of good practice, we will consult on the stand alone criteria).



4.18 We can quickly put in place interim arrangements to monitor the programmes without prior consultation. However, subject to the Committee's decision, the Executive will communicate the interim arrangements to AMHP programme providers and other relevant stakeholders.

## **5. Development of stand alone criteria**

- 5.1 The criteria posed on the previous page(s) are proposed on an interim basis. It is important that we develop our own criteria to approve and monitor AMHP programmes in England on an on-going basis.
- 5.2 The power to establish SOPs and SETs does not apply to AMHP programmes. This means that the criteria we develop will exist as a standalone document.
- 5.3 However, the Executive expects that the criteria will contain the functional equivalent of both the SETs and SOPs. The criteria will therefore set out the systems and processes an education provider would be expected to have in place to deliver the AMHP programmes, as well as the competencies professionals must achieve on completing the programme.
- 5.4 The Executive will prepare an initial draft of the criteria, drawing on the existing frameworks and relevant parts of our standards. The Executive will also speak to relevant stakeholders to identify any particular strengths of the existing frameworks or any areas that need to be updated. This first draft version of the criteria would then be considered at the stakeholder meeting mentioned below.

### **Stakeholders**

- 5.5 The development process will need to include appropriate stakeholder engagement, including with the following groups:
  - AMHP Leads
  - Social Care Strategic Network
  - The Association of Directors of Adult Social Services
  - The British Association of Social Work
  - The British Psychological Society
  - The Care Council for Wales
  - The College of Occupational Therapy
  - The College of Social Work
  - The Northern Ireland Social Care Council
  - The Nursing and Midwifery Council
  - The Royal College of Nursing
  - The Scottish Social Services Council
- 5.6 The list above is not intended to be exhaustive and the Executive will work with other organisations as appropriate. The Executive will also explore the best ways of engaging AMHP service users in developing the criteria.

### **Timetable for development**

- 5.7 The Executive proposes the following timetable for developing the standards. As the development of criteria is a new approach for us, the timetable allows sufficient time for careful thought and appropriate

development. However, the timetable also ensures that the criteria are in place before we begin approving AMHP programmes.

- 5.8 It is important that we involve stakeholders appropriately in developing the criteria, to ensure that the criteria set the necessary requirements. The Executive proposes that we should hold a stakeholder event in mid-September to invite comment on the draft criteria before we formally consult on the criteria. The event would be an opportunity to engage with the field before the consultation and would help us to make the consultation process more effective.

Task	Date
Approach to developing AMHP criteria and interim arrangements agreed by ETC	June 2012
Approach to developing AMHP criteria and interim arrangements agreed by Council	July 2012
Draft AMHP criteria	June – September 2012
Stakeholder meeting to discuss draft criteria	September 2012
Draft criteria considered by ETC	November 2012
Draft criteria considered by Council	December 2012
Consultation on draft criteria	January – April 2013
Criteria revised after consultation	April – May 2013
Revised criteria considered by ETC	June 2013
Revised criteria considered by Council	July 2013
Criteria published	August 2013
Criteria communicated to Education providers	September 2013

## **6. Decision**

6.1 The Committee is invited to discuss the attached paper and agree:

- the interim arrangements set out in paragraph 4.16 above; and
- the approach to developing criteria for approving AMHP programmes set out in section 5 above.

# Post-qualifying framework

for social work education  
and training



# Foreword

The General Social Care Council was created in order to promote the highest standards in social care in England. One of the ways we do this is by promoting the highest standards of training for social care workers.

After successfully introducing the new degree in social work, we are now pleased to publish details about the post-qualifying (PQ) framework for social work education and training.

The PQ framework has been thoroughly revised to build on the new social work degree and to take into account all the changes that have taken place in social work practice in recent years. Inter-professional working, service user involvement and the person-centred approach are all firmly embedded in the revised framework.

I would like to use this opportunity to thank all those who contributed to this document. The framework drew on extensive discussions and consultations with all our stakeholders, including many individuals as well as organisations. We are confident it will make a major contribution to the continuing development of the social work profession and to raising standards of social care in England.

The regulations associated with the PQ framework will come into force throughout England on 1 September 2007.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lynne Berry". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large loop for the letter 'L'.

**Lynne Berry**

Chief Executive General Social Care Council





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# Section one

## Introduction

1. The revised post-qualifying (PQ) framework for social work education builds on the qualifying degree in social work. It will be relevant to the education and training needs of qualified social workers, and will complement and support regional and local workforce planning and development. The overall objective is to ensure that post-qualifying education and training improves the standard of social work practice. User and carer involvement is an integral part of the revised PQ framework and users of social care services and their carers will be able to participate in all aspects of PQ education and training. In this way the framework will also ensure that the needs and perspectives of services users and carers are at the heart of post-qualifying education and training.

## Aims

2. **The revised PQ framework aims to be:**
  - relevant;
  - efficient and effective (representing good value for money);
  - meaningful and easily understood by practitioners;
  - accessible;
  - modular;
  - linked to national occupational standards;
  - linked to the university credit accumulation and transfer system (CATS) in a straightforward way;
  - focused on the assessment of competence in practice; and
  - likely to enhance the maintenance of national standards.
3. Everything that follows in this document is a response to the challenge of developing a framework that meets these requirements.

## Developing the qualified social work workforce

4. A key feature of the revised PQ framework is the integration of professional development with the development of the workforce. This includes forging a clear link between education and training and the development of career pathways. The revised PQ framework will provide a means by which new patterns of education and training can develop to meet the evolving needs of the workforce. It will support workforce planning and development by ensuring that all programmes of education and training approved by the GSCC are relevant to the needs of employers and employees.
5. The revised PQ framework makes it possible to link supervision, appraisal and performance management to key stages of ongoing professional development. One example of this is the way structured induction of newly qualified social workers can be linked to the first stage of post-qualifying learning – the consolidation of initial competence in a specialist context.
6. The revised PQ framework will enable all social workers to progressively enhance and develop their practice in the overall context of the six key roles described in the National Occupational Standards for Social Work (Topss 2002). At the post-qualifying stage, social work practice becomes increasingly diverse. In its emphasis on specialist knowledge and skills, the revised PQ framework recognises this.
7. Over time, the major focus of activity for some social workers may shift towards enabling or managing others. The revised PQ framework will be relevant to educators, researchers, managers and regulators as well as to practitioners.
8. For all Registered Social Workers (RSWs), the PQ framework offers a number of different ways to adhere to point six of the GSCC codes of practice. *‘As a social care worker, you must be accountable for the quality of your work and take responsibility for maintaining and improving your knowledge and skills’*. The framework will also enable social workers to fulfil post registration training and learning (PRTL) requirements. All forms of PQ will count towards PRTL.

## Developing the qualified social work workforce continued

9. The revised PQ framework has a strong inter-professional and multi-agency orientation. It will enable social workers and other professionals to study alongside one another and ensure that all social workers have a strong grounding in inter-professional and inter-agency working while simultaneously developing their social work professionalism.
10. The revised PQ framework will play a part in raising standards of practice, and over time, help to improve the quality of social work and social care in England. Occupational standards form an integral part of the revised PQ framework and progression will depend on the assessment of practice competence. The GSCC will only approve PQ programmes that specify the role of workplace learning and state clearly how practice competence will be assessed in line with occupational standards.
11. The revised PQ framework is based on a principle already firmly embedded in the qualifying degree in social work. This is the principle that academic and professional learning must be fully integrated. This means that appropriate professional outcomes, at all levels, are to be fully integrated with university validated programme and module learning outcomes.
12. The GSCC will approve programmes of learning leading to university awards that meet its requirements and will treat universities as course providers responsible for all aspects of their provision. However, in order to ensure that post-qualifying programmes are able to draw on all relevant knowledge and expertise, and provided the GSCC is informed, universities may make arrangements with other training organisations or training providers to deliver particular modules.
13. In line with the principle of academic and professional integration, each level or stage of the revised PQ framework is linked to a minimum academic level. The GSCC is willing to approve programmes offered at academic levels above those set down here as the minimum academic level for a specific award, provided regional arrangements are in place to ensure that the framework is accessible to all qualified social workers regardless of the academic level of their initial qualification.

- 14.** The modular nature of the revised PQ framework, together with its emphasis on flexible patterns of learning, will ensure that individuals can progress at their own pace. Moreover learning and development is a continuous and ongoing process. Awards are a way of recognising key staging points in this process, but participation in the revised PQ framework will start to generate positive outcomes for all concerned from the outset. In due course, these outcomes should include continuous and ongoing improvements in the quality of services and the experiences of service users and carers.
- 15.** All programmes of PQ education and training must formally monitor and review the progress of students at least once a year. The GSCC expects that this progress will normally be certified by transcripts, produced by the awarding university, that clearly identify any credits obtained or learning outcomes achieved. It is particularly important that the first stage of PQ education and training, focused on the consolidation of competence in a specialist context, is certificated in this way.
- 16.** For newly qualified social workers, the revised PQ framework provides a series of structured opportunities to develop as specialist social workers while progressing through increasingly demanding and complex levels of practice. It should be possible to access the revised PQ framework as soon as a newly qualified social worker begins induction training as part of their first PQ experience of employment.
- 17.** For experienced social workers, the revised PQ framework offers opportunities to obtain recognition and credit for what they have already achieved. It also provides ways of moving on to new types of education and training, perhaps linked to new career challenges and opportunities. Social work and social care is a rapidly developing field in which innovation and change are becoming commonplace. The revised PQ framework has been designed to support this process of innovation and change, and to enable more experienced social workers to continue to develop their careers in a rapidly changing environment. To this end, the new system incorporates accreditation of prior learning, including prior experiential learning (AP(E)L) at all levels.

# Section two

## Structure of the PQ framework

- 18.** The revised PQ framework is divided into three levels, each corresponding to a different stage of professional development.
- 19.** The focus of the first or specialist level is on consolidating, extending and deepening initial professional competence in a specialist context.
- 20.** The second or higher specialist level has a specific focus on the knowledge and skills needed to make complex judgements and discharge high levels of responsibility for the co-ordination of social support and the management of risk.
- 21.** The third or advanced level is focused on the knowledge and skills required for professional leadership and the improvement of services. This incorporates managerial forms of leadership but also includes other types of professional leadership including those linked to the promotion and dissemination of advanced practice skills.
- 22.** The revised PQ framework is an overarching framework designed to be flexible enough to embrace all areas of contemporary social work practice. It is based on a combination of:
  - generic requirements that build on the requirements of the degree in social work and are applicable to all types of social work; and
  - specialist requirements associated with particular areas of specialist practice.
- 23.** Integral to the framework is the principle that professional development is a holistic process. This is a process whereby individuals acquire knowledge and skills in different areas, which then combine with one another to promote a deeper sense of overall professional identity. At the specialist level, for example, professional development will encompass the knowledge and skills needed for direct practice, those needed for self-management and use of supervision and those that are essential to the process of mentoring colleagues and teaching and assessing students and/or colleagues. In this way, the revised PQ framework will contribute to the important task of developing a coherent and rounded social work identity beyond the point of qualification.

