

# **DEVELOPING A QUALIFICATION AND PROGRESSION FRAMEWORK FOR THE EDUCATION WELFARE SERVICE**

## **1 Introduction**

This piece of work has been undertaken on behalf of the National Association of Social Workers in Education (NASWE) and funded by the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC).

The aim was to research and develop a proposal for a framework for qualifications and career progression for both existing and new entrants to the education welfare service. In undertaking this report it has been important to take account of:

- the historical context
- the current position
- likely future development of the education welfare service in the context of the development of integrated children's services and the vision of education welfare services being part of both the social inclusion section of formal education services and the wider family of youth services
- the implications of the emerging integrated qualifications and progression frameworks for the children's workforce.

Once agreed it is hoped that the framework will be used as the basis for a future funding application for a national strategy. It should also have value at a local level where children's services authorities are developing local training plans.

The report is structured as follows:

- The Historical Context**
- The Current Situation**
- A Proposed Way Forward**
- Implementation Issues**

## **2 The Historical Context**

Education Welfare and Education Social Work have a long history, with NASWE itself having been formed in 1884.

The work has always included a focus on school attendance but has also included several other elements which have evolved over time and in various ways across different areas of the country. Most commonly education welfare has been seen as a branch of social work, with the same values and principles, but with a particular focus on the link between children, young people, their families and schools. As with mainstream social work the overall lack of clarity

on role and tasks has therefore been something of an issue but the specific role relating to school attendance does provide a clear and common focus.

As in many professions a relatively recent development has been the introduction of an assistant role, with some such staff being employed by local authorities and many others by individual schools.

In terms of qualifications there was a period when most local authorities saw their education welfare officers as social workers but many did not extend this to either requirements or support for people to achieve a social work qualification. Therefore many local authorities have not had a clear or consistent policy on qualification requirements or support for existing staff to achieve qualifications. This is highlighted in the recent survey of education welfare staff (see next section and appendix A).

This historical confusion has existed for over 30 years, since the Certificate in Education Welfare was discontinued in April 1976. An excellent report by the Local Government Training Board (LGTB) published in August 1974 anticipated that development, provided a clear analysis and vision and recommended that the appropriate training for Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) was 'social work training suitably structured to take account of the educational setting in which that role is performed'.

Sadly that recommendation and the others contained in the 1974 LGTB report were never implemented, leading to the confusing and inconsistent situation described above.

These comments apply to England. The position in other parts of the United Kingdom is different. The greatest contrast is in Northern Ireland where a social work qualification is the minimum requirement for an Education Welfare role. The benefits of such a clear approach are obvious, with a more highly professionalised service and much greater buy in from the employer.

The introduction of the Learning, Development and Support services (LDSS) National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in 2003 has provided a further opportunity but, at the same time, created a further complication and even greater confusion about whether local authorities should expect or support their education welfare staff to achieve particular qualifications. The separately commissioned work on the use of APEL to allow individuals to fast track towards achievement of the NVQ also provides some insight into the issues involved.

The recent NASWE survey (appendix A) highlights very divergent attitudes towards the LDSS NVQ. For some it is a valuable qualification, the completion of which increased the individual's knowledge, skills and understanding. For others it is seen as being of little value, with no academic content, and the completion of which has been only about demonstrating competence, without people acquiring

new knowledge or skills. The difference in perceptions would seem to be partly about the inherent value that different people put on vocational qualifications but also influenced by the way in which the qualification and any supporting learning programme are delivered in different areas.

TOPSS (England) undertook some work in 2004 looking at the issues involved in the training and qualification of Education Welfare Officers and identified some of the key matters that required attention. A report, including recommendations, was passed to the newly established CWDC in April 2005. Although not an immediate priority for the new organisation CWDC has recognised that education welfare is one of the occupational groups that require work to establish a clear approach to training, qualifications and career progression. This has led to the CWDC support for this current piece of work.

From this understanding of the history there are three clear requirements for any future qualifications framework. Firstly, any proposal has to be very clear, specific and unambiguous. Secondly there has to be an appropriate training element linked to or as part of achievement of a qualification so that understanding, knowledge and skills are enhanced, thereby enabling individuals to maximise the effectiveness of their work and their contribution to the 'Every Child Matters' outcomes. Thirdly, any new framework must be both accepted and fully implemented by employers, with adequate resources allocated to support implementation.

### **3 The Current Situation**

The recent NASWE survey of local authorities and NASWE members confirms the confusion that currently exists. The full report of the survey is included in appendix A. Further comments made in workshops at the NASWE conference in April 2007 have also contributed to the overall picture and informed thinking about the best way forward.

