

Nagalro response to College of Social Work consultation:

DEVELOPING A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The following comments are written on behalf of Nagalro, a professional association for Children's Guardians, Family Court Advisers and Independent Social Workers established nearly 25 years ago. Nagalro has approximately 700 full members who are predominantly very experienced practitioners working with children and families, often in the court arena. All members are registered as social workers with the Health and Social Care Council (HCPC) and hold professional indemnity and public liability insurance cover under the Nagalro group policy. A significant proportion of members are self employed and hence these practitioners do not have access to the managerial oversight and support of employed social workers. This is likely to have implications in the way that Continuing Professional Development (CPD) plays its part.

The proposal that CPD should have a much broader approach, be aligned with the relevant levels of professional capabilities and be linked to the career structure is feasible. However, it is difficult to see how such a proposal would link in with a self employed practitioner. There is no career structure or support from employers for self employed practitioners. The College of Social Work (CoSW) states in its publication "*The Future of Continuing Professional (1912) Development*" that employers need to take a recognised role as standards have been developed with them in mind. Furthermore, they need to work in partnership with higher education so that flexible programmes leading to a Masters level could be developed. The present arrangement does not take into account the career path of someone who is self employed.

Similarly the CPD proposals suggest that appraisal and supervision are key activities to be supported and actively engaged in by employers. They do not see a world where there are self employed practitioners who have no direct supervision but whose needs for review and appraisal are clearly necessary. Careful thought needs to be given to the way this is done because merely providing direct supervision would have repercussions on a person's employment status and tax liability as defined by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC). This should be possible as there are numerous other professions where the majority of members do not work under managerial control, but who are able to satisfy their professional requirements in terms of continuing professional development.



Further thought needs to be given to include a more flexible approach to CPD in service structures where there are both employed and self employed individuals and in which an individual is personally accountable for his or her views and recommendations. Nor is it clear whether all individuals must follow a recognised career path in order to comply with the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) and CPD. For example, if working in a setting such as research which is not direct social work, would they then be penalised? Social workers can be engaged as outside consultants in a free lance capacity in a research setting and their activities could comply with their PCF.

Key questions for consultation and discussion

i. Why do we need a new CPD framework for social work now, and, as a practitioner, what would you want it to offer you?

The more flexible and all inclusive approach recommended suggests possibilities which are more flexible and may open up new opportunities. It would prevent the current 'counting of hours syndrome'. Making the change now before everything becomes set and static would be an advantage. As a practitioner it would indicate how this new approach is to become part of the learning model.

Nagalro members work in the family justice system and may be involved in a comprehensive range of both private and public law proceedings. Work commissioned by the Nuffield Foundation some years ago identified a body of knowledge for family justice professionals and highlighted the need for a socio legal family court specialism to be acknowledged. Hopefully the current consultation provides an opportunity to revisit those recommendations within the overarching strategy for continuing professional development for social workers.

ii. Should the framework define standards at different levels of the PCF, and if so, which levels should take priority?

This is a difficult question to answer. Trying to define standards at different levels of the PCF and deciding on priority could both complicate and make it unworkable.

iii. Should the framework define standards for particular roles (as currently for AMHP) and/or specialisms (e.g. dementia, end of life care), and if so, which should these be?

Using the framework to define standards for particular roles could have some merit. However, the danger of building a hierarchy of skills so that, for

example, working in mental health demands skills which are seen as higher than those requiring palliative care in a hospice, must be avoided. The different standards should be able to ensure that the practitioner has reached the requisite level of competence.

iv. Should there be elements of the framework that are mandatory? If so, what should these be? Or should it all remain for voluntary agreement between the social worker and their employer?

It is very tempting to propose that some elements of the framework should be mandatory so that everyone seeking ongoing recognition will have basic skills. This would provide for greater consistencies and a minimum standard and could extinguish difference of perception between employed and self employed practitioners.

v. Should there be national standards linked to awards and professional exams?

This question would seem to be premature. It is important that some standardisation is achieved within the new framework and also that there is a fundamental appraisal of self employed practitioners built into the scheme.

Nagalro Council
8 December 2014