## The process of establishing a new programme

- 24.** Under the new arrangements, all programmes must be linked to university awards and the process of establishing a new programme will begin with application from a university to be a provider of PQ education and training. A formal statement of commitment will be required, but, in most cases, this statement will build on rather than duplicate the evidence already submitted as part of the process leading up to accreditation of the university to offer the qualifying degree in social work. Where a university already offers the qualifying degree in social work, the new process will be used to extend existing arrangements into new areas.
- 25.** Exceptionally, the GSCC may consider an application from a previously unaccredited university to offer post-qualifying programmes in social work. The statement of commitment from a previously unaccredited university will need to address the full range of requirements, including those relating to employer and stakeholder involvement, excluding those that relate only to the degree in social work.
- 26.** The GSCC will make a final decision on course approval only after it receives the final version of a university validated programme specification meeting Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) requirements. This programme specification must clearly demonstrate that the programme is designed on modular or unitised lines so that learning, teaching and assessment can be undertaken in discrete and manageable blocks of time by students who may be working full-time and will, in all cases, be studying on a part-time basis.
- 27.** Regional planning networks are an essential element of the revised PQ framework. These networks must involve employers, service users and carers at a regional, sub-regional and local level and promote an active, ongoing dialogue between employers as commissioners, and universities as providers of education. To ensure these networks are involved in course development, evidence must be submitted at the course approval stage that the programme contains a clear rationale, supported by employers, linking programme learning outcomes to employment needs and workforce planning. The flexibility inherent in the structure of the revised PQ framework will ensure that all programmes are relevant to employer needs and that employers are able to use their commissioning powers at a regional, sub-regional or local level to promote the development of innovative and practice-focused programmes.

## Post-qualifying programmes and awards

28. The revised PQ framework will support flexible module-based learning, building to university awards.
29. Practice competence is at the heart of the revised PQ framework and all approved programmes will be expected to incorporate significant amounts of workplace learning. In order for workplace learning to develop, there will need to be a growth in the numbers of those with relevant knowledge and skills. Over time, the revised PQ framework will enable increasing numbers of qualified social workers with skills in the teaching and assessment of practice to become available for the support of workplace learning. However, the availability of this resource will be a key strategic issue for universities and employers to consider when planning new programmes.
30. Awards will be offered by universities linked to programmes of learning and teaching approved and regulated by the GSCC. Universities will be responsible for the titles of their own awards. However, to enhance the accessibility and transparency of the PQ framework, all universities will be asked to ensure that the titles of their awards draw on the terminology which has been used to develop the revised PQ framework, as well as that used to describe particular areas of specialist practice.

## Programmes leading to a post-qualifying award in specialist social work

31. The minimum academic level for programmes leading to an approved post-qualifying award in specialist social work is honours level or level H in the QAA framework. It is envisaged that these programmes will be offered in two main academic forms and, provided they meet all its requirements, programmes of either kind will be approved by the GSCC. In order to ensure that the PQ framework remains accessible to all qualified social workers, whether they are graduates or non-graduates, a post-qualifying programme in specialist social work may be approved either as all or part of the final year of an honours degree or as a freestanding graduate diploma.



- 32.** Universities may offer this award at a higher academic level, but they will need to ensure that those without degree level qualifications also have opportunities to access a comparable programme. Whether offered as part of an honours degree or as a graduate diploma, all programmes leading to a post-qualifying award in specialist social work should retain their character as programmes designed for those who have already qualified as social workers and are seeking to consolidate, extend and deepen their initial competence in a specialist context.

## Programmes leading to a post-qualifying award in higher specialist social work

- 33.** The minimum academic level for programmes leading to a post-qualifying award in higher specialist social work is level M in the QAA framework. At this level, the framework offers opportunities to begin to develop career pathways in professional practice, professional management, professional education and applied professional research. For some, the learning associated with the higher specialist level will be one component of an advanced programme of professional study leading to a masters degree (see para 35).
- 34.** The higher specialist level is associated with professional issues involving complex problem solving and critical thinking that can only be assessed at the postgraduate level. However, it is not envisaged that higher specialist programmes will involve the volume of learning or assessment associated with a masters degree and there will be no GSCC requirement to undertake an assessed research project. It is therefore envisaged that freestanding higher specialist programmes that do not lead on to an advanced award programme will be offered at postgraduate diploma level. Postgraduate diplomas awarded to those who, for whatever reason, do not complete an advanced award programme, will be recognised by the GSCC as equivalent to higher specialist awards, provided all requirements have been met.

## Programmes leading to a post-qualifying award in advanced social work

35. The minimum academic level for programmes leading to a post-qualifying award in advanced social work is level M in the QAA framework. Level M is the academic level common to both postgraduate diplomas and masters degrees. However, only programmes leading to masters degrees will be approved as advanced award programmes. These programmes will build on and incorporate higher specialist work, but they will also require professional ‘mastery’ of a specific area of work with a strong emphasis on various aspects of professional leadership. This includes leadership in relation to professional practice, professional management, professional education or applied professional research.
36. Another feature of the advanced level is that it has a focus on developing the capacity to evaluate and undertake research to support the ongoing improvement of services. The advanced level links knowledge and skills for leadership with those associated with research and the improvement of services.

## The conceptual model

37. The conceptual model underlying the revised PQ framework draws on three key principles:
  - a. The process of ongoing professional development is broadly similar for all social workers and the stages of professional development are best described as ‘generic’ levels or levels of professional development common to all. These ‘generic’ levels are the qualifying, specialist, higher specialist and advanced levels described above.
  - b. In the context of contemporary social work practice, professional competence at any level beyond that of the qualifying degree in social work can only be meaningfully evaluated in a specific or specialist context and therefore in relation to the national standards associated with a specific or specialist area of practice.
  - c. Some standards underpin social work at all levels and should be integral to both the qualifying degree and any PQ programme of education and training in social work.

- 38.** Each level of the revised PQ framework is defined by the broad generic criteria specific to that level. These criteria define the specialist, higher specialist and advanced levels of the revised PQ framework, but they also differentiate between them.
- 39.** Specialist standards are specific to a particular area or field of social work practice. These particular areas or fields of social work practice may not always be based on specific service user groups. In some cases, they may apply only to social work, but they may also be inter-professional in scope and applicability. The GSCC will produce a clear map of relevant standards for each specialist area.
- 40.** The underpinning standards of the revised PQ framework underline the overall coherence of social work as a profession and occupation, the continuity between pre-qualifying and post-qualifying education and training and the vital importance of social work values and the codes of practice for all types of social work. They apply right across the revised PQ framework at all levels and in all specialist contexts. These underpinning standards include the Topss *National Occupational Standards for Social Work*, and the GSCC codes of practice, but some key standards (subject to review) are also contained in the *Guidance on the assessment of practice in the workplace* (GSCC and Topss).
- 41.** The example below (Figure 1) focuses on one area of specialist practice at three different levels and illustrates how levels and standards combine with one another to create the regulatory framework for any post-qualifying programme. The vertical column represents the PQ levels and their associated level criteria. The horizontal column represents the various standards applicable to a post-qualifying programme. To illustrate, the diagram focuses on just one set of specialist standards but includes the full set of underpinning standards applicable to all programmes. The title given to this particular specialist area is provisional and may change.
- 42.** As Figure 1 illustrates, a programme in children and families social work offered at the specialist level will:
- address each of the 11 criteria associated with the specialist level;
  - incorporate all the standards associated with the sample specialist area; and
  - incorporate all the underpinning standards.

## The matrix of levels and standards

**Figure 1: The relationship between post-qualifying programmes and the levels and standards of the revised PQ framework**

PQ LEVELS and associated level criteria	STANDARDS			
	Specialist standards	Underpinning standards		
	EXAMPLE Specialist standards (and requirements) for post- qualifying programmes in social work with children, young people and families	Topss England National Occupational Standards for Social Work	GSCC Codes of practice	GSCC and Topss Guidance on the assessment of practice in the workplace (subject to review and possible revision)
<b>Specialist social work</b> Criteria: i-xi (see para 45-49)	A post-qualifying award programme in specialist social work (children, young people and families)			
<b>Higher specialist social work</b> Criteria: i-ix (see para 50-51)	A post-qualifying award programme in higher specialist social work (children, young people and families)			
<b>Advanced social work</b> Criteria: i-x (see para 52)	A post-qualifying award programme in advanced social work (children, young people and families)			

- 43.** Figure 1 also shows that a programme in children and families social work offered at the higher specialist level will:
- address each of the nine criteria associated with the higher specialist level;
  - incorporate all the standards associated with the sample specialist area, including any additional requirements specific to this level; and
  - incorporate all the underpinning standards.
- 44.** Finally, Figure 1 shows that a programme in children and families social work offered at the advanced level will:
- address each of the ten criteria associated with the advanced level;
  - incorporate all the standards associated with the sample specialist area, including any additional requirements specific to this level; and
  - incorporate all the underpinning standards.

## Awards, levels and level criteria

### **Programmes leading to a post-qualifying award in specialist social work (generic level criteria)**

- 45.** Programmes leading to a post-qualifying award in specialist social work allows practitioners with a qualification in social work to develop the range of knowledge and skills associated with competence in depth in a particular area of specialist social work practice. At this level, the aim is to develop well-rounded practitioners, confident about working in inter-professional and inter-agency contexts, who have demonstrated competence in a range of key areas including direct work with service users, families and carers, self-management and use of supervision and mentoring and practice education.
- 46.** Specialist award programmes consolidate and extend initial competence as well as developing competence in depth in a specific area of practice. It is anticipated that employers and universities will work together to ensure that structured programmes of induction and the natural assessment points associated with the completion of probationary requirements will be integrated with modules supporting the consolidation of initial competence. So the consolidation of competence in a specialist context (described in para 49, criteria iii) will be the focus of a single module located at the first stage of these programmes.

## Awards, levels and level criteria continued

- 47.** Consolidation of initial competence in a specialist context must be demonstrated across all the units of the *National Occupational Standards for Social Work* and this will have implications for learning and teaching strategies. The GSCC does not wish to impose a single template for this module but all relevant requirements must be clearly demonstrated in both the content and the assessment of this module. In particular, all programme specifications should make specific reference to para 49, criteria iii in relation to this module. The GSCC may designate additional requirements for this module in relation to specific areas of specialist practice.
- 48.** Those who reach the level of development associated with a specialist award will be well equipped to progress further in their careers. However, the primary aim is to raise standards in social work by ensuring that increasing numbers of qualified social workers have available to them a way of consolidating and extending their initial level of competence and developing additional competence in depth in their specified areas of practice.
- 49.** In order to satisfy approval requirements, specialist programmes must show how they will enable qualified social workers to:
- i.** Meet the relevant academic standards associated with social work at this level.
  - ii.** Think critically about their own practice in the context of the GSCC codes of practice, national and international codes of professional ethics and the principles of diversity, equality and social inclusion in a wide range of situations, including those associated with inter-agency and inter-professional work.
  - iii.** Consolidate and consistently demonstrate in direct work with users of social care services and carers the full range of social work competences across all the units of the *National Occupational Standards for Social Work* and in the context of one area of specialist social work practice.
  - iv.** Draw on knowledge and understanding of service users' and carers' issues to actively contribute to strategies and practice which promote service users' and carers' rights and participation in line with the goals of choice, independence and empowerment.

