

social work
Connections
MAY 2008

PRTL
positive and
necessary



**The future of social work
– making a real difference**

Newsletter of the General Social Care Council



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Social Care Council

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Editorial statement
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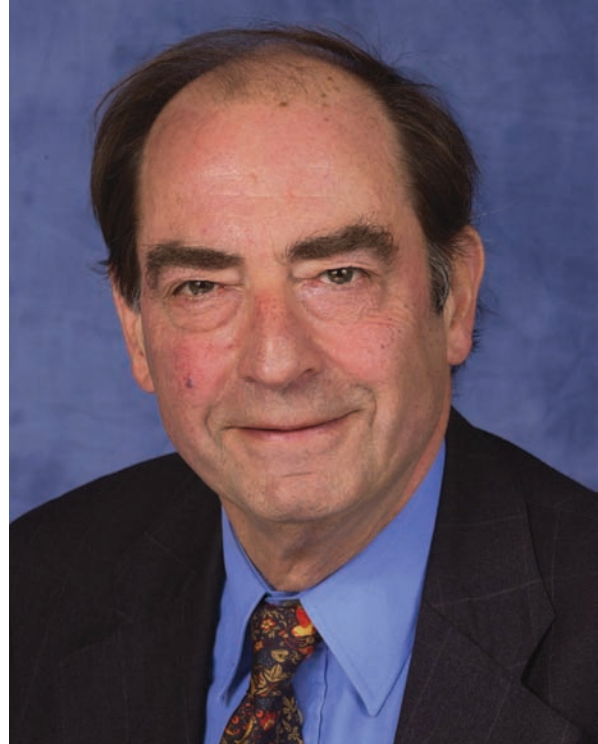
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Welcome to *Social Work Connections*

A warm welcome to the first issue of *Social Work Connections*, our new quarterly newsletter, which is designed to provide you with a regular update of news and information relating to social work and the GSCC.

At present, over 90,000 social workers and social work students are registered with the GSCC, and *Social Work Connections* is primarily intended for them, but we hope that others will also find it interesting. Over time, we will develop different versions of the newsletter for other groups of social care workers as they join the register.

We care about the same issues you do – professionalism, educational standards, and open and transparent regulation – and our aim is to use these pages to help and support you. We hope you find them



useful, informative and accessible. Please do let us know how we are doing – constructive feedback, whether positive or negative is most welcome. I would also urge you to take part in the polls that the *Social*

Work Connections website will hold each month. We will be using these to get a flavour of what matters to you in the wide arena of social work.

Sir Rodney Brooke CBE DL
GSCC Chair

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The future of social work – making a real difference



Photo: John Eiriosell

Social work constantly renews itself.

It has a good record of developing practice in response to the changing needs of people who use services and the changing expectations of politicians. Once again, social work in England is facing radical transformation – potentially the most fundamental change in social care for adults and children in 60 years. The move to personalised care, reforms to the regulatory regime, and new plans for the workforce emerging from the Department of Health and the Department for Children, Schools and Families to deliver *Putting People First* (adults) and the *Children's Plan* (children and families) will have a significant impact on the role of social workers. This is a new agenda, and social work needs to shape it rather than be shaped by it.

There is widespread support for enabling people who use services to have more control over their lives and the care and support they need. Most want to be active participants in

determining their own support. Social work is based on a set of values that support this aim. Social workers will rightly expect to be one of the groups that will help to design the architecture of this new system. Social workers will want to help ensure that the new arrangements are strong and practical, and that answers are given to the difficult questions about how the move from dependency to independence and control can be resourced and managed.

This transformation is not just for adults – it will apply to children and families too. There are pilots running to look at the application of personal budgets to children with disabilities.

The changes ahead provide social work with an opportunity to regain a focus that some

argue it has lost in the move to care management. That focus is on relationship-based work with people in need and with communities who need support – it stresses the value of human contact and care, over systems and technology. It accepts that social workers have to deal with managed risk, and so there will continue to be a central role for social workers as accountable professionals for complex cases that span social care, health and education.

