

CURRICULUM OUTLINE FOR POSTGRADUATE QUALIFICATION PATHWAY FOR SOCIAL WORK WITH PEOPLE WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

For social work educators



Department
of Health &
Social Care

Introduction

Social workers, alongside other staff in social care, health and other public bodies, will soon undertake mandatory learning disability training in England. However, social workers who work with, assess and commission for people with learning disability require additional, more specialist, knowledge and skills.

The curriculum outline described here builds on the mandatory training, by enabling social workers to gain a specialist post-qualifying award.

Social work educators are encouraged to adapt and use this module in their post-qualifying (PQ) programmes.

The post-graduate pathway provides an opportunity to develop a specialism within the field of adults with learning disabilities, through advanced learning and reflection. It recognises the specific challenges faced by people with learning disabilities and supports social workers to enhance their practice in order to maximise people's potential for independence, self-determination and meaningful belonging in living the lives they want to live.

Underpinning the pathway is the application of a relational approach that requires a personal contribution in delivering the professional task. Research, policy and practice in the learning disability field has a rich *relational focussed* history, with themes of inclusion and person-centred approaches shifting the focus of the social work role towards working *with* rather than *for* people with learning disabilities. The pathway therefore, seeks to recognise the value of knowledge alongside a clear ethical orientation as fundamental to developing the specialist social work role in working with adults with learning disabilities.

The post-graduate pathway will ensure that a post-graduate level of learning and attainment is recognised and valued as 'specialist' - over and beyond that required for initial qualification as social workers.

It applies to most social workers in direct practice and can be a standalone qualification or form the foundation of a postgraduate diploma or masters. The postgraduate qualifications will be accredited by the university but have been designed to be blended programmes, which can be accessed, using a portfolio model, via a distance learning approach within the practice environment.

The delivery approach utilises models delivered by other professions (e.g. education) and develops a specific social work with people with learning disabilities curriculum. It also draws on existing learning disability related courses and resources used for social work CPD across a range of local authorities.

This course outline should be read in conjunction with BASW's [Continuing Professional Development \(CPD\) Pathway for social work with adults with learning disability](#).

Background

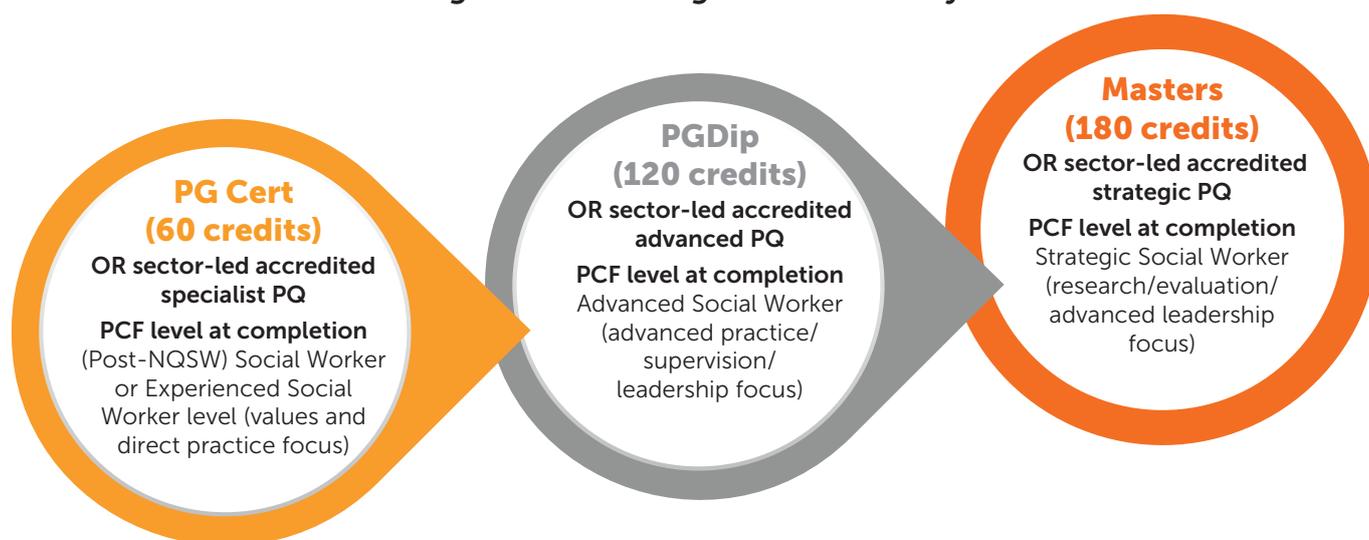
BASW's CPD Pathway for social work with people with learning disabilities is an innovative and practice-focused post-qualification training framework. It is underpinned by principles of co-production and has been developed through collaboration. Moving beyond the involvement of people with learning disabilities, to genuine collaboration and recognition of their expertise, this project to develop the curriculum outline and mapping document has benefited from extensive guidance and input from people with lived experience.

BASW's CPD Pathway for social work with people with learning disabilities builds on the [Capabilities Statement for Social Work with People with a Learning Disability](#), a practical framework to promote improvement of practice and positive impact of social work in this field. The domains of learning, training, and development within the CPD Pathway are drawn from the [Professional Capabilities Framework \(PCF\)](#) and are consistent with the [Knowledge and Skills Statement for Social](#)

[Workers in Adult Services](#). The CPD Pathway has also been designed to align with the [Department of Health and Social Care's Core Capabilities Framework for Supporting with a learning disability](#). A separate [mapping document](#) sits alongside this document.