- v. Use reflection and critical analysis to continuously develop and improve their specialist practice, including their practice in inter-professional and inter-agency contexts, drawing systematically, accurately and appropriately on theories, models and relevant up-to-date research.
- vi. Extend initial competence so as to develop in-depth competence in the context of one area of specialist practice to agreed national specialist standards, drawing on knowledge and experience of the range of settings and service systems that impact on the lives of service users.
- vii. Work effectively in a context of risk, uncertainty conflict and contradiction.
- viii. Teach, mentor, and support social work or other students and/or colleagues and contribute to assessment against national occupational standards.
- ix. Take responsibility for the effective use of supervision to identify and explore issues, develop and implement plans and improve own practice.
- x. Effectively manage own work and demonstrate a capacity to plan for and respond to change in organisational, inter-organisational and team contexts.
- xi. Develop and implement effective ways of working in networks across organisational, sectoral and professional boundaries, demonstrating a well-developed awareness of the relationship between social work and other roles and an ability to overcome barriers to multi-agency and multi-disciplinary communication, thereby promoting inter-professional working and delivering integrated and person centred services.

### Higher specialist and advanced award programmes

50. Programmes leading to a post-qualifying award in higher specialist social work will offer valuable professional qualifications closely related to new roles now emerging in the context of workforce development. Within the PQ framework, higher specialist work is also an essential component of the post-qualifying award in advanced social work.

## Awards, levels and level criteria continued

### Programmes leading to a post-qualifying award in higher specialist social work (generic level requirements)

- 51.** The higher specialist level of the PQ framework is associated with complex decision making and high levels of professional responsibility. Higher specialist programmes are for those who have already demonstrated competence in-depth. In order to satisfy approval requirements, higher specialist programmes will need to show how they will enable qualified social workers to:
- i.** Meet the academic standards for work at level M in the QAA framework.
  - ii.** Use independent critical judgement to systematically develop their own practice and that of others in the context of the GSCC codes of practice, national and international codes of professional ethics and the principles of diversity, equality and social inclusion in a wide range of situations including those associated with inter-agency and inter-professional work.
  - iii.** Demonstrate a substantially enhanced level of competence in a defined area of professional practice, professional management, professional education or applied professional research to the agreed national standards for higher specialist work in this area.
  - iv.** Demonstrate a fully-developed capacity to use reflection and critical analysis to continuously develop and improve own performance and the performance of professional and inter-professional groups, teams and networks; analysing, evaluating and applying relevant and up-to-date research evidence including service user research.
  - v.** Use a critical knowledge and understanding of service user and carers issues to develop and implement service user and carer rights and participation in line with the goals of choice, independence and empowerment.
  - vi.** Work effectively as a practitioner, researcher, educator or manager in a context of risk, uncertainty conflict and contradiction where there are complex challenges and a need to make informed and balanced judgements.



- vii. Take responsibility for managing aspects of complex change processes, including those involving other professions or other agencies, in the context of professional practice, professional management, professional education and training or applied professional research.
- viii. Support, mentor, supervise or manage others enabling them to identify and explore issues and improve their own practice.
- ix. Develop and implement effective ways of working in networks across organisational, sectoral and professional boundaries, taking responsibility for identifying, analysing and resolving complex issues, problems and barriers, promoting partnership, collaboration, inter-professional teamwork, multi-agency and multi-disciplinary communication, and ensuring the delivery of integrated and person centred services.

#### **Programmes leading to a post-qualifying award advanced social work (generic level requirements)**

- 52.** The advanced level of professional competence will incorporate and build on higher specialist competences, aiming to produce individuals with the ability to lead the further growth and development of the social work profession, drawing on in-depth knowledge of a specialist area of work and experience of conducting research and applying research to practice. The additional requirements associated with the movement from higher specialist to advanced work are indicated by the use of italics in the criteria listed below. Overall, programmes of advanced social work education and training allow qualified social workers who have demonstrated competence in-depth and been assessed as capable of working at a higher specialist level to:
- i. Meet the academic standards for work at level M in the QAA framework.
  - ii. Use independent critical judgement to *take a leading role* in systematically developing their own practice and that of others in the context of the GSCC codes of practice, national and international codes of professional ethics, the principles of diversity, equality and social inclusion in a wide range of situations including those associated with inter-agency and inter-professional work.
  - iii. Demonstrate a substantially enhanced level of competence in a defined area of professional practice, professional management, professional education or applied professional research to the agreed national standards for higher specialist work in this area *and take a leading role in promoting good practice.*

**Awards, levels and level criteria** continued

- iv.** Demonstrate a fully developed capacity to *take responsibility for the use of reflection and critical analysis* to continuously develop and improve own performance and the performance of professional and inter-professional groups, teams and networks in the context of professional practice, professional management, professional education or applied professional research; analysing, evaluating and applying relevant and up-to-date research evidence including service user research.
- v.** Use a critical knowledge and understanding of service user and carer issues to *actively promote*, develop and implement service user and carer rights and participation in line with the goals of choice, independence and empowerment.
- vi.** Undertake research designed to address issues or problems in the context of professional practice, professional education, applied professional research or professional management.
- vii.** Work creatively and effectively as a practitioner, researcher, educator or manager *and take a leading role* in a context of risk, uncertainty conflict and contradiction or where there are complex challenges and a need to make informed and balanced judgements.
- viii.** Take *a lead* responsibility for managing *key* aspects of complex change processes, including those involving other professions or other agencies, in the context of professional practice, professional management, professional education and training or applied professional research.
- ix.** Support, mentor, supervise or manage others, exercising practice, research, management or educational leadership to enable them to identify and explore issues and improve their own practice.
- x.** *Take a leading role* in the development and implementation of effective ways of working in networks across organisational, sectoral and professional boundaries, taking *a lead* responsibility for identifying, analysing and resolving complex issues, problems and barriers, promoting partnership, collaboration, inter-professional teamwork, multi-agency and multi-disciplinary communication and ensuring the delivery of integrated and person-centred services.

# Section three

## National specialist standards

- 53.** In order to ensure comparability of standards throughout England, similar programmes will be approved and inspected according to the same set of national standards. The generic level criteria described in section two are one aspect of the proposed national framework of standards. In addition, all programmes will need to demonstrate how they will develop appropriate levels of competency in one or more identified specialist contexts. A definitive set of such standards together with any associated teaching and learning requirements will be published by GSCC before any programmes in that specialist area are approved.
- 54.** To maintain flexibility specialist areas will be defined in broad terms. This will give regional planners and commissioners an opportunity to have a direct input into course design. Specialist standards will need to draw on one or more of the following:
- i.** legal requirements and statutory instruments e.g. Approved Social Work;
  - ii.** occupational standards, e.g. Child Care Award;
  - iii.** policy guidance, e.g. care management, care programme approach or the vision for adult social care;
  - iv.** other government requirements e.g. the six headings of the common core of the children's workforce;
  - v.** other relevant sector skills council definitions and requirements;
  - vi.** National service frameworks; and
  - vii.** national employer agreements.
- 55.** Where a regional planning network wishes to commission a specialist programme which falls outside the scope of any of these and where there is no general national specialist framework within which the proposal can be appropriately nested, the regional planning network will first need to obtain national backing for its plans and national support for its specialist standards from the GSCC, and the setting of these standards will need to involve Topss England and possibly other sector skills councils.

## Regional planning networks

- 56.** A condition of approval is that all programmes emerge from and are linked to either a regional planning and commissioning process or a national planning and commissioning process. Where the term ‘region’ is used it should be taken to mean the government regions of England. These are equivalent to the current Topss regions. The GSCC also wishes to see evidence of a robust relationship between local and sub-regional partnerships and regional arrangements.
- 57.** The GSCC will not prescribe the form these planning and commissioning arrangements will take but they must sit within a broader context of workforce planning and development.
- 58.** At a regional level they must include the following elements:
- The planning and commissioning process must cover both regional, sub-regional and local arrangements.
  - The network must include all universities accredited for PQ based in or operating in the region.
  - The network must be linked to one or more learning resource centres and networks.
  - Topss regional networks must have a key strategic role.
  - The network must show how it is building on past experience and drawing on available expertise.
  - The network must be employment-driven and membership must include employers from all relevant employment sectors.
  - Service users and carers must be enabled to play a key role as regional stakeholders.
  - There must be clear mechanisms for the commissioning of programmes.
- 59.** National commissioning arrangements may well develop alongside regional arrangements. The form of commissioning arrangements involving individual universities and national employers of social workers will not be prescribed by the GSCC. GSCC requirements in relation to the relevance of such programmes can be met at the approval stage by providing evidence of the relationship between the proposed programme and the workforce plans of the individual employer.
- 60.** To encourage inter-professional developments and to assist with the planning process regional networks should include NHS workforce confederations and strategic health authorities.

## Participation and involvement of users of social care services and carers

61. In order to ensure that user and carer involvement is at the heart of the PQ system, arrangements for user and carer participation and involvement must be comprehensive. This means that these arrangements must be an integral part of arrangements for regional, sub-regional, local planning and commissioning of programmes, ensuring that the profile of training needs draws on user and carer voices and experiences. It also means that user and carer involvement and participation needs to be a feature of programme design and programme delivery. This will include involvement in teaching, assessment and course planning.
62. Programmes must have in place systems to support and enable users of social care services and carers to make an effective contribution in all these areas.

## Inter-professionalism in the framework

63. The PQ framework, as a whole, is designed to promote inter-professional education. This should be reflected in the design of programmes at all levels of the framework. The great majority of modules approved for PQ should be accessible to appropriately qualified members of other professions. Other appropriately qualified individuals including users of social care services and carers should also be able to access relevant modules or units of study. All such modules will need to be incorporated within a number of different programme specifications. This, in turn, means that universities will need to have ways of organising inter-professional module validations on an inter-professional basis and to have ways of involving all relevant regulatory bodies in this process. The PQ framework is a framework for professional social work but the GSCC wishes to encourage common learning at the module level.
64. Common learning is an important ingredient of inter-professional education. But inter-professionalism cannot be promoted only by means of shared modules. There is a distinct body of knowledge and skills associated with inter-professional and inter-agency working. The revised PQ framework addresses this body of knowledge and skills in two main ways. First, it is referred to explicitly in the generic criteria at all levels (see para 63). Second, it is referred to in particular sets of specialist standards.