Personalisation will also call for an increase in advocacy services to help people who use services to get more out of their lives. People who use services regularly report that social workers who combine respect and care with knowledge of the support systems that they need, are those who make the biggest difference to them.

A recent GSCC report on the roles and tasks of social work recognises the desire of social workers to get out from behind their desks and spend more of their time in face-to-face

work with the people who need their help and support. The GSCC is firmly committed to supporting this in the move toward personalised services.

In a wider context, personalisation will mean a changing workforce across social care, as more people who use services decide what they require and who they employ. New roles will emerge, and others will shift as personalisation becomes a reality. The care manager role, which some argue removed the social worker from human contact with people who use services, will be transformed as social workers and their 'customers' work in partnership to face challenges.

“
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The GSCC is now initiating further work to explore the implications of personalisation for the social care workforce of the future, and for our role as the workforce regulator. There are many challenges. For example:

- How should the move towards individual choice be supported by social work education and training, and how can practice placements give students the right experience of how self-directed support can work well?
- Our codes of practice are based on human rights values, but do they need to be changed to reflect the new realities of service provision?
- We are examining possible reforms to our post-registration training and learning (PRTL) requirements – which ensure that social workers have to keep their skills updated to renew registration. We expect to be consulting on those reforms later in the year.

- As the workforce changes in response to the multiplicity of services required and chosen by individuals with choice, what should fall within the ambit of 'social care' and what sort of regulatory regime would best meet our goals as a regulator?
- Which of the emerging workforces should be regulated?
- How we can ensure that standards in social care continue to be raised, that the right skills are developed, and that regulation is effective? How can we as a regulator, work best in partnership with the people for whom choice and control will provide the right solutions?

We recognise the pressures social workers are under. They face increasing referral rates and high case loads. There are too many unfilled posts, more and more cases involve drug- and alcohol-related problems and too many social workers face aggression and violence. There are challenges associated with record keeping, confidentiality and sometimes complex bureaucracy. Those issues cannot



Photo: John Birdsall

be solved overnight, but we are committed to working with employers to find ways to enable social workers to have more 'contact time' with people who use services.

Regulation is now a central part of social work and is a key indicator that social work has a professional status, something that will stand it in good stead in the face of such change.

Regulation demonstrates there are professional standards against which quality is measured. All social workers have to commit to those standards and to continuous training and development – and we, at the GSCC, will work to ensure that our regulatory regime provides the right framework for social work to meet the challenges we are all facing.

Conduct and fairness

Fortunately, very few social workers will ever have to face a conduct case; clear evidence that the vast majority of social workers carry out their work with honesty, integrity and professionalism.

On joining the Social Care Register (SCR) you agree to abide by the *Code of Practice for Social Care Workers* and to cooperate with any GSCC proceedings where there are concerns that you may have breached the codes. On our part, we ensure there are robust mechanisms in place to assess the suitability of social workers and students to be registered and remain registered. This is both about protecting people who use services, but also ensuring social workers are dealt with fairly. (See box for a breakdown of key findings from our conduct work.)

New rules

On 4 March 2008, new rules came

into force, which change the way the GSCC deals with conduct matters. For those few social workers or students who do find themselves the subject

of a conduct proceeding, our new way of doing things will mean that processes are quicker and more transparent.

Key facts about conduct

- To date, 214 people who applied to join the Social Care Register have been denied access to it
- A further 60 have had conditions placed upon them at the point of joining the Register
- 36 conduct hearings have been held and from these, 16 social workers have been removed from the Register, three suspended and 17 admonished
- The overwhelming majority of conduct referrals are closed at the early stages without the need for further investigation
- No conduct hearing has yet found only a single area of the codes to have been breached; the areas of the codes that have been most commonly breached have been relating to trust and confidence of people who use services and the public
- Around 40 per cent of GSCC conduct hearings to date have involved inappropriate relationships with people who use services
- The GSCC now receives an average 42 complaints about social workers per month.

