
post-qualifying courses for social workers and managers

case studies



The revised post-qualifying (PQ) framework came into effect on September 2007. Its employer-led, modular nature means it can be used as continuing professional development (CPD) for qualified social workers, while also allowing non-social worker staff to undertake specific modules. This approach to PQ supports the key strategic drivers of the sector.

the post-qualifying framework

If you are thinking about undertaking a PQ course, it is important to understand the PQ framework. The diagram on the following page (adapted from the original format produced by the School of Social Work, Kingston University) explains its structure.

There are three levels of award in the framework, each corresponding to a different stage of professional and career development.

Degree / Masters in Social Work
 (or CQSW, CSS, DipSW, or internationally recognised qualification)
 GSCC registration as a "Social Worker"

Post Qualifying Award in Specialist Social Work
 (Minimum honours degree level)

Pathways:

Child Care	Adults	Mental Health	Leadership & Management (registered managers only)
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The Specialist Award seeks to consolidate and extend initial professional competence in a specialist context. This level includes a consolidation module, developing professional practice modules and a practice assessor / practice education module entitled 'enabling others', which will include responsibility for the learning and assessment of a social work degree student.

Post Qualifying Award in Higher Specialist Social Work
 (Post graduate diploma level)

Some universities offer joint pathways

Professional Practice (in one of the following areas: Child Care / Adults / Mental Health)	Leadership and Management	Professional Practice Education
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The Specialist Award seeks to consolidate and extend initial professional competence in a specialist context. This level includes a consolidation module, developing professional practice modules and a practice assessor / practice education module entitled 'enabling others', which will include responsibility for the learning and assessment of a social work degree student.

Post Qualifying Award in Advanced Social Work
 (Masters degree level)

Some universities offer joint pathways

Professional Practice (Child Care / Adults / Mental Health)	Leadership and Management	Professional Practice Education
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The Advanced Award focuses on the knowledge and skills required for professional leadership, the improvement of care services and applied professional research.

at which level should I enter the framework?

<p>Are you a newly qualified Social Worker?</p>	<p>You should enter the framework at Specialist level and progress through the framework during your career.</p>
<p>Are you an experienced Social Worker undertaking direct work with service users and carers?</p>	<p>You should normally enter the framework at Specialist level. You may be able to 'fast-track' the first part of this level.</p>
<p>Have you completed some courses, but not all the PQSW (for example the GSCC Practice Teaching Award, or the PQ1)? Are you doing direct work with service users and carers?</p>	<p>You should normally be able to get credit for courses you have already passed at Specialist level. This is called APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning). You should aim to complete Specialist level as soon as possible.</p>
<p>Have you a Masters or a BA/BSc Degree as an initial qualification in social work? Are you doing direct work with service users and carers?</p>	<p>You should enter the framework at Specialist level and during your career progress through the framework. It may seem strange that you are taking an academic award at the same level as you have already gained. The point to remember is that these awards are assessing your competence at post-qualifying level, not qualifying level. You are at an advantage in that you have already honed your academic skills.</p>
<p>Do you have the former GSCC Post Qualifying Award (PQSW) (all elements – PQ1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6) in the service area in which you are currently working?</p>	<p>You have the equivalent of the Specialist award. You should consider a Higher Specialist Award course.</p>
<p>Are you a manager? Are you an educator (for example a training officer or a specialist practice teacher)?</p>	<p>You should normally consider a Higher Specialist Award course. You should meet with the course leader and your employer to tailor a programme at this level which will meet your employment needs and your career aspirations.</p>
<p>Have you taken other courses in management or education and training?</p>	<p>You should normally be able to get credit for courses you have already passed at Higher Specialist level. This is called APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning). Discuss this with the course leader when you come for interview.</p>
<p>Can I enter the framework at Advanced level?</p>	<p>To gain the Advanced level you must complete a Masters degree and have your practice assessed at this level of leadership. You may choose not to have your practice assessed at Higher Specialist level (PG Diploma stage of a Masters Degree which is two-thirds of a Masters degree). You should discuss this with the course leader. Most people will complete both Higher Specialist and Advanced levels.</p>

case studies

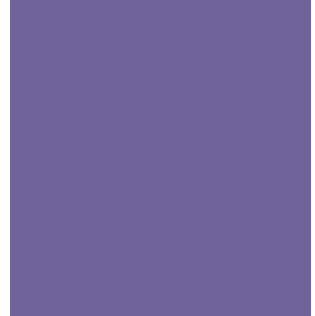
We have collated a series of eight case studies on the following pages, each of which is a composite of real social workers. They are intended to give you an insight into why social workers decide to do PQ courses and their potential value and impact.

