The Impact of Social Work Reforms on Health Employers

Authors: Claire Barcham (TCSW), Pervez Akhtar (JSWU), Suzanne Hudson (LGA)

Introduction

Over the last two or three years, a lot of energy has gone into looking at how social workers are educated, supported and developed, to so that they can more effectively meet the needs of vulnerable adults, children and their families. Social Work happens in a range of settings, including the NHS and other health employers. With a greater understanding of the impact of social issues on health provision, this trend in employment is likely to increase. This briefing is intended to ensure that health organisations are aware of their responsibilities in terms of employing social workers, as well as the opportunities they offer and know where to access more support as appropriate.

Social Workers within your workforce can help to ensure that you meet the expectations of people who use your services, ensuring that social issues affecting people who come into contact with health services are effectively dealt with and allowing resources to be focused on medical necessity.

The reforms, which have been developed by the Social Work Reform Board and backed by a wide range of employer organisations, unions and educators include the following1:-

- The College of Social Work (TCSW) which was launched on the 3rd January 2012
- A single unified way of understanding what capabilities social workers should have at different points in their professional career (the ‘professional capabilities framework’)
- The introduction of an ‘assessed and supported year in employment’ (ASYE) when social work students qualify and begin their first job
- A new Continuing Professional Development (CPD) framework which will enable more flexibility and choice and promote organisational and personal responsibility for CPD, which in turn will give greater priority to ongoing learning and development

---

1 See appendix for more details of specific reforms
• Standards for employers of social workers and the supervision framework have been developed to ensure that Social Workers are able to work safely and to best effect.

• Advice to improve both the quality of candidates being recruited by universities to train as social workers, and the education they will receive.

• Principles for effective partnership working between employers and universities, as partnerships are pivotal to the delivery of the reforms

The Role of The College of Social Work (TCSW) in the reform program

TCSW is the professional body for social work and is responsible for supporting the implementation of the reforms concerning Partnerships, CPD framework, Education and the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF), and is responsible for leading work on further development in these areas. The Employers Standards are being hosted by the LGA (Local Government Association http://www.local.gov.uk/social-worker-standards) and the Centre for Workforce Intelligence have taken responsibility for workforce modelling.

The role of the regulator

Social Work has been a regulated profession and social work a protected title since 2003. However, in July 2012 the GSCC will be abolished and their regulatory role for social workers will pass the Health Professionals Council, which will be renamed the ‘Health and Care Professionals Council.’

What do the reforms mean for NHS and other health employers?

NHS and other health employers will need to understand what these changes mean for them. As employers of social workers, you will need to support them to ensure they meet the requirements of their regulator (soon to be the Health and Care Professionals Council). Additionally, it is likely that system regulators will use the employers standards in the future during their assessments of organisations. We would therefore recommend that organisations review whether current systems and processes would meet these standards.

Standards for employers - key points:

• Develop an accountability framework to monitor the effectiveness of SW practice – for example by adapting current governance frameworks to ensure social work specific issues including an annual report ‘health check’ on social work practice, safety in the work setting, and feedback from users and carers are monitored. Identify a qualified, registered social worker to take on the strategic lead on social work within your organisation.(the ‘Principal Social Worker’ role).

• Support Social Workers to engage with TCSW.
Engage with other local social work employers to form partnerships with SW education providers, ensuring that good quality placements are available in NHS settings.

Have a clear work allocation system in place, and processes (linked to governance) that are able to flag up excessive work load problems.

Ensure social workers:

1. Can work safely, and have access to personal welfare systems, as well as professional support from legal advisors, translators and interpreters as needed.
2. Have access to professional supervision from a registered, qualified social worker. Supervision should take place weekly for a newly qualified social worker, at least fortnightly in the first 6 months and a minimum of 1.5hrs of uninterrupted time per month thereafter.
3. Have access to CPD opportunities to ensure they are able to maintain and develop their professional abilities, and meet the requirement of their regulator (currently GSCC, will be HPC from July 2012).

Work closely with the regulator and TCSW to maintain and develop professional standards.

Ensure you have systems in place to highlight to the regulator any social workers whose practice is subject to serious concerns.

