Introduction: What is post qualifying social work practice?

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This book explores post qualifying social work practice (PQ) – the practice that takes place after qualifying as a social worker, starting in most instances (except for independently employed practitioners) with a newly qualified social worker's induction as an employee, and then consolidation of qualifying level competences. PQ social work experience, supported by continuing professional development (CPD), leads to enhanced knowledge and skills within specialist practice areas. Over time, PQ social work may demonstrate practice expertise, denoted by leadership within the profession.

This vision of moving from competence to expertise within PQ social work practice is important for social workers. Social work is now a registered profession and a protected title in the United Kingdom. All UK social workers have to register with their Care Council in order to practise, and as a consequence of registration, have to undertake CPD. Registration requires social workers to complete PRTL (post registration training and learning) of specified days over three years.

PQ social work practice is not just about acquiring experience – there are clear expectations that social workers will continue to develop their practice through professional development.

'CPD' and 'PQ' are interrelated terms with somewhat different meanings.

- *Continuing professional development (CPD)* denotes flexible learning and development undertaken after successful completion of a professional qualification. Although CPD learning does not always have to be assessed or result in an award, CPD activity should always result in personal and professional development. CPD, a broader concept than PQ, is the over-arching concept within which specific PQ awards and activities are located.
- *Post qualifying education and training (PQ)* is designed normally as specific assessed modules or awards whose content and assessment are prescribed by a social work regulatory body, and whose aims are to develop social workers' practice in accordance with employers' requirements. The principle of demonstrating practice achievement underpins PQ.

Assumptions

The chapters make assumptions – that social workers will work in diverse organisational structures, that they should be aware of European social work models, and that values and relationships are essential.

Values and relationships

PQ practice promotes professional relationships that consult, engage with, and support the choices of people who use services and carers rather than wield hierarchical power. Social workers are expected to pursue goals of social justice through advocacy (Bateman, 2000; Brandon and Brandon, 2000) and emancipatory practice (Pease and Fook, 1999). They are required to take responsibility for their own practice and contribute to the practice of others by becoming a mentor, enabler, or assessor of students' and colleagues' work-based learning.

Diverse organisational structures

The main multi-professional groupings for social workers are *health and social care* (social workers in NHS Trusts alongside health professionals, social workers engaging with adults with mental health problems, learning disabilities, physical disabilities and older people) and *children and young people's services aligned with education* (social workers alongside children's centre workers, early years workers, education welfare officers, teachers, personal advisers, and learning mentors).

Social workers work for third-sector organisations (both private and charitable), employment agencies, social inclusion initiatives, as well as for local authorities. Some social workers may be self-employed. In England, adult social care and children's services are structurally separate, and in England and Wales, criminal justice work is organisationally separate.

European social work models

Social workers will benefit from exploring European social work models that are becoming known in the UK, and incorporating aspects, where appropriate, into new forms of practice. As well, UK social workers engage with refugees, migrants, and asylum-seeking families and individuals.

Consultation with service users and carers

Whilst preparing the book, the editor attended a service-user group and a carers group, and asked what they thought was important for PQ candidates to learn. They made three requests: first, that social workers should be knowledgeable of current events that affect decisions about service provision; second, that social workers should monitor new research, treatments and trends; and third, that social workers must recognise the importance of values for practice. The chapters attempt to address these concerns.

Who is the book for?

The book is written for UK-based social workers, and is relevant for trainers and managers as well as practitioners from other professions (health, children's workforce, housing, education, justice, youth work, careers guidance, community workers, and social care workers). Experienced social workers and newly qualified social workers will benefit from reflecting on practice issues discussed

in the book. Managers will find chapters helpful for understanding PQ and CPD choices in the context of workforce strategies. Educators and trainers can draw on the book's overview of PQ issues.

Aims and objectives

The overall aim is to enhance (and hopefully inspire) social workers' continuing professional development of knowledge, skills and values within specialist areas of practice. Specific objectives are to:

- Increase knowledge for practice;
- Explore values dilemmas;
- Encourage social workers to reflect on their practice, and through critical self-appraisal, construct different ways of thinking about and doing social work that build confidence in their professional identity;
- Promote PQ learning and career development.

Structure

The book draws on contributions of social work academics and practitioners in the UK and Europe. Contributors reflect critically on a range of relevant PQ concerns: ethics and values; evidence from research; National Occupational Standards, knowledge, skill and service frameworks; Care Councils' requirements for CPD/PQ and post registration training and learning (PRTL); and relevant policies. Anonymised examples from practice, research, and teaching encourage self-analysis. Each chapter suggests further reading to stimulate thinking beyond that provided within the book's limited length. A glossary explains acronyms and technical terms. Users, carers, and social workers acted as 'critical friends', commenting on the book's emergent content for its relevance to 'real world' issues.

Following the Introduction, four Parts are each introduced by a bridging statement:

- **Part One: Essential elements for PQ practice** – includes frameworks, values, and working with service users and carers (Chapters 1–3).
- **Part Two: Specialist practice** – covers children and families, mental health, older people, the social model of disability, learning disability, and European skills and models (Chapters 4–9).
- **Part Three: PQ functions** – concerns multi-professional practice, research and reflective practice, practice education, and leadership and management (Chapters 10–13).
- **Part Four: Learning organisations and criticality** – covers recruitment, retention, career development, and critical reflective practice (Chapters 14–15).