

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT MATTERS: THE FAQ'S OF REGISTRATION

Neil Macleod examines registration in the second of three related articles from the Voluntary Sector Social Services Workforce Unit.

“Registration is a major part of the drive for higher standards in social services and will bring this workforce in line with other professional colleagues. Nursing, medicine and teaching are all regulated professions and workers have to register with their own regulatory bodies to be able to work in their field. Now social service workers will have to do the same.”

(www.sssc.uk.com)

The registration of Scotland's social services workforce is designed to reinforce the safeguards for service users and to increase public confidence in the sector. In Scotland the registration agenda is well underway – phase one began in April 2003 and included the registration of social workers, residential child care workers and managers of adult day care services. Phase two began in October 2006 with the registration of managers and lead practitioners in early education and child care. Workers in adult residential care services begin registering in autumn 2007 and staff in housing support services will begin registering in 2009.

The challenges that organisations will encounter in ensuring their workforce meet registration requirements has to be viewed as part of a much wider picture. Service providers are re-examining the mechanisms they employ to recruit, register and ultimately retain their employees. The Voluntary Sector Social Services Workforce Unit's conference: 'Workforce Development Matters: Recruiting, retaining and registering your workforce' (see inset) will explore each of these related concepts and examine the implications for your workforce and, ultimately, the services you provide.

The first article in this trilogy (featured in the September issue of 'Care Appointments') examined the challenges of staff recruitment in social services, while a subsequent article will explore the rationale and process for retaining your workforce. This article aims to avoid the temptation to re-examine the history, rationale and process of registration and instead addresses seven of the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) on this subject. A selection of references can be found at the end of this article.

The Registration FAQs

I would like to find out more about registration. Where can I turn to for guidance?

The SSSC's website provides a starting point for anyone who wishes to learn more about the rationale and process for registering social service workers. Some providers may find after reading the website, however, that they still have specific questions which remain unanswered. The SSSC holds a series of information sessions for employers shortly before each section of the register opens which offer providers an opportunity to meet with staff from the agency's registration or communications teams. A series of information sessions regarding the registration of managers and supervisors in care home services for adults took place during August / September 2006, for example. The Learning Networks have also organised registration information sessions. Check the 'events' section of the SSSC website or the Workforce Unit's website for information about future registration sessions.

We have many employees who will have to register, and we need to start thinking about how we can enable these workers to achieve the necessary qualifications in time. Who can I turn to for help with this?

The first thing to note is that your organisation may have many employees who will have to undertake qualifications in the near future, but you are not alone. The Workforce Unit conducted a survey of 22 voluntary sector organisations in November 2006. The participating organisations cumulatively employed over 8,320 staff who would have to register with the SSSC – approximately 21% of these employees held qualifications that would be appropriate for SSSC registration.

It may be useful to begin by conducting an audit or Training Needs Analysis (TNA) of your existing workforce to identify the gaps and the qualifications or knowledge that your employees will require. The EVOC Care Training Needs Analyser, for example, is a web-based TNA Tool which organisations can use to identify and collate individuals' qualifications and training needs. Publications such as the Voluntary Sector Social Services Workforce Unit's 'Workforce Planning Toolkit' (VSSSWU, 2007) also help organisations to think about the systems and processes they will require to recruit, retain and develop the workforce.

We have concerns that some of our employees will struggle to complete qualifications as they have literacy or numeracy needs. How can we support these valuable employees to obtain qualifications?

Many organisations employ staff who have few or no qualifications or have been out of education for a considerable period of time. These individuals are valued members of the workforce but may require support to build their confidence or to complete qualifications. The Scottish Social Services Council (in conjunction with The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework) is currently developing tools to assist with the process of 'recognising prior learning' achieved during life or previous work experiences.

There are various schemes that exist to help individuals in the social services workforce to develop their literacy, numeracy and study skills. The 'Return to Learn' initiative, for example, is delivered by the Workers' Educational Association and UNISON (although eligibility is not restricted to trade union membership) and is a study and communication skills course which has a strong focus on confidence building and personal development. The course is targeted at individuals who have few or no formal educational qualifications, those who have had a poor experience of education in the past, or those who have been away from education for some time. The course is open to anyone working in social services, irrespective of whether they are working in the public, private or voluntary sector. 'Return to Learn' can also provide SVQ Accreditation – individuals can achieve a qualification at 'Communications at Intermediate Level II', for example. The 'Return to Learn' courses are free, although employers are expected to provide paid release for staff to attend and a suitable venue for the course wherever possible.

Projects such as the Core Skills Appraisal Project also provide valuable support for employees. The Core Skills Appraisal Project aims to support staff who do not have the required educational entrance criteria for the HNC. The project provides employers with an assessment of their staff's capacity for success and /or the resources needed to address their learner support needs. The CSAP has supported residential child care employees to date but is currently exploring the potential to offer the service to additional parts of the sector.

How can we support our employees to complete relevant qualifications in the workplace?