## Career pathways, professional development and PQ

65. In addition to any other requirements, higher specialist and advanced programme specifications are expected to incorporate exemplars showing how different module options or student pathways will allow students to build the kind of knowledge and skills needed to pursue different kinds of career pathways. Programmes at these levels are expected to make such pathways explicit in their publicity and to show how such pathways might relate to careers in practice, professional management, education and training or applied research. The programme specification must also show how students may access appropriate advice and guidance, helping them to select the combination of modules appropriate to their chosen pathway.

## Selection processes and entry requirements

66. The PQ framework should be accessible to all qualified social workers regardless of their academic qualifications. This means that where a university wishes to offer a diploma in specialist social work at a level above that of a graduate diploma or the final honours year of a degree they must provide evidence that this is not diminishing opportunities for non-graduates. This evidence must be presented with reference to the regional PQ plans made within the context of regional planning and commissioning. These plans must show how different groups of students can access programmes relevant to their needs and that issues of transport and communication have been fully thought through.
67. Formal interviews may not always be necessary, but it is proposed that programmes must have in place ways of reliably evaluating the capacity of individuals to benefit from particular programmes and ways of ensuring that any special needs or skill deficits are identified prior to the commencement of the programme, so that they can be satisfactorily addressed. Although all of these are addressed in relation to the selection requirements for the qualifying degree in social work, programmes will need to demonstrate that they are aware that in some cases these may include needs associated with written and verbal communication, numeracy and computer literacy.

## Accreditation of prior experiential learning and other flexibilities

- 68.** Accreditation of prior experiential learning AP(E)L is a powerful tool for demonstrating the value placed on the knowledge and skills acquired in a wide range of different ways by the qualified social work workforce. There are no professional reasons for limiting the proportion of prior learning that can be accredited by programmes and the GSCC will not create any obstacles to the creative and flexible use of AP(E)L. Moreover, all programmes must show how their AP(E)L proposals fit into regional plans to provide routes through the framework for all parts of the qualified social work workforce, including those with large volumes of experience but few academic qualifications. The PQ Framework is designed to be used by the whole of the qualified social work workforce and AP(E)L should be seen as a key tool for making sure that this happens.
- 69.** Individuals should be able to receive full credit where they have completed programmes of assessed and certificated learning which can be mapped closely onto the learning outcomes of approved post-qualifying programmes.
- 70.** All programmes must be explicit about structures, systems and processes for AP(E)L and where restrictions apply. This information should be published in an accessible form.
- 71.** Applications for course approval should also demonstrate there are mechanisms in place that will enable suitable candidates to make effective use of relevant experience in addition to any credit they may have been given via AP(E)L. This is an additional form of flexibility that might include arrangements for structured portfolio-based modules enabling students to both reflect on experience and be assessed on these reflections.
- 72.** While applicants for programmes leading to higher specialist and advanced qualifications will, in future, be likely to hold one of the new specialist awards, a Post-qualifying Award in Social Work (PQSW) or its equivalent, programmes must also make provision for those without such qualifications who are able to demonstrate that they have attained the outcomes associated with the specialist award and are therefore eligible to enrol on a higher specialist or advanced programme. This process should not be seen as an application for credit and should not be linked to AP(E)L procedures. Rather, it should be seen as one whereby admissions officers ascertain whether an individual can provide convincing evidence of the kind of achievements that would indicate that they were able to benefit from a higher specialist or advanced programme in the same way as someone who had successfully completed a specialist award.

## Accreditation of prior experiential learning and other flexibilities continued

- 73.** Existing PQ qualifications are fully compatible with the revised PQ framework. The PQSW is equivalent to one of the new post-qualifying awards in specialist social work. The GSCC will expect universities to ensure that PQSW holders do not need to make use of AP(E)L procedures to establish their eligibility for higher specialist and advanced programmes.
- 74.** While newly qualified social workers will normally be expected to complete all modules and levels of the framework as they progress in their careers, the GSCC will encourage fast track AP(E)L routes for experienced social workers able to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in other ways. This will enhance the attractiveness of the framework to both employers and employees.
- 75.** The GSCC expects universities to ensure that students are able to obtain full credit for the certificated learning they have undertaken on GSCC approved programmes at other institutions of higher education and will expect specific agreements to be in place between universities at a regional level to ensure that this happens. These regional agreements may include agreements on volumes of credit for specific modules taught at a number of different universities. It will be particularly important for universities to ensure that modules associated with consolidation of initial competence, the first stage of any post-qualifying award in specialist social work are covered by these regional agreements. Any regional agreement must be in line with the national framework described in this document and any specialist requirements laid down by the GSCC.



# Section four

## Assessment requirements relevant to achievement of specific awards

### For programmes leading to a post-qualifying award in specialist social work

76. Programme specifications must be in line with the agreed specialist standards relevant to a particular award. Every element of the programme specification must be assessed and programmes must show how competence will be assessed in relation to all the criteria associated with the specialist level of professional development. Programme specifications must also show how assessment supports a process of professional development that moves by stages through the phase of consolidation of initial competence to the development of competence in depth. Assessment must also be undertaken with reference to relevant specialist standards although some modules may be flexible enough to be suitable for qualified social workers across a range of specialisms. In the course of this process, professional competence must be assessed in relation to the following:

- Topss *National Occupational Standards*;
- GSCC codes of practice;
- QAA *Social Work Subject Benchmark Statement* (where it sets appropriate academic benchmarks for degree programmes, and for those who are already qualified as professional social workers);
- any relevant specialist standards; and
- GSCC and Topss *Guidance on the assessment of practice in the workplace*.

## Assessment requirements relevant to achievement of specific awards continued

### For programmes leading to a post-qualifying award in higher specialist social work

**77.** Programme specifications must be in line with the specialist standards relevant to a particular award. Every element of the programme specification must be assessed. Programmes must show how competence will be assessed in relation to all the criteria associated with the higher specialist level of professional development. Assessment must also be undertaken with reference to specialist standards although some modules may be flexible enough to be suitable for qualified social workers across a range of specialisms. Professional competence at this level should be assessed in relation to the following:

- Topss *National Occupational Standards*;
- GSCC codes of practice;
- relevant specialist standards; and
- GSCC and Topss *Guidance on the assessment of practice in the workplace*.

### For programmes leading to a post-qualifying award in advanced social work

**78.** Programme specifications must conform to the agreed requirements for a particular award. Every element of a programme specification must be assessed. Programmes must show how competence will be assessed in relation to all the criteria associated with the advanced level of professional development. Assessment must also be undertaken with reference to specialist standards although some modules may be flexible enough for qualified social workers across a range of specialisms. The ten advanced criteria incorporate and build on the nine higher specialist criteria and all advanced competencies should be assessed in relation to the following:

- Topss *National Occupational Standards*;
- GSCC codes of practice;
- relevant specialist standards; and
- GSCC and Topss *Guidance on the assessment of practice in the workplace*.

# Section five

## For all awards at all levels:

79. For any PQ award approved by the GSCC, practice competence must be systematically and comprehensively assessed to an appropriate standard and level.
80. On leaving a programme all students must be provided with a full transcript identifying modules passed and credit acquired. This also applies to those leaving a course before completing their full programme of study. In this way their learning will be certificated by means of transcripts of programmes followed and credits awarded.

## Mentoring, practice teaching and assessment

81. At the specialist level, all programmes must show how they will develop knowledge and skills in mentoring, practice teaching and assessment. Programme specifications must show clearly how the domains of practice identified in the GSCC and Topss *Guidance on the assessment of practice in the workplace* will be addressed. This guidance will be regularly reviewed and updated.
82. A staged process should be evident. Initial or baseline competence in the majority of the competences identified in domains A and B of the GSCC and Topss *Guidance on the assessment of practice in the workplace* must be assessed before candidates receive a full and final assessment of their competence in all domains of practice including domain C *Manage the assessment of learners in practice*. The philosophy underpinning this is consistent with that adopted by other professions in that it seeks to introduce two distinct levels of development, one focused on mentoring/support/guidance and the other focused on practice assessment. The *Guidance on the assessment of practice in the workplace* document contains underpinning standards and therefore applies throughout the proposed framework. However, it has a particular significance in relation to practice teaching and assessment at the specialist level.
83. The process of review and updating the domains of practice will, in the near future, include looking at the competences associated with strategic roles and activities. This may lead to changes to the descriptions of the 'domains' and new standards in relation to higher specialist and advanced knowledge and skills for practice teaching and assessment.

## Evidence requirements

- 84.** There is scope within the revised PQ framework for particular requirements to be set in relation to awards in specific specialist areas. These may include reference to specific evidence requirements. However, the only specific evidence requirements associated with the proposed overarching PQ framework are as follows:
- All programmes must ensure that they draw on direct evidence of practice competence in addition to any other types of evidence that might be considered necessary.
  - All programmes must draw on a range of evidence including evidence drawn from the workplace.
  - All programmes must demonstrate that the assessment strategy is based on a partnership between higher education institutions and employers and focuses on the integration of theory and practice.
- 85.** The general PQ framework does not set any particular requirements around volumes or proportions of particular types of assessment. Specialist areas of practice may well impose requirements of this kind (see para 84). However, all programmes are expected to contain an assessment of practice and to be explicit about the way in which practice is to be assessed. Moreover, the framework as a whole is designed to lever up the quality of practice. At the approval stage, this focus will inform GSCC judgements about the fitness for purpose of the assessment framework. Programmes that do not have assessment structures and systems that are fit for purpose will not be approved. Wherever practice is directly assessed there must be a demonstrable capacity to do so. This means that approval will take into account arrangements for workplace learning and workplace assessment.
- 86.** The GSCC (following QAA guidelines) encourages the use of a wide range of assessment tools, but in all cases, a clear relationship to practice will be expected. In a modular scheme, assessment is of specific learning outcomes. When approving programmes, the GSCC will need to be provided with explicit evidence that the full set of learning outcomes comprehensively addresses all relevant requirements and standards.

## University commitments

- 87.** Universities offering the qualifying degree in social work are accredited by the GSCC in relation to four areas:
- quality-assurance;
  - key personnel and involvement;
  - resources; and
  - information.
- 88.** Accredited universities intending to offer programmes of PQ education and training will need to provide some additional evidence.
- 89.** In relation to quality-assurance evidence will be sought of:
- An overall commitment to develop programmes of post-qualifying education and training in line with the revised GSCC framework of PQ education and training in social work.
  - A commitment to ensure that PQ education and training comprehensively incorporates the involvement of users of social care services and carers in the development of regional training plans, programme design, development, delivery and assessment.
  - A commitment to provide for flexible access to programmes of PQ education and training (including a commitment to publish guidance for AP(E)L, paying specific attention to the needs of experienced social workers, who may need help to evidence their achievements).
  - A commitment to ensure that the practice competence of students is assessed at an appropriate level and in relation to appropriate standards as determined by the relationship of the award to the PQ framework of education and training.
- 90.** In relation to key personnel and involvement evidence will be sought of:
- A commitment to ensure that all students are taught and assessed by appropriately qualified and experienced people, including carers and those who have developed an expertise in relation to their experiences as users of social work services.
  - A commitment to ensure that qualified registered social workers are always involved in workplace teaching and assessment.