**How TCSW and the LGA can help**

TCSW in partnership with the Local Government Association (supported by the Joint Social Work Unit) will be developing guidance to support employers in the following ways:

- **Job profiles** have been developed and are available for use
- By providing best practice guidance
- By providing on site briefing for social workers and managers about the reforms to social work (email www.CollegeEvents@tcsw.org.uk for more information)
- By helping employers become involved in partnerships that are responsible for the development and delivery of qualifying and post-qualifying training for social workers, and work with them on presenting the case for their involvement to their own organisation
- By working with employers in multi-professional settings where students from a range of professions, including social work, may be placed, and help them
understand and meet the expectations for social work students and newly qualified social workers

- By developing specific workforce model tools – for example in relation to the Approved Mental Health Practitioners (AMHP) role in Mental Health.

**Key Contacts**

WEB SITE info

The Local Government Association - [www.local.gov.uk/](http://www.local.gov.uk/)

TCSW is the professional body for social work, it holds the standards for the profession and will work to support social workers to meet them by provision of membership benefits such as an online CPD portfolio, Communities of Interest and ‘Knowledge at the College’, an online professional question and answer service. The College will also speak up for social work, influencing policy at a national level and working with partners across a range of organisations to ensure social work is understood and valued for the contribution it makes.

The Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) sets out the profession’s expectations of what a social worker should know and be able to do at each stage of their career and professional development. Whilst it refers to the career stages set out by the Social Work Task Force\(^{2[1]}\), it is a professional, rather than an occupational framework and therefore does not link to specific job titles or roles. It applies to all social workers in England. National Occupational Standards apply in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.\(^1\) It is expected that the framework will be used by and for all social workers, in conjunction with the Standards for Employers.

The new cpd framework works together with the HPC regulations to put more onus on the individual social worker and their employer to agree appropriate development activities which relate to job roles and activities. These may include a range of activities, including day courses, on the job learning, e-learning and other activities. The HPC expects professionals to keep an electronic record of their activities and the College’s e-portfolio will provide a useful resource in this regard. The HPC also expects social workers to identify the impact of learning which has taken place as a result of their development activities.

Principles for Partnership
The activities of effective partnerships have a major impact on raising standards in social work education and training. Collaboration between employers and HEIs is central to the delivery of high quality placements, ASYE and CPD. Health employers of social workers will want to join such partnerships to make sure that students and social workers entering specialist areas of health employment are appropriately recruited and trained to meet service needs. The partnership principles set out four key principles that underpin effective partnership working, which existing and new partnerships can use to review and, where necessary, improve the way they work. A series of web-based resources have also been provided to assist employers and universities as they negotiate with each other to develop local arrangements. These include tools, templates, examples of works in practice and other support materials.

The ASYE year will be introduced for all those who graduate in the summer of 2012. It is similar to ‘preceptorship’ for OTs or ‘newly qualified teacher’ status for new teachers.

ASYEs should have more regular supervision from a registered social worker (1.5hrs weekly for the first 6 weeks, then fortnightly for 6 months,) a caseload appropriate to their level of experience with a 10% reduction to allow them to access required training. The College is exploring how to establish a national standard for demonstrating that this year has been completed successfully.

Standards for Employers and the Supervision Framework for Social Work
Good social work can transform people's lives and protect them from harm. In order to achieve consistently high outcomes for service users, social workers must have the skills and knowledge to establish effective relationships with children, adults and families, professionals in a range of agencies and settings and members of the public.

Job Profiles
NJC(National Joint Council) has issued benchmark job profiles, moderated job evaluation scores and accompanying guidance. The career stages in the PCF are not descriptions of specific jobs. How they are used will depend on agency size, function and local circumstances. The NJC profiles are intended to model typical jobs and role designs, indicating how these might evaluate using the three main job evaluation schemes – in order to help employers ensure that their jobs are appropriately graded and remunerated. Put simply, the role profiles are intended to help employers measure the size and complexity of jobs at different levels. The PCF is designed to help individuals and employers understand the capabilities that people must demonstrate to carry out jobs of varying levels of complexity.