skills for care

Skills for Care London have developed a PQ Programmes Directory, which provides information on the PQ programmes available within the region. They also arrange quarterly PQ Information Exchange meetings and have produced a useful document which answers the most frequently asked questions about PQ: Making sense of the Post Qualifying Awards – a brief guide for London Employers. This publication and the other useful PQ information can be found on their website: london.skillsforcare.org.uk (click 'developing skills' in the menu on the left, then click 'post qualifying social work (pq)' in the menu on the right).

next steps

Talk to your local authority PQ lead – you can ask about the courses that are available, the application process and funding sources. You should also discuss your plans with your manager, as they will need to release you to study and so on.



Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) - Adults

CASE STUDY 1: Sean

Sean qualified almost a year ago and is working in an Elders social work team, which is soon to integrate with nursing colleagues from the local Primary Care Trust. He was a newly qualified social worker (NQSW) during this year. He has undertaken the NQSW programme and had extra support from his supervisor to help him settle into his career.

PQ courses undertaken and why

The training and development Sean has undertaken as an NQSW can count towards the Consolidation Module (the first part of the Specialist Award in Social Work). The university linked to his employer will accredit his NQSW study (Accrediting Prior Experience and Learning – APEL) so he only needs to complete an extra couple of pieces of work to gain the Consolidation Module.

impact

Sean has found working in the Elders team challenging as he has been involved in work safeguarding adults and assessing service users' mental capacity (areas he didn't have a lot of experience in).

He is also working at a time of major change in Adults social care, with the implementation of the Personalisation agenda and its implications for the way social work is practised.

He found the opportunity for supported learning and development very helpful as it allowed him time to develop his skills and knowledge rather than dropping him in at the deep end. He now is able to practise with confidence, both with service users and colleagues from a range of other professions, because he knows that he is more competent and effective than when he started.

The training has also contributed to the hours of Continuing Professional Development Sean needs to undertake to maintain his GSCC registration.

future possibilities

Sean could go on to complete the full Specialist Award in Social Work.

He could begin with the two modules in professional practice, which are designed to be directly relevant to his job. The modules would increase his knowledge and skills by focusing on working with older people. He is interested in the mental health of older people and this could lead him to work in a specialist mental health team.

Sean could continue on to the module(s) that replaced the previous Practice Teaching Award, which would develop his skills and knowledge to help social work students learn when they are on placement. He could become a practice assessor supervising his own social work student, which is the first step towards supervising the work of others. This is a good way to gain experience to apply for senior practitioner posts, and to maintain a fresh approach and a different perspective to his work.

CASE STUDY 2: Danny

Danny gained his DipSW six years ago and had remained in the job he got when he first qualified – in a Learning Disability team. He hadn't thought about doing any post-qualifying courses as his job was very busy and he usually worked long hours and studying took him extra time as he is dyslexic. He enjoyed working with people with learning disabilities and was an extremely competent worker who personified person-centred working, gaining considerable expertise in working with younger adults who also had mental health concerns. He didn't particularly want to go for promotion to a senior practitioner post although his colleagues regularly consulted him informally about their concerns about their work. He didn't think of himself as 'management material'. In the last three years, the social work team has become integrated with local Primary Care Trust services for people with learning disabilities and he has been working with colleagues from nursing, Occupational Therapy and psychology.

PQ courses undertaken and why

Danny's interest in mental health and learning disability led him to apply to do the Approved Mental Health Practitioner (AMHP) course. He had discussed with his manager his concern at the quality of Mental Health Act assessments for people with learning disabilities carried out by AMHPs from the mainstream mental health services and they agreed that it would benefit the team and service users to have a specialist AMHP in their team to undertake this role.