## Relevance

- 91.** The concept of ‘relevance’ is introduced as a fifth area around which evidence of commitment will be sought. The intention of the GSCC is to ensure that evidence is provided at an early stage of a strategic commitment on the part of the university to work in collaboration with employers, carers, users of social care services and other providers of PQ social work education and training on a regional, sub-regional and local level.
- 92.** Evidence will be sought of a specific commitment to:
- identify current and future education and training needs;
  - develop regional training plans;
  - contribute to the local and regional development of forms of education and training to meet these needs ensuring that regional provision, as a whole, is appropriate, flexible and accessible; and
  - provide education and training in accordance with regional plans as commissioned by regional workforce bodies or in response to demand from specific employers.
- 93.** As so much of current practice is conducted in inter-professional and multi-agency contexts, universities are also expected to make a commitment to work with other bodies to ensure that modules are designed to enable other professionals to participate in them. Where appropriate, they will also be expected to incorporate inter-professional modules validated, accredited or approved by other professional bodies or regulators within post-qualifying programmes of PQ education and training for social work.
- 94.** Specific evidence will be required of employer commitment to working with universities in regional/sub-regional and local planning networks.

## Monitoring, review and inspection

- 95.** The arrangements for ongoing monitoring of standards and review and inspection of approved PQ programmes are modelled on those adopted for the degree in social work, but there are also some differences.
- 96.** PQ programmes must appoint at least one external examiner who has a GSCC recognised social work qualification. Annual monitoring of programmes will include scrutiny of external examiners reports. Universities responsible for approved courses of post-qualifying education and training must provide copies of external examiner reports to the GSCC together with copies of university responses and, where appropriate, information on subsequent actions. The GSCC will publish these reports in summary form.
- 97.** On an annual basis, universities responsible for approved courses will be required to supply copies of any internal evaluations of course quality. They will also be required to monitor stakeholder views about programme quality and to make the results of these stakeholder monitoring exercises available to the GSCC if asked for.
- 98.** All PQ programmes are to be reviewed on a five-year cycle and reviews will formally confirm re-approval of programmes. These reviews will involve visits by officers of the GSCC and/or independent visitors appointed by the GSCC for this purpose. Reviews will always involve opportunities for stakeholders to provide their views on the quality and fitness for purpose of PQ programmes.
- 99.** Courses may be inspected at any time if there is evidence that indicates an inspection process should be triggered. The specific triggers for inspection are those laid down in the regulations governing the degree in social work. Inspection visits are to be carried out by a panel consisting of officers of the GSCC and independent visitors.
- 100.** Further information on these procedures will be made available in due course.

## Student information and complaints procedures

- 101.** The requirements relating to student information and complaints for PQ are identical to those contained in the requirements for the qualifying degree in social work.

## Ending training

- 102.** Requirements identical to those for the qualifying degree in social work will apply to any issues associated with the premature ending of training. However, there will be an additional requirement to involve the employer of the student at an early stage and for all concerned to fulfil their responsibilities under the GSCC codes of practice.









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General  
**Social Care**  
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**Social Care**  
Council

Specialist standards and requirements  
for post-qualifying social work education  
and training

## **Social work in mental health services**

Revised May 2010

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# Section 1

## Introduction and explanation of the requirements

1. This document contains the specialist standards and requirements for post-qualifying (PQ) programmes of education and training for social work in mental health services. This document should be read in conjunction with the *Post-qualifying framework for social work education and training* (General Social Care Council, revised 2009) which describes the relationship between general and specialist requirements relating to different areas of social work practice. The generic value base and range of knowledge and skills which must be demonstrated at post-qualifying levels, and are to be embedded in all PQ awards, are given below.

2. The revised PQ framework is an overarching framework designed to be flexible enough to embrace all areas of contemporary social work practice. It is based on a combination of:

- generic requirements that build on the requirements of the degree in social work and are applicable to all types of social work; and
- specialist requirements associated with particular areas of specialist practice (GSCC, 2006, para 22, p8).

3. The PQ framework is divided into three different levels: specialist; higher specialist; and advanced levels. Each level is linked to a set of criteria and builds on the one below (GSCC, 2005, para 45-52, p15-19). The specialist level is made up of a consolidation module plus further specialist modules. These requirements apply to all levels of the PQ framework. The nature of social work practice in the specialist mental health context does not fundamentally change, but rather grows and develops as individuals acquire higher levels of knowledge and skill.

4. These requirements provide an opportunity for the development, delivery and recognition of PQ training and awards for all social workers in the specialist mental health context, whatever their role, employment or service setting. They provide an opportunity for universities, working with commissioners of programmes, to develop and deliver a wide range of modular programmes that fit the specific needs of particular groups of staff. Universities design modules to be attractive to a wide range of organisations and individuals from a range of different backgrounds and experiences, including people who use services and carers, and other professionals.



## Specialist context of contemporary mental health social work practice

5. Social work provides an integral contribution to mental health services and is a crucial component in their development. Social work values, skills and knowledge already encompass the approaches set out in current Government policy documents. These emphasise the need for people who use services to actively participate in their care. Social workers have historically sought to work in partnership with people who use services. More than any other profession, their value base is most closely aligned to this approach.

6. Social workers are the only mental health workers with social science training, which supports a unique sociological perspective and empowerment ethic (McCrae, et al 2005). This encompasses a wide range of theoretical perspectives and methods of intervention, underpinned by participative approaches, anti-oppressive practice and the principles of social inclusion. Within a multi-disciplinary practice context they are equipped to be protagonists of social models, able to look beyond the person's mental distress to important dimensions such as social inclusion. They also look at mental health consequences of abuse and discrimination including stigma arising from diagnosis of mental ill health, and relationships with family and informal carers.

7. Users of mental health services and their carers and families have stressed the importance of social workers taking an individualised person-centred yet holistic approach to their work with them. This imperative is clearly emphasised in *the National Service Framework for Mental Health* (Department of Health), *the Ten Essential Capabilities Framework* (NIMHE), and the National Occupational Standards that all influence mental health social work and are referred to later in this document. It is also echoed throughout the Government White Paper, *Our health, our care, our say*.

8. This person-centred yet holistic approach traditionally engages mental health social workers' trained expertise in cases of considerable diagnostic and causal complexity, including personality disorder, and in equally complex interventions with people who have mental health problems, their families and carers. For social workers, this approach includes effectively managing the dilemmas that can exist between enabling and protecting people who experience mental distress. It includes identifying children in need and at risk, safeguarding their welfare and assessing parental capacity as well as addressing the mental health problems of adults and their carers, who may also be children or young people.

9. The practice context for mental health social workers includes an extensive range of legislative, statutory and policy instruments, not only mental health legislation, to which they work with particular trained knowledge, understanding and skill.

**10.** The range of service and employment settings to which social workers bring their distinctive mental health social work contribution is very diverse and not restricted to 'traditional' mental health service environments or the statutory role of the Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP). Mental health social workers practice, for example, within local authority services and trusts of various health and social care configurations, hospitals, day centres, clinics, housing services, criminal justice services, and in health and social care services in the independent, voluntary and private sectors.

**11.** Increasingly the normal place of work for mental health social workers is within multi-disciplinary teams. Good multi-disciplinary practice seeks to address the needs and issues of holistic care, recovery and complexity in person-centred work in which there is an increased focus on people who use services and carers. Social work values, skills and knowledge traditionally address these dimensions already. Social work contributes, for example, to multi-disciplinary mental health services that provide assertive outreach, early intervention in psychosis, crisis assessment and home treatment in services for adults of working age, specialist community teams for older people with mental health needs, children and adolescents' mental health services (CAMHS), and learning disability community teams. Mental health social workers are also employed in specialist NHS employment and are found as managers at all levels.

**12.** Mental health social workers will be at the forefront, along with other professions, of working in new ways, being encouraged by the National Institute for Mental Health in England (NIMHE) *New Ways of Working in Mental Health* programme. This will also include working alongside non-affiliated workers in new roles including Support, Time and Recovery (STR) Workers, Graduate Workers in Primary Care Mental Health and Psychology Associates.

**13.** Specialist contemporary mental health social work expertise is also applicable to consultant practitioner roles, normally recognised by senior clinical level appointments within modern mental health services.

**14.** The AMHP role under current mental health legislation is a specific statutory one within a multi-disciplinary context. Mental health legislation extends the AMHP role to nurses, occupational therapists and psychologists in addition to social workers. Social worker AMHPs work in a wide range of settings and have built up considerable expertise in the implementation of legislation and associated case law, with local investment in developing and maintaining good working relationships with emergency services and general practice. AMHP training for all professionals must meet the specifically designated module requirements for this role that are set out in section 3 of these regulations.

**15.** Wherever mental health social work is practised within the diversity of its multi-disciplinary settings and contexts, and whatever the complexity of the needs and cases that social work practice addresses, the common knowledge, skills and values that social workers especially bring, characterise its distinctive contribution to modern health services.

## Flexibility

**16.** Although social workers operate in a wide range of different organisations, often with very specific roles, they also need to develop the kind of flexible transferable skills which will enable them to develop their careers within the broad context of mental health services. These requirements deliberately focus on the commonalities all social workers who work in the specialist context have in their work with people who have mental health problems, their families and carers.

## Embedding values

**17.** Values are particularly important in the field of mental health with its complex interplay of issues around trust, power, responsibility, risk, safety, 'duty of care' and empowerment for people who use services. The National Service Framework for Mental Health recognises the 'centrality of the service user' and the need for all mental health professionals to work in partnership with people who use services and carers in a holistic and inclusive manner, to foster hope and facilitate recovery.

**18.** The GSCC worked with a group of people who use mental health services and carers over several months, sharing all of these standards and requirements in their development. The group advised on their development throughout to ensure that these standards and requirements should reflect, and have strong focus on, their experiences and perceptions. Their comments and advice helped to inform and shape the standards and requirements throughout this document.

**19.** All qualified social workers will have demonstrated their capacity to integrate principles of valuing diversity and equalities awareness in their practice (DH 2003, p3). They also have to achieve academic and practice levels in relation to the subject benchmark core values and ethics statements, and shown a commitment to the GSCC's codes of practice. The standards and requirements in this document have benefited from a strong focus on people who use services and carers' experiences and perceptions. They make clear what generic professional attitudes and values should mean in practice within the context of mental health services and the impact on people who use services and carers themselves.

**20.** While these values and attitudes may not be unique to social work in mental health settings, their application has a specific focus and meaning for people who engage with mental health services and carers. Therefore, specific values focussing on people who use services and carers are explicitly identified in the requirements (as outlined in sections 2 and 3). They are the starting point, which maintains that people who use services and carers are experts through experience in their own conditions and circumstances.

