

Your Post Qualifying and Practice Learning Co-Ordinators

London has five sub-regions and your first point of contact is the PQ and Practice Learning Placement Co-Ordinator.



- South East
- South West
- North West
- North East
- North Central

PQ Social Work Education Group

Michael Williams • Barnardo's (chair)
Ben Arnold • Amicus Recruit (co-vice chair)
Anna Dias • LB Brent (NW PQ rep) (co-vice chair)
Linda Christian • General Social Care Council
Marcia Daigo-Daley • CWDC
Stephen Fox • London Metropolitan University
Teresa Gray • LB Greenwich (SE PQ rep)

Jan Hill • LB Tower Hamlets (NE PQ rep)
Katie Law • RB Kingston (SW PQ rep)
Bambie Maxwell • Skills for Care London
Heidi Rossetter • LB Islington (NC PQ rep)
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PLOs compared to M25: complex and fragile

The current system for Practice Learning Opportunities in London has been likened to the traffic flow problems of the M25 motorway.

Research undertaken by the Centre for Social Work Research University of East London and the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust in 2008-09 found the current position for statutory PLO in the region to be complex and fragile.

The study commissioned by Skills for Care (SfC) and the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) to assess the demand for statutory PLOs and the trends and factors driving demand, has called for clearly identified mechanisms to be implemented in local authorities.

The report also recommended that the role of training and workforce development should be given higher priority, with local authority senior management responsible for developing cultures of work in which training is integral and integrated within everyday working practices.

The research found:

- shortcomings of accountability and responsibility for PLOs at management level, evidenced by HEI target setting for student numbers and the lack of awareness of PLO issues in local authority senior management;
- evidence that practice assessors are under supported and undervalued;
- strategic planning and auditing is an inexact proposition in a system which is subject to subtle and variable fluctuations and this leads to incomplete data and understanding;
- examples, within the overall London regional system, where enterprise, initiative and working networks generate good quantity and quality of PLOs.

The findings were based on a survey of all London local authorities and higher education institutions (HEIs); analysis of recent reports and data including material sourced from the General Social Care Council; and individual and focus group interviews with directors of social services; HEI social work course leaders; SfC sub regional coordinators, practice assessors, students and other key personnel.

Attempts to increase the number of social workers being trained by increasing demand has put considerable pressures on the system, researchers found, leading to a potential shortfall of PLOs and unpredictable fluctuation in availability across the region.

Such pressure has highlighted structural problems in the workforce, particularly on the role and function of training within the operational context of social work practice.

A need to better connect training practices with strategic and operational practice at senior management, together with the lack of practitioner and educator career pathways, further exasperated the issue said the report.

"However, if social work is going to be successful in the current contexts of policy and practice, these need to be directly and substantively addressed now," the report concluded.

A synopsis of the report can be found on page 9

Workforce asked to shape future development

Social care professionals and others who work with young people are being offered a unique opportunity to help shape the workforce of the future.

A series of regional events are to culminate in coming weeks as part of a major consultation programme being led by the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) and managed by the Children's Workforce Network – a strategic body of sector skills councils, workforce reform and regulatory bodies.

Employers and others in the sector are being asked to get involved and help shape the next stages of the government's £25 million 10-year strategy Aiming High for Young People which covers the young people's workforce aspects of training and development.



The multi-million pound programme aims to:

- strengthen leadership and management through training programmes for up to 300 strategic leaders, 5,000 frontline managers and 150 emerging leaders;
- to build capacity in the third sector; and
- to create a common platform of skills which includes the Youth Professional Status.

Keith Brumfitt, CWDC director of strategy, said: "This programme is about building on the good work that the workforce already does to ensure it is better able to successfully deliver improved outcomes for young people.

"It is also about promoting greater cohesion and consistency in the way the workforce works with each other and with young people."

The series of 11 regional events have already seen seminars take place in Birmingham, Leeds, Newcastle, Bolton, Brighton and London. Further seminars are planned for:

- Cambridge – June 12
- Taunton – June 16
- Birmingham – June 19
- London – June 23

Marcia Daigo-Daley, CWDC regional development manager for London, said the consultations presented "a fantastic opportunity" for social care professionals. "I would urge that where possible try and attend the consultation events and share your knowledge and experiences in how services could be delivered more effectively."

Spaces for the regional events can be booked by calling 0845 6120256 or visiting www.cwdcevents.org.uk/yps/

The regional events will support the wider online public consultation which opened on April 29 and can be accessed at: www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/yps-consultation

Tribute to inspirational leader

The CWDC has paid tribute to passionate and inspirational leader Michael Leadbetter who died in April.