Post-registration training and learning – positive and necessary

When you renew your registration, you will need to be able to demonstrate that you have kept your skills and knowledge up to date. You would not expect to be treated by a doctor who had not kept up to date with new research – people who use social services have a right to expect that social workers are in touch with the latest evidence about good practice.

Post-registration training and learning (PRTL) is not a heavy burden. The requirement for successfully renewing registration is that you can show that you have done 90 hours (or 15 days) of PRTL over the previous three-year period. The good news is that an early research snapshot of renewals suggests that so far, on average, social workers are recording more than double this minimum target.

PRTL is flexible. It is not only formal training that qualifies towards the 90-hour target, but may include anything that leads to relevant learning. Here are just a few examples:

- A social worker in fostering records all the in-house training they have undertaken as part of meeting *National Minimum Standards for Fostering and Adoption* and adds this to the learning gained from reading two key guidance books on fostering from government
- A social worker in a community project supporting people with a learning disability records a number of incidents and events where they have played an active part. For example, chairing case reviews, attending funding meetings and advocating at specialist hearings. She has talked through the learning from this with her line manager and recorded the outcome of learning in hours. This has been added to a two-



day in-house training course on using a new computer system and one half-day external training advocacy skills

- A social worker in a children and families duty and assessment team undertakes the PQ award for children at higher specialist level.

Avoid a last minute rush

Remember, you need to record activity from the previous three years, so record your learning as and when you do it. Providing you keep a record of each training and learning activity you undertake, as you do it, then filling in the renewal form will be much easier and much more accurate. If you are having trouble following the requirements for PRTL completion, then talk to your line manager, who should be well versed in the requirements and processes.

Is PRTL doing its job?

The GSCC is reviewing the current arrangements and deciding whether they are 'fit for purpose'.

Some social workers will have just renewed their registration. Many more are in the course of doing so. We are keen to hear from registrants about their experiences while it is fresh in their minds.

At this stage we want to know if the PRTL scheme is working well enough or if it needs further development. We do not intend to embark on major change unless there is clear evidence that the current system is 'unfit for purpose'. If that is what we conclude then we will consult all social workers on options for reform.

Why not have your say on the future of PRTL by clicking [here](#). We will publish some of your responses and feed them into the ongoing review.

Update on GSCC plans to register the home care workforce

Last year, the government announced that it would be asking the GSCC to open the Social Care Register to other parts of the social care workforce, starting with home care workers and their managers.

We know from research with home care workers that many want registration because they recognise that

it will raise their status and improve the workforce for people who use services.

We believe that home care workers and their managers make a vital contribution to social care and a positive difference to the lives of thousands of people every day, often in very challenging circumstances. There are at least 200,000 home care workers

in England, working with children and adults across approximately 4,500 statutory, not-for-profit and private sector employers.

The GSCC is currently working with the government and people in the sector to finalise plans for the start of registration. Keep an eye on future editions for more details.

Renewing your registration

Signing up to abide by the *Code of Practice for Social Care Workers* is an important part of registration. It brings a range of opportunities, but also responsibilities to social workers. The codes benefit the sector by setting out the standards of conduct expected of everyone working in social care and letting people who use services know what standards they can expect.

Under the codes of practice, employers and workers are both required to demonstrate their commitment to training. Continually updating your skills and knowledge is also a requirement of registration. In short, registration:

1. Shows you're qualified and committed to high standards
2. Reassures people who use services and gives them confidence in you
3. Boosts your employability
4. Raises your professional status and puts you on the same footing as other registered professionals, like doctors and teachers

Renewal

An important aspect of registration is renewal – it is compulsory for qualified social workers who intend to continue practising to renew their registration every three years. The GSCC sends out a renewal application pack to those



on the register three months before registration is due to expire, so everyone should know in plenty of time what they have to do and by when. Remember to let us know if your contact details change by emailing us:

changeofcircumstances@gsc.org.uk.

