

## **The Future of Continuing Professional Development**

### **1. Introduction**

The Framework for continuing professional development (CPD) developed by the Social Work Reform Board has now been passed to The College for further development and dissemination. This briefing paper summarises:

- The key characteristics of the framework
- Changes from the General Social Care Council (GSCC) to the Health Professions Council (HPC) requirements for CPD
- What this means for how social workers plan, record and reflect on their CPD activities
- What The College will do to support CPD
- Timetable for moving on

### **2. The SWRB Framework**

Continuing professional development is essential to ensure that social workers remain up to date with professional developments, and can adjust their practice in line with new evidence. The recommendations in the new framework recognise that learning can, and does, take place in a range of different ways and circumstances. It is not always associated with a 'course' and the development need may be met through a range of different activities. Outcomes of learning and career development routes are identified within the professional capabilities framework. This broad conception of CPD has led to the principles which underpin the framework, which were set out by the Reform Board:

#### **The framework will be aligned with the relevant levels of the professional capabilities framework (PCF) and linked to the career structure**

This means that the PCF will act as a framework or 'scaffold' to inform the CPD requirements of any individual social worker. It should be used in conjunction with any internal appraisal and supervision structures which help identify learning requirements to support the social worker in meeting organisational as well as personal and professional needs.

#### **Social workers will be supported by employers and expected to take professional responsibility for developing their skills to a high professional level, through undertaking learning and development activities over and above the core standards required for re-registration with HPC**

This principle makes explicit the need for every individual social worker to take responsibility for identifying and meeting their professional needs. Learning activities will arise from everyday work, as well as any other requirements imposed by external circumstances or organisational needs. Professional social workers are expected to be proactive in identifying needs and ways of meeting them.

One reason for undertaking CPD is to demonstrate that threshold standards of practice for re-registration are being met. However, this is a minimum requirement. What the Reform Board and The College are working towards is the raising of consistent standards of practice, which will lead to improved outcomes for service users and an enhanced profile and reputation of social work as a profession.

However, social workers are not expected to take on this additional responsibility for CPD on their own. Alongside the CPD framework, the Reform Board has also developed standards for employers which clearly set out the duty of employers to support CPD for social workers through supervision and protected time to undertake learning and development. These are hosted by the Local Government Association, and The College will be working closely with LGA and other employer organisations to monitor and promote implementation of supervision and support for CPD. More about the employer standards can be found [here](#).

**A wide range of learning and development activities should be promoted. Space for critical reflection, learning from others and opportunities for access to research should be valued alongside more structured training. There is an aspiration that social workers should have the opportunity to achieve PQ awards at Masters' level through modular programmes.**

The new CPD framework differs from the GSCC's PQ framework in that it does not stipulate or recommend that social workers follow specific learning programmes or work towards higher education awards. In line with the Health Professions Council (HPC) requirements for CPD, social workers will seek to find a range of ways to meet their needs, which will involve a range of learning activities. Higher education institutions are being encouraged to develop flexible programmes at Masters level, in line with the PCF and other development needs which they identify in partnership with employers. This means that those social workers whose needs and aspirations will best be met through engagement in higher education will have an appropriate route to follow.

**Learning and development needs will be identified, planned for and monitored through annual appraisal cycles and supervision**

Continuing professional development takes place in response to an individual's needs and aspirations. However, responsibility for planning and implementation cannot be left entirely to the individual, but must be part of the wider needs of the employing organisation and the whole social work team. Appraisal and supervision are key activities to enable this to take place, and the implementation of these are underpinned by the standards for employers

**Mechanisms for recognising and recording CPD activities will be established to provide clarity of process, and portability across the country**

Under the GSCC PQ framework, there was a consistency of 'language' for formally assessed CPD in the form of higher education credit. This uniformity of approach will cease when the GSCC closes. The HPC has a standardised approach to recording CPD, which rests on self-evaluation by the individual social worker, with an audit of the evidence of learning for fixed percentage of applicants for re-registration.

In order to ensure and raise the quality of the large range of learning opportunities that are currently on offer, The College plans to develop an endorsement scheme, whereby education and training providers can demonstrate that their learning programmes meet criteria which are relevant to social workers and their learning needs. The scheme will be tested early in 2012, and will cover both qualifying courses and post-qualification learning opportunities.