Danny had three months out of his job to undertake the full-time AMHP course. Like all the other staff doing the course, he found it extremely demanding to complete all the practical and academic work but he also found it extremely interesting. He could see that he was learning a huge amount that would be directly relevant to his usual role. He completed the course successfully and he had an extremely good practice assessor on his placement who helped him make links between his work in learning disabilities and mental health.

impact

Danny returned to the learning disabilities team with new responsibilities and the expertise to carry them out effectively. Service users who also had mental health concerns got a much better service than before. Danny was so enthused by his learning and the good experience he'd had on placement that he wanted to become a practice assessor himself. He completed the practice education module at Higher Specialist level and gained the full Higher Specialist Award in Social Work. He then took on being practice assessor for students on the social work degree and others on the AMHP course. A further impact was that Danny realised how competent he was and that he enjoyed supervising other people's work as it was a way to spread good practice. He has since successfully applied for a job as a senior practitioner.

future possibilities

In terms of further study, Danny might want to continue with the Masters degree (Advanced Award in Social Work). The Higher Specialist award is at Masters level, so to gain the MSc he would have to study for two more modules and complete a dissertation. He could choose a dissertation topic relevant to his work so the study time would be of direct benefit to his practice.

In terms of work, if he gained a Masters he might want to consider doing some teaching on a social work course as he has discovered he has a talent for helping people to learn. If he doesn't take this route, he might consider applying for a team manager post and then further management posts.

Approved Mental Health Practitioner (AMHP) – Adults / Mental Health

CASE STUDY 3: Tony

Tony qualified as a social worker 15 years ago and for the last 12 has been working as an Approved Social Worker (now Approved Mental Health Practitioner). For the last eight years the team has been an integrated Community Mental Health Team with a range of mental health professionals working together. Since the Mental Health Act 2007, some of those other professionals are training to take up the AMHP role.

Tony is very experienced and committed to his work. He has no great desire to become a manager but he is concerned that service users get the best service. He has undertaken several short courses to develop his practice but he had not thought about doing post-qualifying social work courses.

For the last five years he has been practice assessor for social workers training as ASWs and he wants to continue this with staff doing the AMHP course.

PQ courses undertaken and why

Tony decided to undertake a module from the Practice Education pathway of the Higher Specialist social work award. This would help him develop his skills to be a practice assessor for any of the mental health professionals doing the AMHP course.

impact

He studied with other mental health professionals doing the module and this helped him develop skills and confidence to be a practice assessor for any mental health professional training to be an AMHP. The module also gave him new ideas about how to be an effective practice assessor and Tony realised he enjoyed this role. It allowed him to help others develop good practice, so he had an impact on the quality of service received by many service users in addition to those he worked with.

Tony also became interested in research through his studies and what he learnt from other professionals. He saw that he could do some research on aspects of his work, which could then be used to help develop good practice. He didn't need to be a manager to spread good practice. He applied to university to take the extra modules and a dissertation to gain a Masters degree.

The dissertation will give him the opportunity to develop his research skills further and he has chosen a topic that is directly connected to his work and that will involve him talking with service users and staff in his team.

future possibilities

Tony could continue his research interest. He could apply to university to undertake a PhD and develop expertise in a new area of practice, which will have an even greater impact on the quality of service users receive. If he does this, it could open up a teaching role for him so he can disseminate good practice even further.

If he doesn't undertake further study he could continue to develop his expertise within the multi-disciplinary team and contribute to the development of colleagues from all the professions represented in the service.

CASE STUDY 4: Cassie

Cassie gained her DipSW seven years ago. She found the course quite challenging as she had left school at 16 and worked for ten years as a shop assistant, then as a Home Carer. She was not a confident student. After qualifying she worked for a couple of years as a social worker in an elders team. She then got a job as manager of a day centre for older people and has been in that post ever since; she is the Registered Manager for the service. Cassie was quite relieved to move away from fieldwork, which she had found very stressful. She has not undertaken any further training, except for one-day courses on the Human Resources aspects of her role as a manager, and the Registered Managers Award. She originally managed and supervised Day Care staff, but two years ago an Occupational Therapist and an OT Assistant joined the service and she has been supervising them also. Her work has become increasingly multidisciplinary and inter-professional.

PQ courses undertaken and why

Cassie decided that she needed to undertake further study – she had to meet GSCC expectations for continuing professional development and she was also finding it increasingly hard to manage the difficult dynamics arising from the differences of opinion between staff from the two professions she was managing. She also wanted to restore her confidence that she could still study and learn as she felt rather at a disadvantage compared to the amount of CPD undertaken by the OT. She discussed with her manager and training officer what course she could do to develop her skills as a manager and her practice skills and knowledge of working with older people. She applied to a university which agreed that she could start the Post-Qualifying Award in Higher Specialist Social Work – she undertook the ‘Combined Pathways’ route, which meant she studied modules about leadership and management as well as modules about professional practice with older people.

