

The Post Qualifying Social Work Part One programme may be in murky waters but that doesn't mean 'throwing the baby out with the bath water', as Keith Brown, Natasha Young and Steven Keen, explain.

In deep water



In the 1500s most people got married in June because they took their yearly bath in May. Baths consisted of a big tub of water. The man of the house had the privilege of the nice clean water, then all the sons and other men, then the women and finally the children; last of all the babies. By then, the water was so dirty you could actually lose someone in it – hence the saying, “Don't throw the baby out with the bath water.” Nowadays this saying is used to express concern over change for change's sake, and that by changing something you may lose valuable elements that could still be developed.

The PQSW (Post Qualifying Social Work) Part One programme – more commonly known as PQ1 – is in murky waters.

The PQ (Post-Qualifying) review was launched in December 2002 and a report submitted to the General Social Care Council (GSCC) in 2003.

In February this year a consultation on a new framework of PQSW education and training was published.⁽¹⁾ In it, the GSCC proposes a new three-level PQ framework, yet does not include PQ1 (see box).

Currently, to pass PQ1 candidates must demonstrate that they have improved and extended the level of competence acquired at the point of qualification. Candidates give evidence to prove that they are (almost) self-reliant in learning, problem-solving, professional communication and critical self-appraisal. PQ1 (worth 40 credits) equates in academic terms to the quality and quantity of one-third of an undergraduate's final year.

Since April 2002 successful completion of Part One has been a prerequisite and preparation for all awards within the PQ framework. As Angela Shaw notes in her book on the subject, the latter has developed amidst constant change and in a sector with resource, recruitment and retention problems.⁽²⁾

However, though the GSCC consultation document does briefly mention PQ1 and asks whether and when a similar requirement should be placed in the new PQ framework, it appears almost as an afterthought.

The questions raised appear to be: should it be a free-standing programme that acts as a passport to the rest of the PQ framework?; should it be linked to a module within the proposed graduate diploma; or should the current PQ1 be developed into a graduate certificate (worth 40 credits) in the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) framework?

Yet what the consultation document fails to do is make any assessment of the impact of PQ1, which is vital to making an informed decision about its future. A number of pieces of work have been completed assessing the impact of Part One programmes.⁽³⁾ In the past three years, the authors of these articles have been conducting an ongoing programme of research to ascertain what people's experience of PQ1 has been. Aside from using feedback on university forms, we surveyed 71 candidates and 26 training managers.

Findings from this research illustrate that candidates find PQ1 to be a positive experience. It enables them to take a step back and look in-depth at their practice.

Through completion of the portfolio, candidates re-engage with core social work values and principles. Importantly, it also prepares them for Part Two courses by acquainting or re-acquainting them with study skills and an academic writing style. The most significant finding, however, has been that PQ1 helps to “start, develop or confirm the importance of critically reflecting on their career and practice”.

For training managers and co-ordinators a positive impact of PQ1 is that it can be delivered flexibly and in a cost-effective manner; it also carries both professional and academic credits. Taken overall, this research shows that PQ1 has a number of

significant benefits for social care workers in terms of personal and professional development and in preparing them for future programmes.

Another major concern about the proposed PQ framework is the usage of the term 'graduate'.

Only 40% of candidates completing PQ1 hold degrees according to data from 2004, therefore, how will prospective candidates without degrees access the framework? Most universities are not able to award Graduate Diplomas to non-graduates. The social work practitioner workforce would need to be qualified to degree level, in order to progress onto a graduate diploma. While entry to the social work profession is now pitched at degree

level, there is still a significant section of the social care workforce with diploma level qualifications or less.

It would seem wise to have four levels of award, and to retain PQ1 (with its 40 credits and possible graduate certificate) as the first point of entry in the award structure.

From our experience, PQ1 needs to remain a generic award, with both academic and professional credits, and be integrated into the post qualifying framework. Its 40 credits could then be used towards a degree, in the case of non-graduates, or as a graduate certificate in the case of graduates. Whatever happens, before PQ1 gets thrown out we need to assess its role and impact. [C](#)

The proposed three-level PQ framework

- Graduate Diploma in Specialist Social Work consisting of a minimum 80 credits at Level H (or 3) in the QAA (Quality Assurance Agency) framework;
- Post-graduate Diploma in Advanced Social Work consisting of a minimum of 80 credits at Masters level in the QAA framework;
- Master's Degree in Advanced Social Work consisting of a minimum of 180 credits at Master's level in the QAA framework.

Biography

KEITH BROWN is acting head of social work and head of the Centre for Post Qualifying Social Work at Bournemouth University. Natasha Young is a research fellow at the Institute of Health & Community Studies, Bournemouth University. Steven Keen is an independent research analyst, and specialises in the fields of health and social care.

References & Information

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- (2) From 'Introduction' - *What Works in Post-qualifying Education for Social Workers?* A Shaw, CCETSW, (2001).
- (3) Post-qualifying Awards in Social Work (Part 1): necessary evil or panacea? *Social Work Education* 23 pp.77-92 K Brown & S Keen (2004); Internal report on off-site learning, S Keen, Bournemouth University (2004a); PQ Part 1 Student Evaluation, S Keen, Bournemouth University (2004b).