"His commitment to children and young people has been an inspiration to many in the sector."

Michael served as the council's chairman from 2007 and was a leading figure in the children and young people's workforce, particularly in social work, driving reform at grass-roots level.

He was previously director of social services in Tameside in Greater Manchester, and Essex for 17 years, serving as president of The Association of Directors of Social Services between 2002-03.

Jane Haywood, CWDC chief executive said: "The contribution Michael made to the children and young people's workforce is immense. He has driven our social work programme with passion and commitment and been a real influence for change in social work.

"His commitment to children and young people has been an inspiration to many in the sector. His legacy is one of ensuring the child remains at the heart of all services and he will be greatly missed."

Thinking on the front line

Judy Foster explores the importance of continuing professional development and the role of the PQ awards and asks why do some teams struggle and others thrive?

It was really rewarding to share my recent research findings with the PQ Seminars for Managers.

During 2005-06 I had observed and interviewed staff in three teams working with vulnerable adults to find what supported and what impeded their ability to problem solve creatively with their clients.

I found five crucial factors that enabled social workers to 'have the capacity to endure the emotional pain in their work and simultaneously exercise measured thought, analysis and judgement' (Cooper 2005). These were:

- Professional development
- Coherent policies
- Mental space
- Support structures
- Autonomy

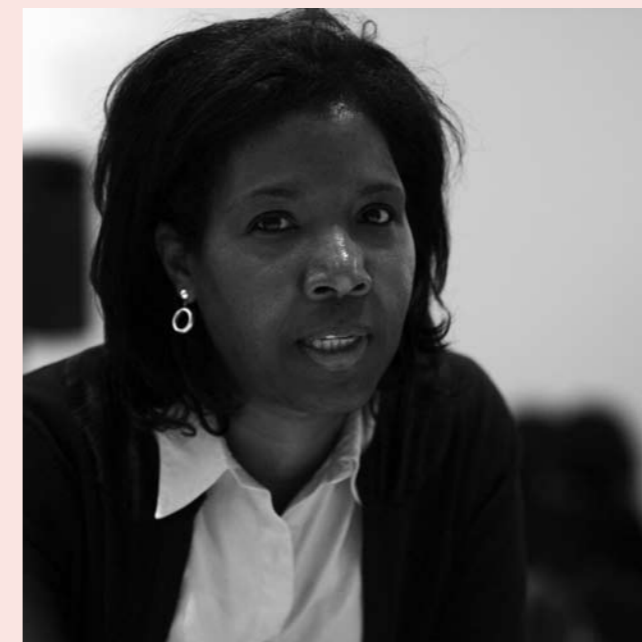
All three teams had a majority of enthusiastic, professional social workers who valued the chance to complete their Post Qualifying awards, though funding was limited.

The award enhanced their knowledge base, provided confidence in multi-disciplinary settings, and increased their expertise and independence. Discovering the impact of the PQ framework upon practice was the nicest surprise of the research.

I found senior management teams preoccupied with budget concerns and reorganisations. Confused policies like 'continuing care' payments and 'no recourse' work absorbed hours of thinking time. Delayed discharges were turning one team into a functional conveyor belt.

Two teams faced a torrent of new work amid staff reductions. Managers could not provide regular supervision or group meetings. Lack of training and support probably compounded this.

The third team held two short meetings a week for team matters, case discussions and allocations. This structure worked well and encouraged other opportunities like working in pairs, informal discussions, and supervision.



“All three teams had a majority of enthusiastic, professional social workers who valued the chance to complete their Post Qualifying awards...”

Noisy offices, lack of IT and administrative support also impeded thinking. But nothing irritated social workers more than losing that sense of autonomy that drives creativity.

One recounted of her previous post: “I don't need anyone threatening me with disciplinary charges if I advocate on the client's behalf, so I handed in my notice.”

Given these enabling factors, how can you get more thinking time for your team? Try these!

- What development opportunity can you provide for someone today?
- What is a good way to get your team to feedback on policies?
- What shared mental spaces can you create for your team?
- How can you help your team feel more in control?
- What is the smallest thing you could do to make the biggest difference in the office?

Judy Foster can be contacted on judy.foster@tiscali.co.uk

Supporting Best Practice through the Post Qualifying Awards

A series of seminars organised by Skills for Care London and the Children's Workforce Development Council have provided managers with an opportunity to explore the benefits of supporting staff to undertake a Post Qualifying Award.

