

Council – 19 June 2012

Social worker in England pre-registration programmes – approval and monitoring processes

Executive summary and recommendations

This paper should be read alongside the paper entitled ‘Social Work Student (England) Suitability Scheme’. It seeks to agree the means by which those social worker pre-registration programmes which will be treated as transitionally approved by the HCPC should be dealt with after 1 August 2012. The Council is asked to agree on the mechanism to manage those programmes midway through a GSCC quality assurance process at the point of transfer as well as advise on the longer term approach to granting open ended approval (or, if necessary withdrawing approval). The longer term approach to programme approval should be cognisant of decisions arising from the paper ‘Social Work Student (England) Suitability Scheme’.

Introduction

1 Background information

- 1.1 The Health and Social Care Act 2012 provides for the regulation of social workers in England by the Health Professions Council and for the Health Professions Council to be renamed to the Health and Care Professions Council. The Act also amends the Health Professions Order 2001 to the Health and Social Work Professions Order 2001.
- 1.2 The Act amends schedule 3 to the Health Professions and Social Work Order 2001 to include the following definition;

““social worker in England” means a member of the social work profession in England, and references to “social work in England” are to be construed accordingly;”
- 1.3 Article 15(8) of the Health Professions and Social Work Order 2001 remains unchanged and provides that;

“The Council shall maintain and publish a list of the courses of education and training, qualifications and institutions –

 - (a) which are for the time being approved under this Order: or
 - (b) which have been approved under this Order but which are no longer approved, together with a record of the periods in respect of which they were approved.”
- 1.4 Transitional arrangements under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 will provide for all of the following to be treated as a qualification approved by

the HCPC from the transfer date (until such time as that approval is varied or withdrawn by the HCPC):

- successful completion of a course in relevant social work which was immediately before the appointed day approved by the GSCC (including courses approved by the GSCC under the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (Transfer Scheme) Order 2001); and
- successful completion of training elsewhere than in England in relevant social work which was immediately before the appointed day recognised by the GSCC as being to a standard sufficient for registration.

1.5 Consequently, by operation of law, all currently approved routes to the GSCC register will be treated on a transitional basis as qualifications approved by the HCPC. The Council will maintain and publish lists of these transitionally approved programmes for social workers in England.

2 GSCC approved programmes

2.1 The GSCC currently sets the minimum requirements that individuals must meet in order to enter their register, including the 'recognised qualifications' that an individual must hold. The social work degree was introduced as the 'recognised qualification' in 2003. Prior to this, the 'recognised qualification' was the Diploma in Social Work (Dip SW).

2.2 It is anticipated that approximately 280 social worker programmes in England will be treated as transitionally approved by HCPC on 1 August 2012. These are delivered across approximately 85 education providers. Approximately 60% of these programmes are at undergraduate level (mainly Bachelor with honours degrees) and 40% at postgraduate level (postgraduate diplomas and masters). There is an approximate 70%: 30% split between full-time and part-time delivery. Approximately 25% of these programmes are designed for individuals already working in the social care and focus on work based learning. The remaining 75% are designed on the more traditional campus based learning model with individuals studying full-time. Approximately 6000 students have enrolled on social work pre-registration programmes each year for the last seven years. Between 2003-2008, approximately 80% students successfully passed their pre-registration training programmes, with approximately 18% withdrawing and 2% failing their studies¹.

3 GSCC quality assurance of approved programmes

3.1 The GSCC have approved all social worker programmes using the following standards - National Occupational Standards for social work (2002), the Quality Assurance Agency's benchmark statement for social work degrees (2008), GSCC codes of practice (2002) and the Department of Health requirements for social work training (2002).

¹

The General Social Care Council 'A Report on Social Work Education in England 2009-10' (2010)

- 3.2 The GSCC have approved all social worker programmes in line with their social work degree rules (2002). This includes a system of approval, monitoring, review and inspection. Approval involves a two stage process (institutional level followed by course level), with the second stage usually involving a site visit by GSCC officers and/or independent visitors. Monitoring involves an annual submission of internal evaluations of course quality, external examiners reports and stakeholder monitoring exercises. This regular monitoring is risk based, with different interventions proportionate to the risk assessment. Reviews occur on a five-year cycle and usually involve a site visit by GSCC officers and/or independent visitors. Reviews formally confirm re-approval for the programme. Inspections can occur at any time if there is evidence to suggest a concern. Inspections involve a site visit by a panel of GSCC officers and independent visitors².
- 3.3 For the last two academic years (2010-11 and 2011-12), the GSCC has adapted their quality assurance processes in anticipation of the regulatory transfer. This has affected their systems of approval, monitoring and review.

4 Wider context of social work education

- 4.1 The wider context in which social work pre-registration education in England operates is currently in flux.
- 4.2 The work of the Social Work Reform Board has had far reaching consequences for the social work education community. In particular, changes are being finalised and implemented around the 'calibre of entrants', 'curriculum and delivery', 'practice placements' and 'partnerships'³. The College of Social Work have recently published a suite of reform resources for education providers as well as curriculum guides⁴. They have also announced an endorsement process for pre-registration programmes.
- 4.3 The Department of Health is currently consulting on reviewing the social work bursary scheme⁵ and has also indicated that they intend to review the social work education support grant in 2013. The social work education support grant is the model used for funding practice placement learning and the involvement of service users in programme development, design and delivery for social work education in England. The Centre for

² The General Social Care Council approval of courses for the social work degree rules 2002
The General Social Care Council Accreditation of universities to grant degrees in social work 2002
Risk management and regulation of social work education (2011)

³ You can find out more about the work of the Social Work Reform Board on their website here - www.education.gov.uk/swrb

⁴ You can find out more about the work of The College of Social Work on their website here: www.collegeofsocialwork.org/resources/reform-resources/

⁵ You can find out more about the current social work bursary scheme consultation at www.dh.gov.uk/health/category/publications/consultations/

Workforce Intelligence recently published an overview report of the supply and demand of social workers for the next three to five years⁶.