### **Employers will be encouraged to develop learning opportunities working in partnership with other local employers and HEIs**

Another of the tenets of the Reform Board is the need for all partners in education and training of social workers to work together in partnership. A set of [principles for partnership](#) working has been developed to guide and promote partnership activity. These principles will apply to all employers of social workers, including those in the voluntary and private sectors and health trusts, and to higher education, internal training departments, and independent education and training providers. Only with full collaboration and commitment from all employers will it be possible to ensure uniform and consistent development of the social work profession.

Six test sites have been working with these principles in their approach to continuing professional development. A summary of what they have done, and what they have learned, can be found [here](#).

### **3. Changes from the GSCC to HPC requirements for CPD**

Registration and regulation of social workers is planned to pass from GSCC to HPC in July 2012. Currently, social workers are required by GSCC to show that they have undertaken 90 hours or 15 days of Post Registration training and learning (PRTL) during their three year registration period. The GSCC also developed a framework of approved post-qualifying awards (PQ) delivered by higher education institutions, and strongly promoted these as a preferred route to professional development.

The HPC has a different approach to its requirements for CPD. The focus is not on a number of hours 'input' of learning activity, but rather the HPC expects the professions they regulate to show that they have undertaken a range of planned learning activities throughout the two year registration period, with reflection on the impact on practice of that learning. Each time the registration period comes to an end, social workers will be required to summarise their CPD and its impact. A random sample of 2.5% of registrants will be asked to provide more detailed evidence of their CPD, so it is important for social workers to keep a log of their learning. People working in education or training and development functions, or those in management or other roles which do not involve front-line practice can continue to be registered if they define the scope of their role on their registration documentation, and carry out CPD that is relevant to that role. Further details of the HPC requirements can be found [here](#).

After transfer to the HPC, universities can continue to offer PQ courses, just as they have under the auspices of GSCC, and should be able to do so in a more flexible way to meet employer and practitioner needs. With the exception of Approved Mental Health

Profession Training, these courses will not be regulated by the HPC. The College of Social Work will set up criteria and processes to endorse post qualifying learning and training courses offered by HEIs and other education and training providers.

The College of Social Work has stewardship of the professional standards for social work, in the form of the PCF. The capabilities enshrined in the PCF set an agenda for professional development that goes beyond the threshold requirements of the HPC. The College's endorsement scheme and its work with the LGA around the standards for employers will work together to allow continuous improvement and development for both individual social workers and their employing organisations.

#### **4. What this means for how social workers plan, record and reflect on their CPD activities**

Moving from an 'input' to an 'output' model of planning and recording CPD will mean social workers will need to think differently about what they need to learn, why they need to learn it, and what would be the best way to undertake that learning. They will normally do this in conjunction with their employers, using appraisal and supervision processes to help them. The combination of learning approaches together with a commitment by employers and social workers, supported by The College, will all combine to raise professional standards.

#### **5. What The College will do to support CPD**

The College is keen to work with employers in understanding and implementing the new framework, in line with the PCF developments. We are developing standard presentations and briefings for use in the workplace which will be on the website. We will also willingly come and either take part in already arranged events, or run targeted workshops for employers, social workers, educators or other groups who want to know more.

College members will have the opportunity to belong to one or more Community of Practice. This will be a place where professionals can come together to share resources and discuss matters which affect their practice. Engagement in these professional debates can form a core activity in CPD, and will help practitioners to keep up to date with new policy and research agendas.

In order to support the new approach to CPD, The College will develop an online portfolio for its members in which they can do all the planning and recording that they need to do in relation to their CPD. The portfolio will also relate to the PCF so that individual learning plans can be developed within the context of career development and progression. It will also include key resources to support reflection, and links to useful sites which can provide information and sources of knowledge and evidence-based practice. The system will enable direct downloading of information and evidence to the HPC template for re-registration.

This facility will be available for testing from April 2012.

Several people have asked The College a range of questions in relation to the future of CPD. These can be accessed [here](#). Further information can also be found on the [GSCC website](#).