Supporting Best Practice through the Post Qualifying Awards, was aimed at better informing managers about how the Post Qualifying awards:

- Develops and enhances social work values, knowledge and skills
- Broadens knowledge of social policy and legislation
- Increases the use of evidence based practice
- Encourages more effective networking and collaboration with colleagues from different backgrounds
- Enhances the sharing of knowledge and skills within teams
- Confirms the status of the consultant social worker

Research was shared about the impact of PQ awards for improving practice. Participants heard from universities offering PQ courses who identified how educational developments are addressing the policy drivers underpinning workforce reform including *Transforming Adult Social Care*, *Every Child Matters* and the new mental health legislation.

Managers confirmed that a key aim of the seminar had been met. Managers had been able to clarify their understanding of the PQ Framework and awards. They were keen to ensure greater staff awareness of the PQ framework and the importance of continuing their professional development.

“It gave me an insight into why some managers in my organisation may be resistant to supporting practitioners to complete PQ programmes.”

“It was interesting for me to hear the views of managers who did not fully support or understand PQ as it gave me an insight into why some managers in my organisation may be resistant to supporting practitioners to complete PQ programmes,” said one delegate.

The seminars covered a range of concerns highlighted by delegates including funding; releasing staff to undertake post qualifying courses – especially for Third Sector organisations; and the links between the PQ award in specialist social work and the Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) projects in adults and children's services.

Universities are now making the links between the NQSW outcomes and the consolidation module. Collaboration between universities and employers has led to the development of new modules which reflect the policy focus on safeguarding, personalisation and multi-agency working.

A full list of London PQ programmes can be downloaded from www.london.skillsforcare.org.uk under “Developing Skills” together with “*Making Sense of the Post Qualifying Awards – A Brief Guide for London Employers*”.

Managers requested that the seminars be repeated on a regular basis to ensure that all staff are familiar with the PQ framework.

Shirley Ayres is a Strategic Development Consultant and publisher of Be Inspired a unique online resource for social work and social care. www.shirleyayresconsulting.com



Michelle Henry: PQ Champion

Michelle Henry readily admits championing the cause of social work but the accolade of PQ Champion is one she is still getting accustomed to.

Recruited from Trinidad to work in Haringey Council's children and families department in 2002 in the aftermath of the Victoria Climbié tragedy, Michelle was forced to hit the ground running.

"In order to do that I became very task orientated," she says. "I would be asked to do something and I would do it."

Social workers are respected professionals in the Caribbean, where Michelle gained a BSc in Social Work and a second degree in law from the University of London, so facing a hostile reception from many of her clients in north London came as a shock.

Relying upon her "Caribbean humour" and people skills to negotiate this often hostile reception, Michelle also immersed herself in further study of legislation and policies underpinning practice in the UK.

"It was challenging getting used to the child protection framework and understanding how the Children Act worked, as it was so different to what existed in Trinidad. Section 47; and taking children into care; and care proceedings – these are things that are only just developing in the Caribbean.

"I really had supportive managers who understood a lot of the challenges I was facing and they provided me with support and advice and pointed me in the direction of people and organisations which would help."

In 2004 Michelle undertook a practice teacher award at Middlesex University, when she says reflection on her practice began in earnest. "That's when I really started to stop and think about what is best for the child and how to get better outcomes. That was the point when my practice in this country really turned around.

Michelle is currently pursuing an advanced award in children and families social work at Westminster University. "I always champion the case of PQ because I can see the impact it has had on my practice and I will always encourage members of my team to take PQ courses.



Michelle Henry

"It's so easy to get caught up in just undertaking 'tasks'. What is really important is being able to take time out to reflect about your work. People can fill out boxes but it's what you do before and after that that makes a difference."

"I really had supportive managers who understood a lot of the challenges I was facing and they provided me with support and advice."

Research and Mapping of Statutory Practice Learning Opportunities and needs in London

During 2008–9 we were commissioned by Skills for Care and CWDC London region to undertake wide ranging research of statutory practice learning opportunities (PLOs) in London. We aimed to assess both the quality and quantity of PLOs in the region, to understand the strengths and limitations in the system, and to seek out examples of good practice and identify barriers or problems areas. Our final report made a series of recommendations which we discussed with invited delegates from across the region in a Search Conference in March 2009.

London region is probably quite different from other regions through its complexity. We found through our surveys, interviews and focus groups that the PLO system is a fragile one, and to make sense of the kind of issues that are raised by this system we compared it to the traffic flow problems of a motorway such as the M25. The complex system is characterised by tensions between individuals and single organisations and the whole, and provides a difficult challenge for monitoring and regulation.

Problems in coordination between HEIs and LAs lead to oscillating demand. We are clear from our research that the demand for placements has risen sharply over the past three years, so that now,

in terms of quantity alone demand for PLOs exceeds the capacity of LAs to supply these. Problems within the system as a whole are carried by individuals working in the boundary roles between supply (HEIs) and delivery (LAs) such as Practice Learning Coordinators in LAs and placement coordinators and managers in HEIs. These individuals are often exposed and vulnerable in their roles.