**21.** Social workers need to ensure their own professional expertise is therefore directed to working within a person-centred approach with people who have mental

health problems, their families, children, young people and carers.

**22.** Mental health social workers need to ensure their work serves to empower people who have mental health problems, their families, children and young people, and carers to live lives that enhance their capacity for being independent and healthy; staying safe, enjoying and achieving life goals and quality of life; participating in and making a positive contribution, as citizens, to communities and society; and realising each individual's potential and wellbeing.

**23.** All mental health social workers, not only AMHPs, work creatively and openly within statutory frameworks with the inherent power that professionals possess in relation to their clients. They are also able to manage effectively the dilemmas that can exist between enabling and protecting those with whom they work.

**24.** The Department of Health (DH) Green Paper, *Independence, wellbeing and choice*, and the Government White Paper, *Our health, our care, our say*, also indicate what these fundamental person-centred values mean in the context of a vision for modern mental health services. This includes a workforce of mental health social workers sensitised and trained to critically promote the wellbeing of people who use services and carers in respect of:

- choices in order to help people remain socially and economically active and to lead rewarding, fulfilled lives;
- aspirations to remain as independent as possible, living in the place of their choice;
- provision of greater control over their own lives;
- flexible services responsive to individual needs;
- a shift to a greater emphasis on prevention; and
- overcoming barriers to inclusion and reaching out to marginalised groups.

**25.** Social workers undertaking post-qualifying training have a crucial role to play as members of the mental health services workforce in helping to achieve these outcomes. This includes a strong professional commitment to person-centred values, supporting a person's carers and family, and engaging with the complex process of helping to bring about positive change for people who use services, their carers and families.

## **Achieving outcomes for people with mental health problems, their families and carers: national frameworks**

**26.** As social workers are a key part of the wider mental health services workforce, all programmes of post-qualifying education and training in mental health social work must demonstrate that they are enhancing competent and effective practice in relation to outcomes for people with mental health problems, their families and carers; and for children, young people and older people, who may be affected by mental health problems in others or themselves.

**27.** In line with this focus on outcomes, programmes must also provide evidence that they are developing practice and assessing outcomes in accordance with the DH's *National Service Framework for Mental Health*, and particularly the *Ten Essential Capabilities of the National Institute for Mental Health in England* (NIMHE). These are listed in the appendix to this document.

**28.** *The National Service Framework for Mental Health* addresses the mental health needs of working age adults up to 65. It sets out national standards, national service models, local action and national underpinning programmes for implementation; and a series of national milestones to assure progress, with performance indicators to support effective performance management.

**29.** Equally relevant are the national service frameworks for older people, children, young people and maternity services.

**30.** The Ten Essential Capabilities (NIMHE) framework comprises the values and principles that should underpin the achievement of outcomes of all mental health practice including social work. This framework is incorporated within the requirements for a consolidation module that is needed to underpin all PQ programmes in mental health. The specific requirements for the consolidation module are set out in section 2 of these requirements.

## **Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP) training**

**31.** The AMHP role is a statutory one established under mental health legislation. AMHP training is directly linked to the GSCC's PQ framework and is incorporated in these specialist standards and requirements. The specific training requirements for training all AMHPs are set out in section 3 of this document.

**32.** These are integrally linked to the generic requirements of the PQ framework as well as the core specialist requirements and standards set out in section 2 of this document. AMHP training programmes that meet the specific AMHP training requirements set out in section 3 of this document will be deemed to have met both the generic and specialist requirements for the PQ Higher Specialist Award for social workers. In addition to social workers, all other professionals identified in mental health legislation and completing successfully AMHP training as specified in the legislation will be eligible for consideration by the relevant local authority for approval to act as an AMHP.

## **Other statutory mental health roles under mental health legislation**

**33.** Current mental health legislation also provides for the statutory mental health role of an Approved Clinician. This is linked to the generic PQ requirements and the specialist mental health requirements set out in this document. Programmes of PQ training that address the needs of students at the PQ Advanced Award in Social Work in the specialist mental health context should enable social workers training at this level to be eligible to access national training that will be available under statutory provision for this role. PQ programmes at the advanced professional award level are characterised by an emphasis on leadership. Programmes should equip and recognise leadership competences; they should enable senior level social workers to be in a position to be suitable for the specific Approved Clinician training set out in the legislation for this role and to be put forward for this work.

## **National PQ standards**

**34.** These specialist standards and requirements will enable employers, PQ students and users of services to know that those who have obtained a recognised PQ qualification have clearly demonstrated practice competence in a number of key areas, regardless of where they trained or which modules they studied. Together with the generic standards and requirements identified in the main framework document, these national specialist standards and requirements will ensure the whole PQ system is transparent and clearly aligned to national standards.

# Section 2

## Requirements for approval

### Requirement A – Evidence

**35.** Before they can be finally approved, all post-qualifying programmes in social work with people who have mental health problems, their families and carers, must provide evidence that the specialist standards and requirements are embedded in programme learning outcomes and their associated teaching, learning and assessment strategies. They must provide evidence that the generic requirements of the PQ framework for social work education and training, including the criteria associated with the appropriate levels of the framework, have been met.

### Requirement B – Relevant occupational standards

**36.** Programmes must ensure they are in line with relevant national occupational standards. They must clearly identify relevant practice settings and occupational groups. Programmes must meet both the core specialist requirements laid down in this document and the specific requirements of sector skills councils in relation to particular parts of the mental health workforce. Some of these occupationally specific requirements may be inter-professional in character.

**37.** In order to meet both the core GSCC requirements and occupationally specific specialist standards, each programme must refer to relevant national occupational standards and any relevant published national guidance approved by sector skills councils.

**38.** Central in this regard are the National Occupational Standards in Mental Health (NOSMH) approved by the Health Sector Skills Council. The NOSMH are statements of competence describing good practice in the delivery of all mental health services. Mapped against the NHS knowledge and skills framework, the NOSMH have been established to provide a benchmark against which performance both at individual and organisational level may be assessed and measured. The NOSMH apply to all practitioner roles including social work in any setting, sector or context. The standards include descriptions of roles and performance criteria as well as the knowledge and understanding that state what an individual needs to know and understand if they are to deliver the standards effectively. The NOSMH are currently in place and will need to underpin social workers' training at all levels in the PQ framework.

**39.** In addition to the NOSMH there are other occupational or sector standards of relevance to social work in mental health services. Where these specialist standards and requirements refer to 'standards', they are referring to the relevant occupational standards or other standards listed in the appendix of this

document.

**40.** Courses designed for particular groups of mental health social workers, for example forensic social workers or those who work in children's and adolescents' mental health services (CAMHS), will need to ensure they have fully embedded all relevant occupational standards in their programmes. Relevant occupational standards are those that are defined as relevant by the appropriate sector skills councils. Where there is any doubt or uncertainty, programmes are responsible for consulting the appropriate sector skills councils to ensure that all standards have been satisfactorily addressed. The GSCC will not approve programmes that do not incorporate the relevant national occupational standards.

**41.** All social work degree students at the qualifying level must demonstrate competence in relation to the six key roles and 21 units of competence identified in the national occupational standards for social work. They will also have completed specific learning and assessment in human growth and development, mental health, disability, assessment, planning intervention and review, communication skills, law and partnership working, and information sharing across professional disciplines and agencies (DH, 2002 p3-4).

**42.** All of these have continuing specific application to the professional development of qualified social workers working in mental health. Therefore, competence in depth includes consolidation of their competence in the specialist mental health services context. Enhanced levels of competence and an ability to take a leading role builds further on the themes covered by the national occupational standards for social work and DH requirements but within a specialist mental health services employment context.

### **Requirement C – Approval requirements for consolidation of competence in a specialist context**

**43.** The social work subject benchmark statement of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) makes clear that all social workers need to have contextual as well as an analytic, explanatory and practical understanding of their work (QAA 2000, p12). The professional context of social work practice is increasingly specialist. This means that the development and assessment of all aspects of practice competence is also specialist. To demonstrate the importance of this principle, the very first PQ module focuses on consolidation of initial competence in a specialist service delivery context (GSCC, 2006, para 45-49, p15-16).

**44.** All students must therefore consolidate their initial competence in a specialist context before they move on to other modules (GSCC, 2006, para 46-47, p15-16).

**45.** In the case of mental health social work, the consolidation module described in sections 46 and 49 (iii) of the Post-qualifying framework for social work education and training must develop and assess effective and competent practice in a specific employment context and in the following areas of



knowledge and skill:

- (i) signs, symptoms and assessment of mental disorders;
- (ii) understanding the experience of mental distress from the perspectives of users of social care services, their families and carers;
- (iii) mental health in relation to social, physical and development factors and their implications for the assessment, care and treatment of mental distress;
- (iv) the legal and policy context of mental health including awareness of relevant local, as well as national, policy contexts;
- (v) facilitating evidence based and value based interventions that recognise the knowledge, needs and aspirations of people who use services, their families, children and young people, and carers
- (vi) working together with people who use services, carers families, children and young people, and colleagues in promoting recovery, safety, positive risk taking and nondiscriminatory practice; and
- (vii) writing reports, including understanding the importance of accuracy, confidentiality, and the significance, power and impact of written records for people who use services and carers.

**46.** The Ten Essential Capabilities (NIMHE) framework, which underpins the values and principles of all mental health practice including social work, is incorporated within this stipulated consolidation module, which is required to support all PQ programmes in mental health.