Many social service organisations have adopted innovative approaches to support their employees to undertake qualifications in the workplace. VSA in Aberdeen, for example, has established a resource centre ('Lyll Cottage') where HNC candidates can study before or after their work shift. Some social service organisations have introduced 'Night Assessor' posts to support workers on the evening shifts to undertake qualifications at a time that these employees find more conducive for learning. There are various other things that an employer can do to help individuals to undertake learning and development in the workplace. These initiatives can include, for example, the provision of regular support and supervision for employees, practical considerations such as providing individuals with time to study or even making sure that there is a spare PC in the office that employees can access.

Ensuring that our staff have the requisite qualifications for registration will be expensive. Are there any funding sources available?

There are various funding sources that will support learning and development for social service workers. Voluntary sector employers may be able to apply for funding from the Voluntary Sector Development Fund, for example. Information about the VSDF and the application criteria is available from the Voluntary Sector Social Services Workforce Unit's website. Many employees will be eligible for an Individual Learning Account which can contribute to the cost of qualifications, while providers with their own SVQ Assessment Centres can also access monies to cover the cost of candidates' registration and completion fees.

These funding sources (and others) are detailed in 'Navigating the Funding Streams 3' by the Voluntary Sector Social Services Workforce Unit. (VSSSWU, 2007) 'Navigating 3' is aimed primarily at individuals working in the voluntary sector although many of the funding sources will be applicable to organisations operating in the public or private sector.

Contact Laura Weir at vswu.admin@ccpscotland.org or visit the Workforce Unit's website to download a copy.

The Scottish Executive is currently undertaking a review of the funding sources for learning and development in social services. Organisations such as the Workforce Unit are participating in the process and will provide updates on the review. A workshop at the Unit's conference in November will outline the latest developments and highlight key funding sources for learning and development.

How can we learn from organisations in a similar position to us, and avoid 'reinventing the wheel'?

'Changing Lives' highlighted the need for organisations to engage in inter-sector and cross-sector collaboration. The Workforce Unit is currently developing an 'Infobank' project which will provide a mechanism for voluntary organisations to share ideas and practice. The Workforce Unit also co-ordinates a National Workforce Development Network which provides a forum for providers to discuss various themes and issues. Recent network meetings have explored induction practices, for example. Visit the Workforce Unit's website for more information about the Infobank and the Workforce Development Network.

The Learning Networks provide a forum for providers from the public, private and voluntary sector to meet with representatives from further and higher education and to learn from each others experiences. The four regional learning networks are taking differing approaches to supporting organisations in their area. In the west of Scotland, for example, a local learning network has provided a forum for providers from the public, voluntary and private sector together to explore potential for a common induction training pack. The North of Scotland Learning Network provides a quarterly forum for organisations to discuss key subjects – employees from the public, private and voluntary sector recently met to discuss the SSSC's induction guidance, for example.

Our workers have obtained the qualifications they require and have registered with the SSSC. What happens next?

Employees will also have to comply with Post Registration Training and Learning Requirements (PRTL). Residential Child Care workers, for example, are required to undertake 15 days (or 90 hours) during each registration period. Post Registration Training can consist of "study, training, courses, seminars, reading, teaching or other activities which could reasonably be expected to advance the worker's professional development, or inform their practice." The SSSC's website outlines the PRTL requirements for groups of workers although these have not been set for some staffing groups. The Workforce Unit's conference in November (Workforce Development Matters; Recruiting, Retaining and Registering your workforce) could be seen as an opportunity for Post Registration Training and Learning. Online tools such as SIESWE's 'Learning Exchange' can also provide valuable resources for learners.

Conclusion

Registration aims to improve standards in the social services workforce and increase the quality of service offered to service users. There are still, however, many queries about registration that have yet to be clarified. Organisations such as the Workforce Unit can provide answers to some of the registration FAQs. At the Conference in November the Unit shall be showcasing current thinking about registering your workforce and giving you the opportunity to contribute: Your Workforce Matters.

References

- Voluntary Sector Social Services Workforce Unit (2007) Navigating the Funding Streams 3:A guide to acquiring funding for learning and development voluntary sector social services.
- Voluntary Sector Social Services Workforce Unit (2007) Workforce Planning:A toolkit for voluntary sector social services in Scotland.
- Community Care Providers Scotland (CCPS): www.ccpscotland.org
- Core Skills Appraisal Project (CSAP): www.sircc.strath.ac.uk/education/coreskillsproject.html
- Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations' Council (EVOC): www.evoc.org.uk
- Individual Learning Accounts (ILA Scotland): www.ilascotland.org.uk
- Learning Networks: www.learningnetworks.org.uk
- Return to Learn: www.returntolearn.org.uk
- Scottish Institute for Excellence in Social Work Education (SIESWE): www.sieswe.org
- Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF): www.scqf.org.uk
- Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC): www.sssc.uk.com
- Voluntary Sector Social Services Workforce Unit (VSSSWU) www.ccpscotland.org/workforceunit

October 2007