



Understanding the Post-qualifying Social Work Specialist Awards

Skills for Care and the Childrens Workforce Development Council working through the Social Work Development Partnership Board seek to raise the quality of social work practice across the workforce.

Through national and regional planning networks that involve employers, higher education institutions and service users and carers, clear strategies and resources have been identified to ensure that all relevant stakeholders are working to support this aim.

The importance of continuing study at post-qualifying level has recently been highlighted by Lord Laming (2009) in his report 'The Protection of Children in England', by the initial developments proposed in relation to the establishing of the Social Work Taskforce and by the GSCC (2009) in the report on 'Social Work Education in England 2007-8'.

The Post-qualifying Awards have been developed in conjunction with employers, practitioners, service users and carers and are designed to offer professionally qualified social workers the opportunity to consolidate, deepen and extend their practice skills and meet the specialist level requirements in line with the G.S.C.C post-qualifying framework (www.gsc.org.uk)

Why study for the Post-qualifying Awards?

The overall aim of the P.Q awards is to improve the standard of social work practice and it supports the role of employers in ensuring a professional workforce that:

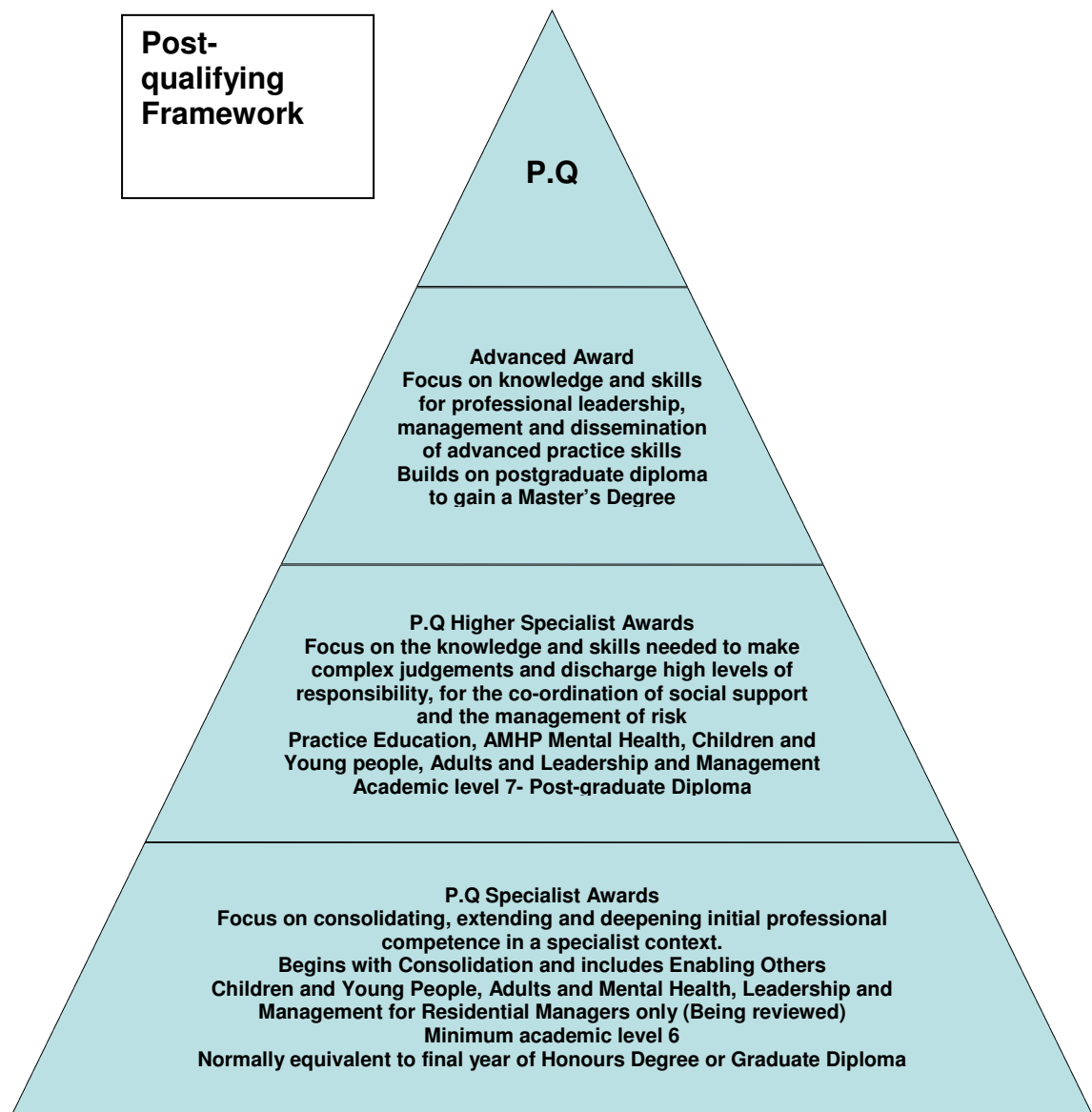
- Offers a high quality social work service that places safeguarding and service user and carer needs at the centre of practice
- Has the capacity to respond effectively to the fast-changing, demanding and complex world of professional practice legislation and policy
- Applies sound, creative, specialist knowledge, theories, values and evidence based practice
- Is accountable for the quality of work and for high professional standards.
- Promotes the specific professional nature of social work and is a key part of sound multi-professional service provision
- Promotes a culture of learning and contributes directly to the development and skills of the profession as a whole.

