



Requirements for PQ and Advanced Awards in social work

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The PQ framework was established by the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW) to support the continuing professional development of qualified social workers. This framework has been adopted by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC), the General Social Care Council (GSCC), the Care Council for Wales (CCW), and the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC).

The framework encompasses two Awards in Social Work - the Post Qualifying Award and the Advanced Award - built upon two different levels of competence:

- **The Post Qualifying Award (PQSW)** which builds on the standards of the DipSW and is designed to recognise the developing skills and expertise of social work.
- **The Advanced Award (AASW)** is the qualification that recognises high skills of practice, policy making, leadership and management.

The aim of the framework is to support education, training and qualifications for social workers that will ensure users of the personal social services receive the highest possible standards of service and care.

The awards are open to all staff of the personal social services who hold a professional social work qualification such as the DipSW, CQSW, CSS or recognised equivalent. This includes social workers in the statutory, voluntary and private sectors, probation officers in Northern Ireland and education welfare officers. The awards are also open to independent social workers and those intending to return to practice after a career break.

This leaflet gives an overview of the post-qualifying framework and provides a summary of the requirements for both awards. The full requirements for the framework are set out in Assuring Quality for Post Qualifying Education and Training – 1 – which can be downloaded from the Quality Assurance Materials section of the NISCC web site.

The PQ framework

The framework was developed by the former Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work in consultation with the main government, employer, educational and professional and trade union interests and has four main aims:

- To recognise and validate the professional development of qualified social workers.
- To ensure common minimum standards across a wide variety of post qualifying social work education and training, in different sectors and settings.
- To provide structures for post qualifying education and training which are flexible and responsive to the changing needs of service delivery and different career pathways.

- To promote education, training and qualifications that support high standards of service and care in the personal social services.

How it works

The PQ framework is based on a system of credit accumulation and transfer (CATS) and on the assessment of a worker's practice competence as the result of learning. The UK standard for PQ is linked to academic awards. The framework is delivered across the UK by 20 post-qualifying education and training consortia. Each consortium is made up of local employing agencies and academic institutions working in collaboration. This enables social workers to have access to the awards in the area in which they work, or if they are not currently in employment, the area where they live.

At the heart of the framework is a system of credit accumulation and transfer (CATS) linked to academic awards which allows candidates to work towards an award over time, and if necessary in different workplaces. It also means that new courses and programmes designed to meet changing service delivery and work patterns can be readily bought into the framework. The framework concentrates on the assessment of learning outcomes, in other words, on the recognition of a workers professional competence as a result of learning. This means that all forms of learning - assessed courses, informal learning in the workplace, distance and open learning - can be used to provide the evidence of competence in particular areas. In addition, the system allows professional credits to be put towards academic awards. The PQSW is comprised of a minimum of 120 professional credits, assessed at the academic equivalent of the final year of an undergraduate degree: the AASW is comprised of a minimum of 120 credits, assessed at the academic equivalent of a masters degree.

Revised Requirements

The PQSW takes workers from the point when they obtain their professional qualification to a post qualifying level where they have extended their skills to demonstrate competence in managing risk, working in complex situations and enabling others to develop their practice. This level of competence should be achievable by all qualified social workers who have been offered appropriate induction, support and relevant training opportunities.

The PQSW is made up of six general and two core requirements and is divided into two parts. Part I recognises the level of competence achieved by a social worker who has consolidated the learning acquired by the point of DipSW qualification. The appropriate Council will issue a certificate to all candidates who have been assessed as attaining this level of competence. Part II recognises the competence of social workers who are involved in complex work and who have gone on to contribute to the development of others, for example, students, colleagues, volunteers, foster carers.

Core Requirements

In meeting the general requirements all candidates must:

- (a) evaluate the effectiveness of their practice using a relevant knowledge base, including an understanding of legal and policy contexts and appropriate research;
- (b) demonstrate an explicit adherence to the values of social work and to the provision of ethically sound practice.

General Requirements

All candidates must demonstrate:

PART I

PQ1 that they have improved and extended the level of competence acquired by the point of qualification.

PART II

PQ2 competence in working effectively in complex situations;

PQ3 competence in exercising the powers and responsibilities of a professional social worker, including the appropriate use of discretion and the management of risk;

PQ4 ability to make informed decisions;

PQ5 competence in identifying and maintaining purposeful networks and collaborative arrangements;

PQ6 competence in enabling others through management, supervision, consultation, practice teaching or direct contributions to education and training.