We found shortcomings of accountability and responsibility for PLOs at management level. For example, HEI target setting for student numbers was driven by the financial needs of the HEI, rather than from any awareness of the issues affecting PLOs. Similarly, in LAs, the responsibilities for workforce development were often delegated down the hierarchy.

It was interesting therefore, within this fragile system to hear the views of students. Consistent with the generally low value placed on PLOs, students feel they are in a kind of lottery situation: if they are 'lucky' they will get a 'good' practice assessor; similarly, practice assessors are 'lucky' if they get a good student. Practice assessors repeatedly told us they did not really have the time and the management support to take the care needed to assess, particularly if a student's work was marginal or not up to standard.

Given the current crisis in social work it is not easy to bring more bad news. However, the opportunities need to be grasped to overcome these problems. Engaging senior managers, making better connections between HEIs and LAs and generating learning and training cultures in social work organisations are essential to improve the qualifying experiences of students, and to generate a workforce that takes care of its responsibilities for professional development. In our research and in the Search Conference we found an abundance of energy and skill that could be harnessed more effectively if these systemic issues are attended to.

*Professor Stephen Briggs,
Vice-Dean, Adolescent Department,
Tavistock Clinic.*

The full research findings can be downloaded from the practice learning section of the Skills for Care London website www.skillsforcarelondon.org.uk

London Benefits from Bursary Awards

Social workers in London have been the most active in taking advantage of Post Qualifying Bursaries to further their professional development, according to Skills for Care.

More than 80 applications were awarded nationally last year, with the majority of bursaries, 16, being granted to social workers based in London, largely for higher specialist awards.

A higher profile and national advertising helped boost interest in the awards which were widened to include voluntary organisations – around 30 individual applications were received from five voluntary organisations.

Awards were granted for a range of courses with individual bursaries awarded for:

- consolidation courses
- leadership & management
- research and dissertation
- children's services; and
- mental health

The PQ bursary fund is provided by the Department of Health (DH) and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), and was created to ensure all social workers have access and support for continuing professional education.

Successful candidates can claim up to £750 per year to cover tuition fees. Social workers who source their work through recruitment agencies are fall outside of current DH eligibility criteria for bursaries, explained Cheryl Wall, programme head for social work development at Skills for Care.

“More than 80 applications were awarded nationally last year.”

Remaining money in the fund is to be used to support all employers to develop practice educators working in partnership with work-based training provider, Learn to Care, she added: “We will be sending out information in relation to this over coming weeks.”

PQ Social Work Education Group

The next meetings of the PQ Social Work Education Group (SWEAG) – formerly the Regional Planning Network Board – will be held on the 1st July and 23rd September 2009, both at the Skills for Care London office in Kensington Olympia (Charles House).

Social Work Development Partnership (SWDP) Board and Social Work Task Force



Bridget Robb, Chair of the SWDP Board

We are currently awaiting confirmation of the allocation of Social Work Development Partnership funding in 2009–10. In the meantime, the Partnership Board has agreed that activity in 2009–10 should focus on increasing the quality and availability of statutory placements and that wherever possible funding will be distributed directly to employers to achieve this objective.

Funding will be allocated for regional PQ planning to enable employers and HEIs to come together to plan PQ provision to meet employer demand. The Partnership is aware that the Social Work Task Force is currently gathering evidence and will, in the autumn, be making recommendations

for improvements and the long-term reform of social work training, practice, recruitment and leadership. The Board will share learning from the first year of Partnership work with the Task Force.

In the London region, the Social Work Task force consultation events were well attended and the recent London Search conference was chaired by Bridget Robb, Chair of the SWDP Board, who is also a member of the Task Force.

For further information on the work of the Social Work Task Force please visit: www.dcsf.gov.uk/swtf

Information Exchange

More than 50 people from 22 London boroughs and 10 higher education institutions in the capital attended the most recent Information Exchange meeting on March 11 organised by Skills for Care London and the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC).

The Information Exchange is the most robust forum for employers and university representatives to discuss the education and training needs of social work professionals.

The next meeting is due to take place on June 10th. At the last meeting, it was agreed that we review the quarterly meeting format as a whole group. This is a one off day to ensure that attendees (both employers and university representatives) have an opportunity together, to consider how best to contribute to and influence the strategic vision of today's social work practitioners as set out by the sector skills councils and government.

The event will take place at Prospero House, 241 Borough High Street, SE1 1GA. The next Information Exchange will be held on the 16th September 2009.