

Council, 14 October 2010

Standards of proficiency for social workers

Executive summary and recommendations

Introduction

The Department of Health recently published 'Liberating the NHS: Report of the arm's-length bodies review'. That report said:

'[...] we intend to abolish the General Social Care Council and move the regulation of social workers out of the arm's-length bodies sector to make it financially independent of government. We believe that in future, the most appropriate model for the ongoing regulation of the social care workforce is to transfer responsibility for these functions to the Health Professions Council, a well established and efficient regulatory body currently regulating over 200,000 registrants from fifteen professions. (DH, 2010, p22)

The abolition of the General Social Care Council, the transfer of its regulatory functions and related changes will require primary legislation and thus are subject to the approval of Parliament. The timing of these changes may therefore change. The proposed timetable assumes that the social workers part of the Register will not open before May 2011 and we anticipate that the legislation will be passed either before or after the summer recess.

The Executive proposes that a Professional Liaison Group (PLG) should be set up to help prepare draft standards of proficiency for social workers.

Decision

The Council is invited to discuss, and agree that:

- the establishment of a Professional Liaison Group to help prepare draft standards of proficiency for social workers; and
- the contents of the work plan should be approved.

Background information

Department of Health 'Liberating the NHS: Report of the arm's-length bodies review':

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_117691

Resource implications

The resource implications include organising PLG meetings and researching and writing papers for the PLG.

Financial implications

The costs of producing and mailing the consultation document, arranging venues for meetings and type-setting and publishing the new standards of proficiency will be funded by a grant from the Department of Health.

Appendices

Draft timetable for the PLG

Date of paper

30 September 2010

Standards of proficiency for social workers

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This paper sets out the draft timetable and indicative plan of work for a Professional Liaison Group which will help prepare draft standards of proficiency for social workers.

Background information

- 1.2 Article 5(2) of the Health Professions Order 2001 states that::

‘The Council shall from time to time –

(a) establish the standards of proficiency necessary to be admitted to the different parts of the register being the standards it considers necessary for safe and effective practice under that part of the register.’

- 1.3 Article 3 (14) requires the Council to consult each time before establishing any standards of proficiency.
- 1.4 Whenever we regulate a new profession, in addition to setting the standards of proficiency, we also set the threshold level of qualification for entry to the Register. This is the level of qualification which we believe is necessary to deliver the standards of proficiency. We would consult on our proposals for the threshold level of qualification alongside the draft standards of proficiency.

Draft timetable

- 1.5 The abolition of the General Social Care Council, the transfer of its regulatory functions and related changes will require primary legislation and is therefore subject to parliamentary approval. The timing of the legislation is therefore subject to change.
- 1.6 The PLG will meet after the proposed primary legislation has been published. The plan assumes that the work will not be concluded in less than three meetings and that the Register will not open before May 2011.

2. Workplan

PLG Sponsor

2.1 The PLG is sponsored by the Council.

PLG Terms of reference

2.2 The PLG's terms of reference are to prepare draft standards of proficiency for social workers for consideration by the Education and Training Committee and the Council.

2.3 The threshold level of qualification for entry to the Register will be considered by the Education and Training Committee and the Council and will not therefore fall within the remit of the PLG.

2.4 The PLG should consider all relevant information in preparing the draft standards, which could include but is not limited to the:

- the codes of practice produced by the General Social Care Council;
- requirements for social work training produced by the Department of Health;
- national occupational standards for social workers;
- any relevant information from the work of the social work taskforce and social work reform board;¹ and
- subject benchmark statement for social work produced by the Quality Assurance Agency.

Meetings

2.5 The draft timetable allows for three meetings.

Membership

2.6 The PLG should consist of up to twelve members. Of these, up to four members of the PLG including the Chair will be drawn from the HPC's Council; the other members will be from external organisations. The Council members will be split equally between registrant and lay members.

2.7 The membership of the group should, as far as possible, include the following mix of skills and experience:

- Experience of the accreditation, approval or quality assurance of education and training.
- Experience of developing and reviewing standards;
- Experience of professional regulation;
- Experience of representing the interests of service users.

¹ <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/swtf/> and <http://www.education.gov.uk/swrb/index.shtml>

2.8 However, this is not intended to be an exhaustive list and members of the PLG may bring other knowledge, skills or experience which is relevant to the work of the PLG.

2.9 Membership should be drawn from the following broad categories:

- council members – registrant and lay;
- education providers;
- employers ;
- the General Social Care Council;
- groups working with both children and adults; and
- professional bodies.

2.10 The PLG should be chaired by a member of Council. The Chair of the PLG will be responsible for agreeing the final membership of the PLG.

3. Draft Timetable

3.1 The following is a draft timetable for the PLG's work and includes an outline of the group's activities at each meeting. The proposed timetable assumes that the social workers' part of the Register will not open before May 2011. As this date may change, any subsequent amendments to the timetable will be agreed with the Chair of the PLG.

14 October 2010

- Council meeting – approve workplan.

November (TBC)

- First meeting of the PLG
 - Legal context and background of the standards
 - First draft of standards
 - Other standards and frameworks

December (TBC)

- Second meeting of the PLG
 - Second draft of standards

January (TBC)

- Third meeting of the PLG
 - Third and final draft of standards

February (TBC)

- Special Education and Training Committee meeting - Consideration and recommendation on draft standards and draft consultation document to Council. Committee will also consider and make recommendations on the threshold level of qualification.

February (TBC)

- Council meeting – consider and approve draft standards and draft consultation document. Council will also consider and make final recommendations on the threshold level of qualification.

February – May 2011

- Public consultation on the draft standards and threshold level of qualification.

May 2011 (TBC)

- Special Education and Training Committee meeting - consider consultation responses and make recommendations to the Council

May 2011 (TBC)

- Special Council meeting to consider the consultation responses and approve the final standards of proficiency and threshold level of qualification.