Key points from the survey are:

109 respondents identified 23 different qualifications they held (see table 3 of appendix for full details). These included unspecified A levels, degrees and masters level qualifications and 20 vocational, professional or academic qualifications that included an element relating to work with children or young people. Of these the greatest number (26%) held a professional social work qualification. This contrasts with the 1974 LGTB research which showed that only 1.5% of Education Welfare Officers held a social work qualification at that time. Thus it can be seen that the LGTB recommendation to move towards establishing the social work qualification as the norm has had a significant but nevertheless limited impact.

In the recent NASWE survey, of the qualifications recognised by employers, the social work qualification (37%) and the LDSS level 4 NVQ (32%) were by far the most common. Many employers recognised more than one qualification. In addition, smaller numbers also recognised youth work and teaching qualifications, relevant or any degree level education and any HE qualification. Most respondents stated that recognised qualifications did not result in enhanced pay. There were a small number of exceptions where there were entry level qualifications and qualifications required for progression.

It is clear that many of those currently working as Education Welfare Officers do not hold one of the two main qualifications identified above. A significant proportion would appear to have no qualification that includes a specific focus on working with children, young people and families. The historic trend for a significant proportion of EWOs to be recruited from former police and armed forces personnel appears to have changed to an extent, with an increase in graduate entrants, who may have significantly different career expectations. This is in addition to those completing the social work degree who choose a career in education welfare.

The link between qualifications and pay is also very variable. Some areas (a minority) pay Education Welfare Officers on social work scales, whether or not an individual holds a social work qualification. Others pay lower scales but offer enhancements for recognised qualifications. Others still have lower scales but with no provision for enhancements linked to qualifications. This is therefore another area of major confusion and inconsistency. For some staff without qualifications paid at social work or equivalent rates there is little incentive to undertake a qualification and also little prospect of job mobility or progression, given most opportunities would require a relevant qualification. This would appear to be one factor contributing to greater stability in the education welfare workforce as compared to mainstream social work. There is also frustration and a disincentive for many of those undertaking or considering the LDSS NVQ level 4, where they will not receive any financial reward for successful completion.

The survey and workshops also identified a very inconsistent, but overall low level of investment in training and qualifications of education welfare staff. Access to in-house and external training opportunities is very variable, with limited budgets that are often unfavourable when compared to those of social care or other parts of education or children's services.

For those undertaking social work or NVQ qualifications there is a very variable approach by employers in terms of financial support and time allowed.

NASWE has also undertaken work to identify courses and qualifications that have been developed specifically for education welfare staff or where the marketing includes such staff. This has revealed a significant number of courses around the country that do not provide a logical or comprehensive spread, with

most being developed and marketed by colleges and universities in an ad hoc way, with limited reference to or involvement of employers. There are some specific examples, particularly in the Midlands and the North East where programmes have been developed at least partly in response to local employer requirements. Although these do not lead to nationally recognised qualifications the content is clearly valued by many as helping develop the skills, knowledge and understanding of those who complete.

For those staff who are social work qualified, many do not have access to the post qualification framework and, in any case, there is currently no specific pathway for EWOs.

To summarise, the current position is perhaps best described as very unclear and confusing and therefore definitely not in the best interests of those working in education welfare services or, even more importantly, those children, young people and families the services support. Therefore the current position confirms the need for clarity, consistency, employer support and training opportunities that develop individuals' knowledge, skills and understanding.

#### **4 A Proposed Way Forward**

To some extent the development of a qualifications framework is dependent on the way education welfare services will evolve within the wider development of integrated children's services. It is also clear that the development of common induction, the common core of skills and knowledge and the integrated qualifications framework are all highly relevant as education welfare staff never operate in isolation from other services and this feature should only increase with the full implementation of the 'Every Child Matters' agenda.

Key points from the NASWE survey are as follows:

- There is strong support for a nationally recognised qualification and progression route for the EWS.
- The NVQ LDSS is gaining recognition; whilst there are many reservations there is support for it to be the starting qualification for the EWS.
- There is support for the idea of widening the LDSS family to support greater recognition and flexibility.
- The workforce is very diverse and as such will represent a challenge to a simple progression route, with the accreditation of prior experiential learning being an important issue.
- Lack of resources including training infrastructure is a significant barrier to progression.

- Currently, there are few incentives for staff to gain qualifications if these are not recognised with enhanced pay.
- EWS provide a valuable family support service to children and families and a significant proportion hold a recognised professional qualification. In terms of workforce planning there is potential which perhaps need exploring, for a much more effective use of this pool of staff within the ECM delivery framework.