The AASW recognises the achievements of social workers who demonstrate leadership and expertise in their area of work. Social workers who achieve this level of competence will be making contributions to the development of services and the profession through policy making, innovative practice, research and education. The AASW is made up of eight general and two core requirements and work towards the award is assessed in one of four areas of social work: practice, education and training, management, research, or a combination of two or more of these areas.

Core Requirements

In meeting the general requirements all candidates must:

- (a) demonstrate analysis and critical reflection which informs and influences practice, policy and service provision;
- (b) provide evidence of a commitment to sustaining the values of social work in the light of continuing social and political change and be able to define and develop policies and practices accordingly.

General Requirements

All candidates must:

AA1 provide evidence of significant contribution to the development, delivery and evaluation of the service provided in a chosen area by demonstrating the ability to research, plan, implement, monitor and evaluate strategies for improvement or change;

AA2 demonstrate critical appraisal of relevant theoretical models, policies and law, in their chosen area, including knowledge of local, national and UK perspectives;

AA3 demonstrate skilled use of a wide repertoire of methods and be able to select and use the most effective approach to meeting consumer need for the different aspects of their work;

AA4 demonstrate competence in enhancing the capabilities of others as a means of informing and improving practice or service delivery;

AA5 demonstrate highly developed skills in strategic networking, negotiation and collaboration;

AA6 demonstrate competence in responding to and managing change in their chosen area, including the ability to respond to unintended outcomes;

AA7 demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the impact of relevant policy, practice and institutions within the European or international context in order to inform practice or service development;

AA8 provide evidence of leadership in their chosen field, including the ability to work independently, and to be accountable, in fulfilling the responsibilities of their role.

Candidates need to register with their local PQ consortium. The consortium will have systems for providing support and guidance to candidates, including the appointment of supervisors and mentors. They will also be responsible for assessment and the allocation of the credit. The aim of the assessment system is to confirm that candidates have satisfied the requirements for either the PQSW or the AASW. Assessment will concentrate on outcomes rather than on content or pattern of learning. Evidence of learning outcomes can be demonstrated through a range of means including written or oral examinations; dissertation; research reports; project reports; evidence of practice competence, including practice log, work products and direct observation of practice; references, testimonials and reports from supervisors and other methods including the use of video, audio tape etc. Candidates at both levels will be expected to accumulate evidence of how they have met the requirement for either award in a portfolio which will be presented to the consortium assessment board.

Credits can be obtained in three ways:

- **Portfolio route:** Credits can be awarded to candidates who have built up a portfolio over time which provides evidence of learning from, for example, work-based activities and non-assessed in-service training or personal programmes of study.
- **Completion of an accredited programme:** All assessed post qualifying programmes of training or study which incorporate competences for either award can be credit-rated. The consortia have responsibility for credit-rating relevant programmes within their area, including the in-service training programmes run by agencies and post qualifying courses offered by academic institutions. Training which is provided on a UK-wide basis is credit-rated by the four Councils. For example, candidates for the PQSW who have the Practice Teaching Award are eligible for 160 PQ credits; candidates who have done ASW/MHO training are eligible for 60 PQ credits.
- **APEL: Accreditation of prior experiential learning:** This allows candidates to gain recognition for the learning they have accumulated in the past. For example, at post qualifying level APEL can allow experienced social workers who have the Practice Teaching Award and/or have undertaken ASW/MHO training to take a fast-track to the award.

Registration fees and other costs

Candidates for the awards will need to pay a registration fee to their local consortium. A one-off registration fee (usually incorporated into the consortium registration fee) is also payable to the Registry of the GSCC and this includes the cost of the award certificate. Additional fees may be charged by the consortium to cover the costs of supervisors or mentors and the cost of assessment. Candidates undertaking accredited programmes of study can also expect to pay course fees to the programme provider. It may be possible to have assessment and course fees spread over time.

Financial support

Candidates in employment interested in registering for the awards are advised to discuss it with their line manager and/or training officer. They may find that their agency will be able to help with some of the costs. In some circumstances small bursaries may be available from the consortia. Information regarding the amounts available, eligibility criteria and application procedures can be obtained from the consortium with which a candidate is registering. The Social Workers Educational Trust at 16 Kent Street, Birmingham B5 6RD also offers grants to experienced social workers for post qualifying studies.]

Further Information

The Requirements in full are set out in Assuring Quality for Post Qualifying Education and Training – 1 which can be downloaded from the Quality Assurance Materials section of the NISCC website.

Practical guidance to candidates on preparing a portfolio is given in the publication Preparing Post Qualifying Portfolios.

For more information about PQ training in Northern Ireland, please contact:

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