For security purposes, please provide your name, address (including postcode) and your date of birth within your email.

If you've already applied for renewal

Renewal applications can take several weeks to assess. There is no need for you to contact us to check the progress of your application. If we require more information then we will contact you. Provided we receive your application before your registration expires, you will remain on the register and be able to continue to practise. On receipt of your application we will send you an acknowledgement letter, which will state this.

If you haven't yet applied for renewal...

Click [here](#) to find out more about renewing your registration and to access replacement documents.

New study to review the codes of practice

In 2002, following extensive consultation with the social care sector, the GSCC together with our sister bodies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, published the first-ever codes of practice for social care workers and employers. The codes provide a clear guide on the standards of practice and conduct that workers and their employers should meet. They also mean that people who use services, carers and the wider public know what standards they can expect of their social care worker. Social workers registered with the GSCC are required to comply with the codes.

Over 2.5 million copies of the codes have now been issued, and they are widely accepted as an integral part of the standards framework within social

care, informing best practice as well as training.

Together with our sister bodies, we recently commissioned the Social Care Workforce Research Unit at King's College, London to carry out a study looking into the use of the codes of practice. The study seeks to find out how the codes are being used by social care employers and workers. It will also establish the level of knowledge and views of the codes among people who use services and their carers. The following questions will be addressed:

- Are the codes 'fit for purpose' and how might they be further developed?
- Are the codes influencing and informing the conduct and practice

of social care workers and their employers, and how?

- To what extent are the objectives of setting down standards of conduct and practice being achieved?
- Are the codes being used in induction, training, supervision and on a day-to-day basis?
- Are the codes being integrated into job descriptions, performance appraisals and disciplinary and grievance processes?

If you want to give your views on your experience of the codes and answer some or all of the above questions, then please 'Have Your Say' by clicking [here](#). We will publish some of your responses and forward them all to the study team at King's to form part of the research.

News from SCIE

The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) is responsible for advancing and disseminating good practice to the social care workforce.

Guide 11: Children of prisoners – maintaining family ties

This guide outlines findings from practice across the UK and makes recommendations for a range of statutory and voluntary agencies.

It is estimated that around 162,000 children in the UK are affected by parental imprisonment every year, and research shows that children of prisoners are less likely than other children to achieve the outcomes set out in the government's Every Child Matters framework.



The resource brings together evidence about strategy, policies and procedures, funding, training and partnerships. It highlights how more needs to be done to consider specific needs of this group and the role that the voluntary sector and local authorities can play in directing people to appropriate services.

Helping you through a hospital stay: Advice from older people

The aim of this publication is to help older people and their carers on what to expect, and how to understand and manage the feelings, anxieties and concerns they may have, when they are entering or leaving hospital. It suggests how they can be involved in their treatment and care, and in planning for the return home.



Advice from the SCIE helps older people prepare for hospital

Written and developed with the input of older people who have been into hospital, it covers all aspects of the hospital stay, including how to prepare for the hospital visit, essential things to pack, what to expect from doctors, nurses, social workers and other professionals, and an extensive list of useful contacts for both pre- and post-hospital care.

SCIE contact

For further information on SCIE's work and resources:

W www.scie.org.uk

E info@scie.org.uk

T 020 7089 6840

Qualifying this summer?

If you are due to qualify this summer, we will be contacting your university to ask them for your result in early June. Before you send in your application to join the part of the register for qualified social workers, please confirm with your university that they have told us you have

passed. This will help to make sure that your application is processed as quickly as possible.



Update on post qualifying awards

If you are already qualified, have you thought of doing a post qualifying (PQ) course?

In September 2007 the GSCC implemented a new PQ framework and we have introduced five new PQ awards, offered at different levels. We have now approved 213 courses to run the new PQ awards programme and further information about these can be found **here**. Don't forget, undertaking a PQ course is a good way to meet your post-registration training and learning requirements.