The Benefits for Practitioners

P.Q is also about supporting you in developing your practice and confidence throughout your career. It gives formal professional and academic recognition to your learning, knowledge and skills and provides a flexible and on-going way of supporting you to:

- Link education and practice
- Gain in confidence
- Develop new knowledge, skills and approaches.
- Identify and apply transferable skills and learning
- Apply practice that is based on sound evidence, theories and methods
- Identify strategies for working in complex and demanding environments
- Work with and learn from other practitioners, service users and carers.
- Enhance skills in reflective and critical analysis
- Maintain registration

What does the Framework look like?



Start here for the Post- qualifying Award Framework

Frequently Asked Questions

Does the Consolidation Module have to be completed first?

Normally yes. If P.Q.1 under the old P.Q Framework has been completed in the same service area then a candidate would usually be exempt from this module. If it was completed in a different service area then an additional piece of work may demonstrate the requirements for Consolidation. Experienced candidates may be able to complete an APEL portfolio to demonstrate the equivalent requirements for Consolidation. All newly qualified social workers enter the framework at this level and at Bucks New University can combine their N.Q.S.W year with the Consolidation programme.

Do Social Workers have to complete the Specialist Award prior to embarking on Higher Specialist Awards?

Experienced staff can undertake Higher Specialist Awards without taking the Specialist Award but must first demonstrate their competence at Specialist level and an ability to undertake academic study at Higher Specialist level (level 7). Care must be taken to meet all the requirements for the Specialist Award and achieve an integrated learning experience rather than simply putting together a disparate selection of courses. Evidence might include transcripts of previous modules or a portfolio of evidence.

At what Academic level is the Specialist Award set?

The G.S.C.C have identified that this would normally be studied at level 6, which is the equivalent to the final year of an undergraduate degree. Bucks New University therefore currently offer the Specialist Award as either the B.A (Practice development) enabling students without a degree to 'top-up' their Dip.Sw / Dip.H.E to an Honours Degree or as a Graduate Diploma for those who already hold a degree. (During the P.Q Awards you are being assessed in competence at a post-qualifying not a qualifying level and this is why Higher Specialist has been set at level 7 or as a Post-graduate Diploma.)

Do Social Workers have to complete the Specialist Award at one University?

No. Consolidation and Enabling Learning modules are those most often studied as stand-alone courses. There may also be other modules for which you can claim credit. You would normally register for your Award with one University.

How does the Specialist Award take account of the many different areas of practice?

There are both Adult and Children and Young People's Awards available at Bucks New University. Overall themes are studied and your practice assessor and tutor will support you in applying your knowledge and skills to your specific area of practice through the integrated academic and practice teaching and assessment elements of the course. The mix of specialist practitioners on the courses will also enable you to identify best practice from within other specialisms.

How long will the Award take to complete?

We have identified that it will take between 18 months and 4 years to complete the Award. This time will vary depending on your preferred rate of study and the time provided by your employer. It is important to give yourself enough time to really consolidate and develop your practice.

What is the involvement of managers?

Managers provide a short report in relation to most of the modules studied. This confirms the standard of practice and will assist candidates in identifying further learning needs. Practice Assessors will carry out direct observations of practice and will provide additional support in

practice development and identifying practice evidence. Assessors are provided from within the work setting or by the University. They must not be in a line-management position to the candidate.

What does the Practitioner Research module involve?

It is important for individuals and organisations to develop evidence and research-based practice. Promoting practitioner research is one way for organisations to initiate knowledge and change rather than simply responding to the research of others. This module provides skills and knowledge to enable the completion of practitioner research projects and will enable the development of active enquiry and research skills. Projects will be in areas of practice that can support practitioners in exploring and improving specific elements of service delivery that are of benefit to individuals, organisations, service users and carers. Research methods are taught, research proposals identified and ethical approval sought. Full support is provided through dissertation supervision. The time needed to complete projects is included within the teaching and study time identified.

Why do you offer two types of Enabling Learners modules?

We recognise that social workers are being required to work with students for the first time as part of the post-qualifying framework. Some will wish to become assessors and develop their involvement in social work education – these people will probably opt to take the longer module 'Enabling Learners.' Others will want to take the shorter module 'Introduction to Enabling Learners' to contribute to the learning of students and in addition take an optional module, perhaps to develop their own practice in relation to mental health.

What future developments are there?

Nationally there is consultation underway to introduce Leadership and Management modules at Specialist level and to identify standards for Practice Educators and to further develop Enabling Learners modules. Bucks New University are already planning responses to these changes. We are now planning Higher Specialist Awards to be introduced in the near future and considering the possible introduction of awards for mental health social workers.

Useful web sites and Publications

Skills for Care: www.skillsforcare.org.uk

Childrens Workforce Development Council: www.cwdc.org.uk

G.S.C.C; www.gsc.org.uk

Skills for Care London Region: www.skillsforcarelondon.org.uk/downloads/PQ-business-casefinalpdf

Laming. H (2009) *The Protection of Children in England: A Progress Report*. London. The Stationary Office.

Tovey. W (ed) (2007) *The Post-qualifying Handbook for Social Workers*. Jessica Kingsley

G.S.C.C (2009) *Raising Standards. Social Work Education in England 2007-8*. G.S.C.C

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