The diagram below explains the 'scaffolding approach' envisaged with these CPD Pathways. Progression is mapped onto a conventional academic pathway such as PG Cert, PG Dip, or Master's qualifications. These pathways could also be pursued through a sector or professional body-led accreditation route, with or without formal academic credits. This is in recognition that CPD needs to be available to all, flexibly and affordably, but also needs to meet agreed quality standards, which are usually assured through higher education institutions. However, although the model proposed here is structured on a university qualification framework for quality assurance purposes, other options and models, including sector-wide accreditation, may also apply.

Figure 1: The Postgraduate Pathway



The blended model

All social workers in both the public and private sector are required to undertake CPD as part of their work. Examples of such activity include: attending courses, conferences and workshops; undertaking one-to-one coaching; and pursuing online and distance learning.

This sector led specialist PQ Pathway provides a staged approach to skills development where practitioners use their practice experience consolidated with theory and academic input to develop their skills. This pathway has been designed for practitioners who specialise in working with adults with learning disabilities. It could also be extended to other health, social care and public sector professions such as health professionals working in integrated teams with social care, advocacy support and other relevant provider services.

This curriculum has been mapped with the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) which is the profession-owned, overarching framework of social work education and professional development in England and the Knowledge and Skills Statement (KSS) for

social work with adults which sets out what is expected of qualified social workers in the adult practice settings. The staged approach aligns with the 'tiered' model used in the Department of Health and Social Care's Competency Framework which the outline is also mapped against (see [mapping document](#)). The pathway aims to build a body of knowledge which heavily draws on the active involvement of people with learning disabilities in its design and implementation.

This work will be supported by BASW's Special Interest Group for social work with people with learning disabilities.

The sector-led specialist PG Cert will be:

- 60 credits formed of 3 x 20-credit modules linked with the PG Dip and Master's awards.
- Online and offered as a national course lasting between 6-12 months.
- Either a single credit or portfolio route.
- Able to provide blended learning opportunities – online teaching (including immersive technology), reflection, lectures, tutor support etc.

Portfolio route

Credits	Module title	Formative task	Summative assignment	Assignment length/words	Assessment
20	Module 1: Knowledge informing practice with adults with learning disabilities	500	Learning proposal and knowledge assignment	2000	Graded – pass 50
20	Module 2: An ethical orientation to social work with adults with learning disabilities	500	Reflective portfolio	8000	Pass/fail
20	Module 3: Applying values, knowledge and skills in practice with people with learning disabilities	500	Summative assignment	2000	Graded – pass 50

Curriculum outline

The curriculum outlined here is an example of what can be developed.

The views of employers, practitioners and people with lived experience of social work should be incorporated into the design, ongoing development and review of the curriculum.

Module 1: Knowledge informing practice

At the end of the module, learners will be able to:

- Critically understand the changing individual and societal conceptualisation of learning disabilities including an examination of the policy narratives shaping practice.
- Critically reflect on the impact of enduring societal and service-based discrimination against people with learning disabilities which has manifested itself in low expectations and poor outcomes in relation to health, education, housing, employment and community inclusion.
- Demonstrate enhanced legal and ethical literacy of the following legislation in relation to working with people with learning disabilities:
 - The Care Act (2014)
 - The Mental Capacity Act (2005)
 - The Human Rights Act (1998)
 - The Equality Act (2010)
- Demonstrate a clear understanding and application of the *Capabilities Statement for Working with People with Learning Disabilities* in their social work roles along with its links to the *Professional Capabilities Framework*, *Knowledge Skills Statement for Adult Social Work* and the *Core Capabilities Framework for Supporting People with Learning Disabilities*.
- Critically analyse and apply a range of relevant theories, models and concepts relevant to working with people with learning disabilities including models of rights based practice, participation and co-production, strength-based approaches, models of advocacy and positive risk taking models embedded within the social model of disability.
- Develop enhanced skills in identifying and appraising research and relevant knowledge and frameworks.

Module 2: An ethical orientation to social with people with learning disabilities

By the end of the module, learners will be able to:

- Recognise and confidently embed relational approaches within all aspects of practice. Drawing on Cottam's (2018) assertion that 'relationships are one of our most critical resources', recognise the importance of a deliberate use of relationships in promoting the well-being principle and adopting strength-based mindsets and practice.
- Enhance opportunities for people with learning disabilities to experience independence, interdependence and meaningful belonging through adopting person-centred approaches and rejecting 'one size fits all' approaches.
- Confidently integrate values, principles and ethos underpinning social work to competently apply legislative duties and inform professional judgment and ethical leadership.
- Uphold human rights and overcome organisational or individual resistance to positive risk taking and use advocacy skills to promote the expertise of individuals with a learning disability
- Understand theories and methods related to the use and management of *self* to ensure a professional approach to relational practice.

Module 3: Applying values, knowledge and skills in practice with people with learning disabilities.

This module provides an opportunity to personalise learning with the focus on application. Learners should select an issue or subject area relevant to their practice context which they wish to develop. Subject areas **could** include:

- Person-centred practice
- Safeguarding
- Mental capacity
- Participation and co-production
- Assessment and outcome-based support planning
- Direct work with individuals and families
- Advocacy
- Social pedagogy
- Transition children services to adult services
- Supervision
- Organisational context
- Professional ethics and leadership

Learners will be supported by tutors and peers to critically explore the area with reference to the points highlighted in module 1 and 2. They will seek to apply creative approaches to the given subject or area in developing practice and leadership in their roles as social workers.

References:

Cottam, H (2018) *Radical Help: How We Can Remake the Relationship Between Us and Revolutionise the Welfare State*. London: Virago

Developed in partnership:

Camden Disability Action
Ali Gardner
Dr Hannah Morgan



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