Cassie completed the six modules over two and a half years, attending five training days spread over four months for each module; and she gained the Higher Specialist Award in Social Work. She didn’t want to do it any faster because of family commitments and found the pace just about right.

impact

Cassie enjoyed the modules. Although she found meeting deadlines for assignments a challenge, she was able to complete them as they were based on work she was doing, so were useful and saved her time in her job. She undertook several of the modules with people from other professions – nurses; GPs; Practice Managers; 3rd sector organisations – and found she learnt a great deal from them as well as from her academic study. She also had to provide evidence to the university of the competence of her practice, which she got from her manager who observed her supervising a staff member and gave her a reference about the effectiveness of some work she had undertaken to develop the Day Centre service. Cassie has recaptured her original enthusiasm for her job and feels more confident that she can be effective in what is now a multi-disciplinary service. She feels excited that she has contributed to significant service development.

future possibilities

For the moment Cassie is satisfied with where she is, but she feels now that if she wants to develop further the next step for her might be a Service Manager role or managing an integrated team of social workers and nurses in the community. She is confident and experienced enough to do so.

Community Services Manager – Adults / 3rd Sector

CASE STUDY 5: Jane

Jane qualified as a social worker 25 years ago, gaining a Certificate of Qualification in Social Work when she was 26. She has worked in many settings since then and has been a senior practitioner and deputy manager in teams in statutory agencies working with adults and people over 65. She didn't undertake any further social work qualifications after she got her CQSW, although she has supervised social work students on placements.

Three years ago she left statutory services and became Community Services manager in a large 3rd sector organisation working with older people.

PQ courses undertaken and why

Jane decided that she wanted to do the Enabling Others module of the Specialist social work award. She thought her agency would be able to offer a good placement for a social work student; and that she would enjoy doing this as she liked the different perspectives that students bring – including the challenge of seeing things from another angle and supporting the development of a new social worker. However, as it had been some time since she last supervised a student she wanted to update her knowledge and skills and the EO module seemed the ideal way to do that.

Offering a placement also meant that she would earn some money, both for her agency and herself.

impact

Jane loved doing the module – it refreshed her view of social work and reminded her that she did enjoy studying when it was a topic she was interested in. The university study days were spread out over a couple of months, so the course felt manageable.

Jane has since had more social work students and continues to enjoy the experience as well as earning extra money.

The experience also motivated her to continue studying and she arranged with the university that she would undertake some modules on the Higher Specialist Social Work Award – some from the 'Leadership and Management' pathway and some from 'Professional Practice'. These have enabled her to develop her management skills, for example in managing the change her service is undergoing as the personalisation agenda for services is implemented. It has also updated her knowledge and skills in working with older people.

future possibilities

Jane completed three modules from the Higher Specialist Award. She can complete the other three modules and gain the full award, which would give her the satisfaction of knowing that she has extended her study and her many years of social work practice and management are recognised.

She may not choose to do this, but what she has gained from the modules she studied have helped her to work more effectively with several challenging issues at work – managing change (the strategy and the people); developing strategy for the service and better relationships with Commissioners from the Local Authority.

Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) – Children’s CASE STUDY 6: Tessa

Tessa qualified almost a year ago and is working in a Children’s team. She is thinking about working in a Child Protection team but is slightly apprehensive as she knows how challenging this work is. She was a newly qualified social worker (NQSW) during this year. She has undertaken the NQSW programme and had extra support from her supervisor to help her settle into her career.

PQ courses undertaken and why

The training and development Tessa has undertaken as an NQSW can count towards the Consolidation Module (the first part of the Specialist Award in Social Work). The university linked to her employer will accredit her NQSW study (Accrediting Prior Experience and Learning – APEL) so she only needs to complete an extra couple of pieces of work to gain the Consolidation Module.

impact

The NQSW programme and Consolidation Module have helped Tessa develop from when she got her degree. She has put into practice what she has been learning from university, from her supervisor and her colleagues and feels more competent and more confident. This has helped her to deal effectively with the increasingly complex work she is taking on and its multi-disciplinary nature – working with colleagues from education, health, Adults and Mental Health services.