### **Requirement D – Specialist requirements for programmes**

**47.** All programmes at the specialist level must meet the requirements for consolidation of competence in a specialist context. At all levels, programmes of education and training must show that they meet the requirements for PQ programmes in mental health social work. In order to be approved, evidence must be provided that programmes develop and assess effective and competent practice in:

- (i) assessing multi-layered and complex social care needs of individuals, carers and families in a mental health context; developing, implementing and reviewing programmes of support for individuals, carers and families, children and young people; working effectively with a range of people, their carers and families; recognising and managing creatively scarce resources and maximising their use
- (ii) applying knowledge, understanding and skill in relevant legal and policy frameworks, not only the Mental Health Act/AMHP role but a wide range including legislation and policy relating to children and young people, community care, disability, race and equal opportunities, mental capacity, vulnerable adults, criminal

justice, welfare rights and entitlements, and human rights;

(iii) working with carers and family members to promote their welfare and opportunities, and their capacity to support individuals with mental health needs; using a wide range of interventions with family systems and social networks to make a positive difference and to protect and promote recovery, wellbeing and safety;

(iv) promoting the social inclusion of individuals with mental health needs by working effectively with them, their carers and families, social and community networks, employers, housing, leisure and other services, including navigating, mobilising, brokering and facilitating community and care resources from third parties; supporting families in maintaining relationships in their wider social structures and environments;

(v) understanding and working with the mental health consequences of abuse, trauma and discrimination; supporting people with mental health problems to challenge and overcome their experience of oppression;

(vi) working proactively with people who use services, carers, families, children and young people, and colleagues to provide care and interventions that make a positive difference and do so in ways that respect and value diversity, including age, race, ethnicity, culture, disability, gender, spirituality and sexuality;

(vii) working collaboratively with other professions; promoting the social model of need/disability/mental health within multidisciplinary settings;

(viii) working in a person-centred way with complex individual and family situations over time, taking account of all relevant health, social and psycho-social factors, and a life span (whole life) perspective throughout to promoting recovery, wellbeing safety and positive risk taking;

(ix) understanding and working effectively with mental health issues in relation to physical health, ageing, sensory impairment, disability, learning difficulties, children and young people in need or at risk and safeguarding their welfare, dual and multiple diagnosis and/or the abuse of alcohol and drugs;

(x) utilising appropriate knowledge and research from other disciplines including relevant research from people who use services and carers, and contributing to the generation and promotion of evidence based practice through the application or conduct of research in mental health social work;

(xi) influencing and supporting communities, organisations, agencies and services to promote people's mental health; to positively affect the ways in which organisations and agencies interact to the benefit of those who experience mental distress and who may or may not use mental health services; working with groups and communities to address their mental health needs; and

(xii) applying knowledge and understanding of cross-cultural perspectives in mental health care; practising culturally capable care.

## **Regulation and commissioning**

**48.** The requirements laid down in this document are intended to provide a broad set of national standards and requirements for specialist education and training in social work with people who have mental health related problems, their families and carers. However, individual employers working together with one another and with universities will want to ensure that programmes of education and training meet their specific workforce planning and development needs. The underlying principle is that it is the task of regulation to promote high standards of education and training, but it is the responsibility of commissioners to ensure that programmes meet specific workforce development and planning objectives. It is envisaged that small employers will be able to collaborate with one another and larger employers to generate effective demand for education and training designed to meet their needs.

## **An employment led system**

**49.** These specialist standards and requirements are defined broadly so as to ensure that:

- Commissioners of programmes can work closely with universities to develop programmes that fit the specific needs of particular groups of staff; and
- universities can design modules to be attractive to a wide range of organisations and individuals from a wide range of different backgrounds and experiences, including users of services and carers, and other professionals.

# Section 3

## Requirements for approval

The requirements set out in this section 3 have replaced those described in part 3 of *Specialist standards and requirements for post-qualifying training social work education and training in mental health services* that were revised by the GSCC in 2007.

## Specific requirements within the PQ framework for AMHP training

### Introduction to the requirements

**50.** This section sets out the training requirements for the duties of an AMHP under the Mental Health Act 2007 ('the Act'). AMHPs have specific responsibilities under the Act. They play a key role in the care and protection of people with mental disorders and are expected to be accountable for the decisions they make.

Under section 18 of the Act local social services authorities are required to approve professionals as AMHPs, who may be social workers, nurses, occupational therapists or psychologists, to discharge the functions conferred on them by the Act. The Act stipulates that no person shall be approved by a local social services authority as having appropriate competence in dealing with persons who experience mental disorder unless he/she is approved by the local social services authority as having appropriate competence in dealing with such persons.

Under the Mental Health (Approval of Persons to be Approved Mental Health Professionals) (England) Regulations 2007 ("the regulations") local social services authorities can only approve professionals who have successfully completed AMHP training approved by the GSCC. The GSCC has duties under Section 54 of the Care Standards Act 2000 to approve, monitor and inspect provision for social work education and training. Section 19 of the Mental Health Act 2007 extends these to the approval of AMHP training. The GSCC approves AMHP training also on behalf of the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) and the Health Professions Council (HPC).

In accordance with the Mental Health Act 2007 and the Mental Health (Approval of Persons to be Approved Mental Health Professionals) (England) Regulations 2007 the GSCC issues the following requirements and standards for the training of social workers, nurses, occupational therapists or psychologists that are to be considered for approval under the relevant legislation. The GSCC specialist requirements set out in this document are agreed and endorsed by, the NMC, the HPC, and the College of

Occupational Therapists (COT), as suitable for the training of all AMHPs.

## **The purpose of AMHP training**

**51.** The primary purpose of the training is to ensure the competence of professionals that may include social workers, nurses, occupational therapists or psychologists who are being considered for approval as AMHPs in accordance with the relevant mental health legislation to carry out statutory responsibilities under the Mental Health Act 2007.

Training will ensure that all professionals gain the knowledge, competences and values needed to carry out the specific functions and duties required of AMHPs. AMHPs must represent and maintain the values, integrity and relevance of the social perspective on mental distress and mental health needs in working with people who use services, relatives, carers and other professionals.

Training must enable AMHPs to articulate the social perspective through the specific role, responsibilities and duties laid upon them by legislation, codes of practice and policy frameworks. AMHPs must be competent to work appropriately with people with a range of mental disorders and with their carers and relatives. AMHPs should have the knowledge, skills and values required to make appropriate decisions, in consultation with people who use services, relatives and carers.

Training should address a role for AMHPs which is wider than that of simply responding to requests for admission to hospital or for supervised community treatment and ensuring compliance with the law. This role includes considering alternatives to compulsory admission to hospital or community treatment as well as that of making application, where this is appropriate. It also includes being aware of the needs of vulnerable adults and children who may be affected by the mental health legislative process or outcome, and providing support and protection accordingly. Training must equip AMHPs to manage and coordinate the relevant legal and practical processes including the involvement of other professionals as well as people who use services, relatives and carers.

AMHPs must recognise and understand the perspectives and contributions which other professionals bring to their own statutory duties. They must be able to secure effective working relationships with other professionals, as well as people who use services and carers, with whom they must collaborate in making decisions and plans, and they must help create and maintain trust in these relationships.

Training must prepare all AMHPs, regardless of their individual professional backgrounds, to bring and be able to assert an alternative social perspective to the medical view, and to act independently. AMHPs exercise independent authority under the legislation and carry individual and accountable professional responsibility for the independent decisions which they must take.

Training must prepare AMHPs to ensure that in fulfilling their statutory roles and responsibilities they promote equal opportunities and challenge and confront

racism, and other forms of discrimination which may disadvantage people who use services, relatives or carers.

## **The GSCC Post-qualifying Education and Training Framework**

**52.** AMHP training is a distinct but integrated part of the GSCC Post- Qualifying Education and Training Framework and the GSCC *Specialist standards and requirements for post-qualifying social work education and training in mental health services* (GSCC, revised 2010).

This document must be read in conjunction with the *Post-qualifying framework for social work education and training* (GSCC, revised 2009), and the *Specialist standards and requirements for post-qualifying training social work education and training in mental health services* (GSCC, revised 2010) set out in the preceding sections 1 and 2 of this document.

All professionals who complete successfully AMHP training, and meet the other requirements set out in the regulations can be considered by a local authority for approval to act as an AMHP. For social workers, successful completion of AMHP training also gains credit towards professional PQ awards in social work.

## **Approval of AMHP training**

**53.** In order to satisfy GSCC approval requirements, AMHP training for all candidates must be located within mental health programmes leading to the GSCC PQ Higher Specialist Social Work Award in Mental Health under the GSCC PQ Education and Training Framework and must conform to:

- the specific requirements that are specified in this document for AMHP training;
- the generic requirements of the PQ framework set out in *Post-qualifying framework for social work education and training* (GSCC, revised 2009);
- the core mental health specialist requirements and standards set out in *Specialist standards and requirements for post-qualifying training social work education and training in mental health services* (GSCC, revised 2010);
- these generic requirements and the linked core specialist mental requirements of the GSCC PQ framework stipulate that all programmes must be accessible to appropriately qualified members of other professions; and other individuals including users of social care services and carers should also be able to access relevant modules or units of study.

## Entry requirements

**54.** To be eligible for entry to an AMHP training programme at the PQ Higher Specialist Social Work Award level, candidates must:

(i) hold a recognised professional qualification in social work, nursing, occupational therapy or psychology and be:

(a) a social worker registered with the General Social Care Council;

(b) a first level nurse, registered in Sub-Part 1 of the Nurses' Part of the Register maintained under article 5 of the Nursing and Midwifery Order 2001<sup>1</sup>, with the inclusion of an entry indicating their field of practice is mental health or learning disabilities nursing;

(c) an occupational therapist registered in Part 6 of the Register maintained under article 5 of the Health Professions Order 2001<sup>2</sup>; or

(d) either a psychologist registered in Part 14 of the register maintained by the Health Professions Council; or a chartered psychologist who is listed in the British Psychological Society's Register of Chartered Psychologists and who holds a relevant practising certificate issued by the Society a chartered psychologist who is listed in the British Psychological Society's Register of Chartered Psychologists and who holds a relevant practising certificate issued by that Society<sup>3</sup>.

(ii) demonstrate that they already have the level of professional competence, capacity and ability to undertake and complete an AMHP training programme at the PQ Higher Specialist Social Work Award level as recognised by the requirements set out in the GSCC PQ framework. These are described in the generic requirements of the framework in *Post-qualifying framework for social work education and training* (GSCC, revised 2009), and the core mental health specialist requirements and standards set out in *Specialist standards and requirements for post-qualifying training social work education and training in mental health services* (GSCC, revised 2010). Admissions officers must ascertain whether an individual can provide convincing evidence of the kind of achievements that would indicate that they were able to undertake successfully and benefit from AMHP training programmes at the PQ Higher Specialist Social Work Award level in the same way as someone who had successfully completed a prior PQ specialist social work award under the GSCC PQ framework; and

(iii) be nominated by a local authority or other employer.

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<sup>1</sup> S.I. 2002/253. The Register is divided into parts in accordance with the Nurses and Midwives (Parts of and Entries in the Register) Order of Council 2004 (S.I. 2004/1765).

<sup>2</sup> S.I. 2002/254.

<sup>3</sup> DH (2009) Qualifying Requirements for Approved Mental Health Professionals, Approved Clinicians and Best Interests Assessors: Introduction of Statutory Regulation of Psychologists from 1 July 2009 (Gateway Reference 12015).

## **Accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL)**

**55.** Applicants should in principle be able to obtain accreditation of prior experiential and/or certificated learning and to offer claims for credit exemption for assessment against the learning outcomes specified for AMHP training modules, and at the appropriate level. Where accreditation of prior learning is available programmes must advise prospective candidates about:

- the learning outcomes against which evidence must be presented;
- credit to which the candidate may be entitled for previous certificated education and training (APL) or non-certificated learning (APEL), which may be used as an alternative means of providing evidence against one or more learning outcomes;
- the process for gaining approval for credit via APL or APEL including details about;
- the expected time-scale within which a portfolio should be completed; and
- arrangements for supporting candidates to prepare a portfolio for assessment.