These views are consistent with the analysis above and any proposal needs to take account of and address the various points made.

The proposal below tries to do that and, at the same time, offer an outline that is both consistent with and informs the thinking around the development of the integrated qualifications framework.

The proposal is summarised in the diagram below but further detailed explanation follows:

<b>PROPOSED EDUCATION WELFARE QUALIFICATION AND PROGRESSION FRAMEWORK</b>					
<b>TITLE</b>	<b>ENTRY REQUIREMENT</b>	<b>TARGET QUALIFICATION</b>	<b>Management Option</b>	<b>Examples of Pathways In</b>	<b>Examples of Pathways Out</b>
		Induction Programme		◀	▶
		▼			
<b>Education Welfare Assistant</b>	Not Specified	L3 LDSS		Volunteer Support Role	Teaching Assistant
		▼			
<b>Education Welfare Officer level 1</b>	Relevant L3 Qualification (minimum)	L4 LDSS/Foundation Degree		Teaching Assistant Residential Care Worker	Learning Mentor Teacher Training Connexions Adviser
		▼			
<b>Education Welfare Officer level 2 Education Social Worker</b>	L4 LDSS or HSC (minimum)	Relevant Degree		Learning Mentor Connexions Adviser Social Worker	Social Worker
		▼	▼		
<b>Senior Education Welfare Officer</b>	Relevant Degree	PQ Framework	Management Qualification	Senior Social Worker	Children's Services Manager
		▼	▼		
<b>Children's Services Manager</b>	Post Qualifying or Management Qualification	Higher Level Management Qualification			Senior management roles in a range of services
		▼	▼		
<b>(Director of Children's Services)</b>					

**Induction:** A structured programme that enables new entrants to meet the CWDC induction standards. The recently updated Learning Mentor induction programme has core units that have been developed and tested for wider use and would seem to provide the basis for a shared induction programme that is suitable for education welfare roles. There is a need to develop the relevant specialist units and it is recommended that this be done as soon as possible.

**NVQ 3 LDSS:** This should be the first level qualification for education welfare staff, aimed at those in an assistant level role. It is recognised that the review of National Occupational Standards (NOS) will address some of the concerns about the present qualification, ensure common core compliance and maximise the common elements. It is recommended that it should become a requirement that all new entrants commence the qualification within six months of appointment, to be completed within the following 12 months. The underpinning knowledge for this NVQ begins with the induction process. The way in which the remaining knowledge and skills development are provided should be a matter for local determination, although the potential to commission certificated programmes with academic credit that feed into other qualifications such as foundation degrees is worth further consideration.

**NVQ 4 LDSS:** This should be the second level qualification for education welfare staff, aimed at those who are new entrants to the officer role and existing staff who do not wish to progress to more senior roles. It should become the minimum level requirement for all those employed as Education Welfare Officer roles, with an expectation that new appointees commence the qualification within six months of appointment and should complete within the following 18 months. In the longer term the aim should be to make the level 4 an entry requirement but this is not considered to be realistic in the near future.

There is a need to offer programmes with underpinning knowledge and skill development that support achievement of the qualification. This could be through foundation degrees (see the Nottingham Trent University paper) or other programmes commissioned by employers on a regional basis, given the likely scale of places required. Alternatively it would be possible to commission a national programme as in youth justice (albeit at a lower level) and for Connexions, although the links to the NOS must be explicit and drive the content of the programme. Once again the separately commissioned work on the use of APEL to allow individuals to fast track towards achievement of the NVQ provides some insight into the issues involved.

There should be an expectation that existing EWOs without this level of qualification should undertake the NVQ within a three year period but, for such staff, there should be flexible programmes that give credit for previous training and experience and concentrate on filling identified gaps and the formal assessment of competence. For some such staff it will be more appropriate that they commence the next level graduate qualification (see next section).

**Professional Graduate Level Qualification:** This should be the third level qualification linked to the idea of a level 2 Education Welfare Officer. It should include but not be restricted to the social work degree, particularly as other degree level qualifications are developed. It is hoped and strongly recommended that, within the integrated qualifications framework, all such qualifications provide a clear pathway from the relevant level 4 NVQs, with maximum credit for previous learning and experience. Within the agreed range of professional qualifications it will be important that there are specialist modules that relate to the education welfare role.

It is recommended that employers develop pay frameworks that recognise the concept of two levels of Education Welfare Officer, based on the achievement of the required qualification.