The training has also contributed to the hours of Continuing Professional Development Tessa needs to undertake to maintain her GSCC registration.

future possibilities

Tessa could go on to complete the full Specialist Award in Social Work.

She could begin with the two modules in professional practice, which are designed to be directly relevant to her job. The modules would increase her confidence as she develops her career in other areas of practice in Children’s Services.

Tessa could continue on to the module(s) that replaced the previous Practice Teaching Award, which would develop her skills and knowledge to help social work students learn when they are on placement. She could become a practice assessor supervising her own social work student, which is the first step towards supervising the work of others. This is a good way to gain experience to apply for senior practitioner posts, and to maintain a fresh approach and a different perspective to her work.

Social Worker (PQ1) – Children’s CASE STUDY 7: Joe

Joe qualified six years ago. He has worked in various teams in Children’s services – Child Protection; Advice and Assessment and for the last year in the Leaving Care team.

He has already gained PQ1 from the previous PQ framework. He had thought about doing the Practice Teacher’s award, but it ceased to exist when the new PQ framework started. He was interested in supervising a social work student.

PQ courses undertaken and why

Joe undertook the following modules from the Specialist Award in social work: ‘mentoring and enabling the learning of others’ so that he could have a social work student; and the Child Care-specific modules so that he would develop his professional practice and then decide where he wanted to go from there. He completed the modules over 18 months and when he successfully completed them he gained the full Specialist Award.

impact

Joe found that the ‘enabling others’ module helped prepare him to have a student and he enjoyed being a practice assessor. He liked the fact that his student brought a different perspective to the work because this made Joe think more about his practice.

Joe was able to join the university’s Practice Assessment Panel, which meant that he was involved in assessing the practice of other students and was sometimes a member of the panel that investigated students’ appeals. He also contributed annually to the university’s teaching programme for students intending to work in Children’s services.

future possibilities

Joe wanted to stay in his current job. He continued to supervise social work students so he could gain more experience of supervising the work of others. He planned to return to PQ study after a year’s break to take a combination of modules from the Higher Specialist award – he could do some from each of the pathways in Professional Practice and Practice Education. In this way he thought he could keep open his options for developing his practice and his supervisory skills.

Dip SW Social Worker (PQ1) - Children's CASE STUDY 8: Razia

Razia gained her DipSW eight years ago and since then has worked in Child Protection. For the last three years she has been the manager of a Child Protection team in an inner-city Local Authority service.

She started work in a Social Services Directorate, but two years ago the SSD split into Adults and Children's services and Children's then integrated with Education Services in the Local Authority to form a new Children's Directorate. So Razia now works closely with teaching staff, educational psychologists and so on. She has a new set of working relationships and new ways to deliver her team's service.

Razia gained PQ1 under the previous PQ Framework but hadn't gone further as she felt under too much pressure at work. She started to feel more confident in her role and as she had an experienced deputy she started to think about developing her career further.

PQ courses undertaken and why

Razia successfully applied to a university to do the Higher Specialist Social Work Award. The university accepted that the nature and complexity of her work meant the Higher Specialist Award was more appropriate than the Specialist Award. They also accepted that Razia would be able to study at post-graduate / Masters level as she had written policy and strategy documents at work that showed her ability to research and write analytically.

She took modules from the pathways in Professional Practice in Child Care and Leadership and Management, as she wanted to develop both as a practitioner and manager.

impact

Razia undertook the modules over two years as she wanted her study to feel manageable and fit around her family and work responsibilities. She was able to choose assignments that were relevant to her work, and that also helped her fit the course with her work.

The course had a strong focus on evidence-based practice and opened up opportunities for her to develop her research skills. She hadn't thought of herself as a researcher but she enjoyed the rigorous and thorough approach to work that the research skills gave her. This meant her assignments were very thorough and she was able to use them at work to help her disseminate good practice across the service.

The modules about Leadership and Management helped her support her staff and the service as they worked in the changing circumstances of the recently created Children's Directorate.

future possibilities

Razia realised that she had effective teaching and facilitation skills. This led her to thinking about opportunities for developing her career – perhaps a teaching role if she undertook a dissertation and the further modules required to complete the Masters degree with the Advanced Award in social work.

The other possibility which interested Razia was to seek a Service Manager's post. This was the next step in management for her. She would be in a position to influence policy and practice across the Directorate, and she was confident that she had a lot to offer the service.