## **Structure and components of AMHP training programmes**

**56.** AMHP training will be based on a minimum of 600 hours of learning, which will include taught elements, direct mental health practice, private study, supervision, portfolio production etc. One quarter of this time, or a minimum of 150 hours, should normally be allocated to the taught element of the programme. Programmes will be required to set out in their course material how the different elements of learning will be structured for all students.



## The knowledge base of AMHPs

**57.** This section sets out the principle areas of the knowledge base which underpins competent AMHP work and which should form the basis of training. It can also assist candidates in identifying evidence to meet the competence requirements. Competent AMHP practice is predicated on detailed underpinning knowledge gained during the post-qualifying or post-registration period.

(i) Mental health legislation, related codes of practice and national guidance, including related case law.

(ii) Other legislation and policies related to the AMHP role.

(iii) National and local policies, guidance and procedures relating to statutory mental health functions.

(iv) Child and adult protection procedures in relation to the AMHP's wider role and duties.

(v) Role and functions of courts, hospital managers' hearings, Mental Health Review Tribunals and associated regulatory bodies.

(vi) Roles and responsibilities of the AMHP.

(vii) Roles and responsibilities of other professionals involved in statutory mental health work.

(viii) Models of and approaches to mental distress, including the biological, psychological and social characteristics, and outcomes.

(ix) The social perspective on mental distress and mental health needs.

(x) Methods of care and treatment for people experiencing mental distress.

(xi) Knowledge of the impact and presentation of mental distress across the lifespan.

(xii) Relevant research on the origins and treatment of mental disorders across specific group including children and young people, people with learning disability, older adults and people with sensory impairment.

(xiii) Research relevant to the AMHP role and wider mental health practice.

(xiv) Understanding complexity, including the interrelationship between drugs and substance misuse and mental disorder and the implications for intervention.

(xv) Local, regional and national resources, formal and informal, for the support of people experiencing mental distress, their families and carers.

- (xvi) Theories and models of crisis management.
- (xvii) Indicators associated with risk, risk assessment, management, promoting safety and positive risk taking.
- (xviii) Care Programme Approach including care, crisis and contingency planning.
- (xix) Partnership working with people who use services and carers.
- (xx) The significance of and sensitivity to gender, culture, religion and spirituality in relation to the experience of mental health distress
- (xxi) The impact of all forms of discrimination and oppression in mental health, including race and gender.
- (xxii) The impact of organisational and institutional structures on behaviour, the effects of power and authority in mental health work.

## **Award criteria for AMHP training**

**58.** In order to satisfy approval requirements, modules of AMHP training must be located within specialist mental health programmes leading to the PQ Higher Specialist Social Work Award in Mental Health. All GSCC approved PQ programmes must be accessible to appropriately qualified members of other professions.

AMHP training programmes must show how they will enable all AMHP candidates to achieve and demonstrate all the following competences. Each of these must be met by all candidates to be assessed as having successfully completed AMHP training in order to be eligible for consideration by a local authority for approval to act as an AMHP.

For social workers, AMHP training programmes that lead also to the PQ Higher Specialist Social Work Award must show how they will enable qualified social workers to achieve and demonstrate all the following competences for this professional social work award.

## Competences of AMHPs

### Introduction: Application of the values of socially inclusive practice

59. AMHP training programmes must be embedded with the values dimension that is set out in out in the *GSCC Post-qualifying framework for social work education and training* (GSCC, revised 2009) and the core mental health specialist requirements and standards set out in *Specialist standards and requirements for post-qualifying training social work education and training in mental health services* (GSCC, revised 2010), especially as described in section 1, 'Embedding Values'.

Emphasising the importance of practice that is person-centred, ethical, respects diversity and challenges inequality, are the underpinning values and principles that must be addressed in AMHP training to enable candidates to demonstrate their application to the AMHP practice. Their articulation through the role, functions and duties of an AMHP represents a key area of competence along with the application of knowledge and skills as follows:

### Key Competence Area 1: Application of Values to the AMHP Role

- (a) the ability to identify, challenge and, where possible, redress discrimination and inequality in all its forms in relation to AMHP practice;
- (b) an understanding of and respect for individuals' qualities, abilities and diverse backgrounds, and is able to identify and counter any decision which may be based on unlawful discrimination;
- (c) the ability to promote the rights, dignity and self determination of patients consistent with their own needs and wishes, to enable them to contribute to the decisions made affecting their quality of life and liberty, and
- (d) a sensitivity to individuals' needs for personal respect, confidentiality, choice, dignity and privacy while exercising the AMHP role.

## Key Competence Area 2: Application of Knowledge: The Legal and Policy Framework

(1)

(a) appropriate knowledge of and ability to apply in practice -

(i) mental health legislation, related codes of practice and national and local policy guidance, and

(ii) relevant parts of other legislation, codes of practice, national and local policy guidance, in particular the Children Act 1989<sup>4</sup>, the Children Act 2004<sup>5</sup>, the Human Rights Act 1998<sup>6</sup> and the Mental Capacity Act<sup>7</sup> ;

(b) a knowledge and understanding of the particular needs of children and young people and their families, and an ability to apply AMHP practice in the context of those particular needs;

(c) an understanding of, and sensitivity to, race and culture in the application of knowledge of mental health legislation;

(d) an explicit awareness of the legal position and accountability of AMHPs in relation to the Act, any employing organisation and the authority on whose behalf they are acting;

(e) the ability to -

(i) evaluate critically local and national policy to inform AMHP practice, and

(ii) base AMHP practice on a critical evaluation of a range of research relevant to evidence-based practice, including that on the impact on persons who experience discrimination because of mental health.

(2) In paragraph (1), "relevant" means relevant to the decisions that an AMHP is likely to take when acting as an AMHP.

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<sup>4</sup> Children Act 1989 (c.41)

<sup>5</sup> Children Act 2004 (c.31)

<sup>6</sup> Human Rights Act 1998 (c.42)

<sup>7</sup> Mental Capacity Act 2006 (c.9)

## **Key Competence Area 3: Application of Knowledge: Mental Disorder**

Has a critical understanding of, and is able to apply in practice:

- (a) a range of models of mental disorder, including the contribution of social, physical and development factors;
- (b) the social perspective on mental disorder and mental health needs, in working with patients, their relatives, carers and other professionals;
- (c) the implications of mental disorder for patients, their relatives and carers, and
- (d) the implications of a range of treatments and interventions for patients, their relatives and carers.

## **Key Competence Area 4: Application of Skills: Working in Partnership**

Has the ability to:

- (a) articulate, and demonstrate in practice, the social perspective on mental disorder and mental health needs;
- (b) communicate appropriately with and establish effective relationships with patients, relatives, and carers in undertaking the AMHP role;
- (c) articulate the role of the AMHP in the course of contributing to effective inter-agency and inter-professional working;
- (d) use networks and community groups to influence collaborative working with a range of individuals, agencies and advocates;
- (e) consider the feasibility of and contribute effectively to planning and implementing options for care such as alternatives to compulsory admission, discharge and aftercare;
- (f) recognise, assess and manage risk effectively in the context of the AMHP role;
- (g) effectively manage difficult situations of anxiety, risk and conflict, and an understanding of how this affects the AMHP and other people concerned with the patient's care;
- (h) discharge the AMHP role in such a way as to empower the patient as much as practicable;
- (i) plan, negotiate and manage compulsory admission to hospital or arrangements for supervised community treatment;

(j) manage and co-ordinate effectively the relevant legal and practical processes including the involvement of other professionals as well as patients, relatives and carers, and

(k) balance and manage the competing requirements of confidentiality and effective information sharing to the benefit of the patient and other persons concerned with the patient's care.

## **Key Competence Area 5: Application of Skills: Making and Communicating Informed Decisions**

Has the ability to:

(a) assert a social perspective and to make properly informed independent decisions;

(b) obtain, analyse and share appropriate information having due regard to confidentiality in order to manage the decision-making process including decisions about supervised community treatment;

(c) compile and complete statutory documentation, including an application for admission;

(d) provide reasoned and clear verbal and written reports to promote effective, accountable and independent AMHP decision making;

(e) present a case at a legal hearing;

(f) exercise the appropriate use of independence, authority and autonomy and use it to inform their future practice as an AMHP, together with consultation and supervision;

(g) evaluate the outcomes of interventions with patients, carers and others, including the identification of where a need has not been met;

(h) make and communicate decisions that are sensitive to the needs of the individual patient, and

(j) keep appropriate records with an awareness of legal requirements with respect to record keeping and the use and transfer of information.

## **Transcripts**

**60.** The AMHP training requirements set out in this document stipulate that the programme provider must give to all candidates who successfully complete an AMHP training programme a written transcript to this effect. Local authorities can only approve professionals to act as AMHPs who have successfully completed a GSCC approved training programme. A transcript will provide evidence of this to a local authority.

Programme providers may, by agreement with programme commissioners, give a transcript to social worker candidates who have successfully completed all the above learning outcomes that are related specifically to the AMHP role, functions and duties as set out in this document but who may not at that stage have completed the final learning outcome for the PQ Higher Specialist Social Work Award.

Such candidates will be eligible to be considered by local authorities for AMHP approval although will not be eligible for the PQ Higher Specialist Social Work Award until they have completed all the required learning outcomes for this award.

## **Assessment**

**61.** To demonstrate competence the candidate must present to the assessment board of an approved programme evidence to meet all the learning outcomes, which make up AMHP training requirements.

### **Evidence must include:**

(a) A portfolio prepared by the candidate which includes a self-evaluation of his/her abilities and which offers evidence of their competence against each of the required learning outcomes, including active involvement in the assessment, planning, negotiation and management of compulsory admission to hospital.

(b) A report by a practice assessor or practice supervisor from the programme, based on observation of the candidate's application of learning.

(c) A formal statement of competence from a practice assessor or practice supervisor from the programme declaring whether sufficient or insufficient evidence has been demonstrated in all of the required learning outcomes.

(d) Evidence in portfolios must be made anonymous to ensure the rights to confidentiality of people who use services and others who have been involved in the process of gathering evidence.

## **People who use services and carers' involvement in the training of AMHPs**

**62.** The active involvement of users of social care services and carers in all aspects of AMHP training is required. User and carer participation and involvement must be a feature of programme design and delivery including involvement in selection, teaching, assessment and course planning. Evidence of this will be sought for approval of programmes.

## **Review of the PQ specialist mental health requirements**

**63.** These overall specialist requirements (sections 1, 2 and 3) will normally be reviewed in relation to their fitness for purpose every five years. The GSCC may review the fitness for purpose of these specialist requirements at any time if there is a major change in policy or practice that needs to be addressed immediately.



# Appendix

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- Relevant national occupational standards and other sector skill council endorsed standards.
- National occupational standards for social work.
- National occupational standards for mental health.
- National occupational standards for child care at post-qualifying level.
- National occupational standards for the justice sector.
- National occupational standards for the housing sector.

# References

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G\_PQLMS\_V2\_May 10