### **Post Qualifying (PQ) Frameworks**

The overall numbers of EWOs does not justify a separate qualification at PQ level and a pathway within the social work qualifying framework is therefore suggested as the preferred route. However, as the suggested professional qualification framework outlined above is not restricted to the social work qualification there will need to be a flexibility about access to the PQ framework that does not currently exist. It is suggested that this is a highly desirable development in any case and important to the realisation of the wider Every Child Matters agenda.

Across the full range of children's services it is hoped that the integrated qualifications framework will allow and encourage people to access a wide range of post-graduate programmes that contribute to recognised professional frameworks and ongoing registration requirements. A modular approach, with shared modules of study that can count towards various qualifications is highly desirable to support integrated working and positive outcomes for children and young people.

Two examples of how progression might work for an individual once the integrated qualifications framework is in place are included in appendix C.

### **Implementation Issues**

The stark lessons of the 1974 LGTB piece of work must be taken into account when considering how to implement the proposed framework. The benefits of the clarity of approach developed for some other groups (e.g. Connexions

Advisers) also need to be recognised if the longstanding issues of a lack of clarity, consistency and resources are to be addressed positively.

Support from employers is clearly crucial in this regard. Therefore CWDC, NASWE and others will need to engage with the key stakeholders as a priority and strongly promote the framework and its benefits. Examples of a clear relationship between qualifications and pay scales will be useful and these should be commended to employers.

It will also be important to explain and promote the new framework with existing education welfare staff. Realistic timescales and arrangements need to be put in place to allow for assimilation. There are positive examples and also lessons from the work to implement protection of title for social workers.

Full implementation of the framework also depends on the ongoing review of NOS and the successful realisation of the integrated qualifications framework. It is hoped and expected that every effort will be made to maximise the scope of core units, to allow full use of credits from previous training, experience and qualifications and the provision of a clear progression from the level 4 LDSS NVQ into relevant professional qualifications. Until these things are all in place (i.e. by 2010) it will only be possible to have partial implementation, with a clear understanding by all of the direction of travel. This will also allow both employers and individuals to review their current situation and plan ahead accordingly.

Achieving agreement on the detail of a framework will be an important step but means little without full implementation. Therefore, once finalised, the communication of the detail and the expectations will need to be given priority and done in a way which engages senior managers, supervisors and practitioners and stimulates them into taking the appropriate actions.

There are clearly major resource implications involved in the implementation of the proposed framework and it is recommended that, once a framework is agreed in principle, that further work is undertaken to scope and cost this over a five year period. Some of these costs can then be included in a bid for occupational group funding.

## **5 Summary**

After many years and several attempts to create a clear qualification and progression framework for the education welfare service a variety of factors now combine to present the best ever opportunity to achieve this. There is a clear will to agree and implement arrangements that will meet the needs of the service, the individuals working within it and the children, young people and their families the service supports. All this will be done within the context of the development of integrated services and the Every Child Matters agenda. In this way education welfare and the individuals working within the service will be able to maximise their contribution to improved outcomes for children and young people.

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**Possible progression examples once an appropriate integrated qualifications framework is in place.**

**Example 1**

Janice is a parent with 2 small children, who was previously an administrative assistant. She has always enjoyed being with children and signs up with her local school as a parent helper.

After a couple of years an opportunity arises to become a teaching assistant and Janice is the successful applicant. Three years on and she has completed her TA NVQ when she sees an advertisement for an Education Welfare Officer (level 1), based in the local comprehensive school and, once again, she is the successful applicant. She then completes the level 4 LDSS NVQ, which only requires her to undertake the units that she has not completed previously.

Two years later she undertakes a professional social work qualification (education welfare pathway) to become a level 2 EWO. Again she gets maximum credit for her previous experience and training towards this qualification within the IQF arrangements.

Three years after that she moves to a mainstream social work role as a senior practitioner but returns to an education welfare management role four years later.

**Example 2**

Jon became a EWO eight years ago after leaving the army. He has no relevant qualification but an obvious talent for the job and is highly valued by his colleagues and the families he works with.

Whilst Jon enjoys his work he is frustrated that, without relevant qualifications, he has no opportunity for career progression. He is also aware that, under the new progression/qualification framework he must complete at least the LDSS level 4 NVQ within the next 3 years.

In discussion with his manager Jon signs up for a combined foundation degree/ NVQ 4 programme - he completes this successfully and, in the process gains the confidence to continue to a full degree level professional qualification.

After this Jon soon progresses to a management position and has a further series of promotions within his local authority's children's services directorate, eventually becoming Director of Children's Services within ten years.