

## Meeting the development needs of a skilled social work workforce

Case studies and resources to illustrate the implementation of continuing professional development in social work



This case study demonstrates a partnership approach to meeting the development needs of a skilled social work workforce in the most efficient way. Information from the Health Check and other skills audits has informed the development of continuing professional development programmes (CPD). Innovative ways of delivering, assessing and measuring the impact of the activity are shown, including how an in-house programme can be extended by an academic component to deepen understanding and improve practice.

### Introduction to the project and the partnership

The CPD Pathway Pilot for North West London includes eight London boroughs and two universities. The North West London partnership came together because of a shared desire to support the social work profession within the separate organisations to meet the predicted workforce needs arising from the Care Bill 2013.

### Organisational workforce development requirements

The CPD programme is piloting an initiative that has been specifically developed to prepare social workers in adult services to meet the requirements of their employers. Senior managers are backing the programme and promoting it across their organisations and providing the resources for their social workers to take part in the learning on offer. Integration, consideration of the effective deployment of social workers, and findings from the employing local authority's Health Check built the case for the programme.

Consultation with social workers helped shape the CPD programme. Together with the Health Checks and input from training and development staff, these informed the three thematic courses within the [programme](#) which can be taken as standalone courses or in combination.

- Safeguarding Adults and Risk (social worker level)
- Interpersonal Skills (experienced social worker level)
- Social Policy, Research and Business Development (all levels)

Initial findings show that the integrating the [Professional Capabilities Framework \(PCF\)](#) into the selection and application process of candidates was helpful in steering candidates towards course combinations that seemed most appropriate to their level of experience and learning needs.

## CPD approach

The CPD pathways project builds on the principles and guidance developed for the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) and develops a CPD pathway for social workers at 'social work' and 'experienced social worker' levels of the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF). The universities offer their research and teaching expertise. The option to provide academic accreditation for courses adds value and portability to CPD activities.

Each of the three components in the programme has been designed to integrate the core principles for CPD in adult services, in that it should:

- offer opportunities for critical reflection through supervision and practice-based discussion
- make use of the PCF
- be assessed holistically
- incorporate practice-based assessment
- measure impact.

However, there are differences between the courses in how these principles are being implemented.

For example, we have used this project to address concerns that social workers who are responsible for adult safeguarding may express a lack of confidence in applying legal knowledge and making decisions. This focus arose from a skills audit in one of the partner agencies and responds to organisational development needs.

## Safeguarding Adults and Risk

Existing training on Adult safeguarding alerts and investigations: practice, policy and law, has been used as the basis for the CPD programme, but now an additional academic element has been added. This enables social workers undertaking adult safeguarding tasks, who have attended an in-house training and development programme, to deepen their understanding of the subject. They will be better able to demonstrate their ability to consolidate and apply this learning in practice through producing a portfolio of evidence. A baseline [self-evaluation tool](#) has been introduced for this course.

The portfolio includes feedback from people being supported, other professionals and managers, observations of practice and a 3,500

word assignment designed to demonstrate capacity to critically reflect on practice.

The assessment is against the PCF and takes account of the [National Capability Framework for Safeguarding Adults](#). Successful candidates will be awarded 30 Masters level credits. The reflective practice sessions are being delivered as part of the course and facilitate critical reflection on practice and development of the assessed portfolio to required standards.

## Interpersonal Skills

The interpersonal skills course is targeted at experienced social workers currently working as professional educators, expert practitioners, and those in managerial roles or planning to progress to such roles. This course was designed collaboratively to address a key outcome of the Health Check findings which was the necessity to enable social workers to move "beyond traditional care management" by enhancing their skills in support planning and working effectively with complex family situations (e.g. addressing ambivalence, resistance and conflict). The consortium agreed to pilot a selection of evidence-based intervention approaches: mindfulness, psychodynamic, systemic, and motivational interviewing.

Participants are supported through individual and group coaching to compile a CPD record, evidencing their capacity for reflection and how they have applied their learning to improve the quality of practice in relation to the PCF and Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) standards of ethics and proficiency. In order to improve portability, academic accreditation of the course is currently being progressed. This will give candidates the opportunity to gain academic credits either on a standalone basis or as part of the MA Practice Education programme by completing a 3,500 word integrative practice study.

## Social Policy, Research and Business Development

Participants choosing this course take the opportunity to update their knowledge and to discuss recent research findings in light of their practice and social work roles. Particular emphasis is placed on policy developments and service reorganisations, such as integration and the implications of the Care Bill 2013.

The course provides opportunity to directly engage with the profession's leadership from The College of Social Work, the Law Commission and Department of Health, as well as with academics working on adult social work research and development. Critical thinking and research literacy, such as understanding of systematic reviews, are also fostered to enable social workers to scrutinize evidence. Business development is addressed by practice examples of commissioning outsourced services and evaluations and sharing of participants' experiences. A further dimension of this course is personal career counselling in which participants are able to consider their own career and professional profiles and networks.

### **Measuring impact**

The interpersonal skills course has piloted an [impact assessment tool](#) which aims to evaluate the impact at individual, team and organisational levels. At the end of the course, participants evidence their advanced self-awareness, resilience and interpersonal skills in a portfolio which comprises feedback from people being supported and managers, observations of practice, pre- and post-course tests, and a plan detailing how they will disseminate learning from the course and contribute to the strategic development of the team and/or employer.

It will take time to fully assess the impact of the CPD programme on service activity. It is envisaged that course participants will have enhanced their confidence and expertise as a result of participating in this pilot and will disseminate learning to students and colleagues, thus contributing to the development of a learning organisation.

The development of the programme has informed strategic workforce planning, a career and development framework for social workers in adult services, and tools for evaluating the impact of CPD activity on social work practice and on the experience of people being supported and carers experience (differentiating between social workers and experienced social workers). The project has also created tools for self-audit and assessment of practitioners which are aligned to the PCF and can be used for annual reviews and promotion applications. The CPD pathways programme has provided an opportunity to identify and enhance the skills of practitioners who are committed to life-long learning, enabling them to advance their careers by taking on new roles and acting as catalysts for disseminating learning from the project—and thereby enhancing services.

© Skills for Care 2013