5 On-going GSCC quality assurance work at the point of transfer

- 5.1 It is anticipated that there will be negligible outstanding work in progress at the point of transfer, given the completion of the GSCC monitoring cycle for this academic year and the adaptations to the approval and review processes. However, to manage the risk, should one arise, it is proposed that the mechanism outlined in appendix 1 is adopted by HCPC. The mechanism draws on executive and visitor expertise and assessment, with the Education and Training Committee retaining any final decision-making powers. Decisions will be made on a case by case basis and be cognisant of our standards of education and training and standards of proficiency for social workers in England, as well as the current expectations on education providers under the GSCC rules and standards.

6 Approval and monitoring arrangements with the HCPC

- 6.1 Once social worker programmes are treated as HCPC, approved programmes there should be a mechanism for the HCPC to ensure that the programmes meet our standards of education and training and that those students who successfully complete them meet our standards of proficiency for social workers in England.
- 6.2 Therefore, it is necessary for the Council to consider how social worker programmes should be granted open-ended approval (or have transitional approval withdrawn).
- 6.3 It is proposed that all social worker in England pre-registration programmes go through the normal HCPC approval process, as the approval visit offers the most rigorous and effective means of assuring that each programme meets our standards of education and training. It also gives education providers the opportunity to interact, in person, with representatives from the HCPC. It is proposed that this approval visit activity spans three academic years (2012-2013, 2013-2014 and 2014-2015). Due to the timing of the transfer and the fact that our approval process requires six months' notice of a visit, approval visits will only be able to be held in five months of the 2012-2013 academic year (February – June 2013). It is proposed that, post transfer, the immediate focus is on communication and relationship building with social work education providers and placement providers, to help develop a better understanding of our standards and expectations. It is proposed that social worker in England pre-registration programmes do not engage fully with the monitoring processes until after the approval process has concluded and they have been granted open ended approval (i.e. from the 2014-2015 academic year onwards).

⁶ You can find out more about the Centre for Workforce Intelligence 's supply and demand report on their website here: www.cfwi.org.uk/publications

- 6.4 It is proposed that the prioritisation within these three academic years takes the following factors into account;
- the GSCC quality assurance evidence and assessment at the point of transfer;
 - the supply and demand of placements within regions;
 - the size and frequency of the student cohort; and
 - the entire provision within each education provider.
- 6.5 In addition, it is proposed that the prioritisation is applied flexibly with opportunities to reassess timelines where;
- significant changes are proposed to transitionally approved programme which are not in line with the principles of the Social Work Reform Board;
 - concerns arise about the transitionally approved programme;
 - concerns arise from an education provider's engagement with the additional transitional arrangements (suitability scheme or equivalent); and
 - additional provision is created within a provider;
- 6.6 Both the initial prioritisation and the subsequent implementation should be cognisant of and responsive to the requests of education providers where possible. The finalisation and implementation of the schedule should be delegated to the Director of Education from here on, with regular progress reports being provided to the Education & Training Committee.
- 6.7 These proposals aim to strike a proportionate balance between the requirements of statutory regulation and the burden which will be imposed on the social work profession and education providers and are recommended for the following reasons;
- 6.7.1 Firstly, they recognise the intention and principles of the Social Work Reform Board and the drive for change in improving social work education and particularly the quality of, and stability in, practice placements.
- 6.7.2 Secondly, they recognise the current financial uncertainties and the potential changes for students, placement providers and service users, all of which are likely to require education providers to revisit the design and delivery of their programmes.
- 6.7.3 Thirdly, they offer reasonable timescales for education providers, involving opportunities for communication and dialogue, without being overly-burdensome.
- 6.7.4 Finally, they offer a realistic and achievable timescale given our planned increase in resources and commitments to social worker in England pre-registration programmes alongside the existing fifteen professions.
- 6.7.5 Additionally, they assume additional transitional arrangements following the discussion of the paper entitled 'Social Work Student (England) Suitability Scheme'.
- 6.8 This long term approach to approval and monitoring (including the proposed three year schedule of approval visits) mirrors the intentions

within the Education Department workplan that was approved by the Education & Training Committee in March 2012. However, due to the recent discussions and decisions around student fitness to practice, student registration and the social worker student suitability scheme, it was felt appropriate for Council to advise on its relevance at this point in time and also for Council to advise on any risks that needed to be managed further through the prioritisation of approval visits.

Decision

The Committee is asked to agree the following:

- To approve the mechanism for managing those programmes midway through a GSCC quality assurance process at the point of transfer; and
- To advise on the long term approach to approval and monitoring social worker pre-registration programmes.

Background information

Education and Training Committee, 9 June 2011 - Transfer of regulatory functions from General Social Care Council – approval and monitoring processes
Education and Training Committee, 12 June 2012 - List of approved social workers in England'
Education Department work plan 2012-2013

Resource implications

Proposed resources have been accounted for in 2012-2013 Education Department work plan and budget, and will be taken forward into future work plans and budgets.

Financial implications

Proposed finance resources have been accounted for in 2012-2013 Education Department work plan and budget, and will be taken forward into future work plans and budgets.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Mechanism for considering social worker programmes midway through a GSCC quality assurance process at the point of transfer

Date of paper

11 June 2012

Appendix 1 – Mechanism for considering social worker programmes midway through a GSCC quality assurance process at the point of transfer

