Developing higher education professional development for the new children’s services integrated qualifications framework

Authors:

Dr Steven Coombs
Head of Continuing Professional Development
School of Education
Bath Spa University, BATH, UK
s.coombs@bathspa.ac.uk Tel: +44-(0)1225-783630

Dr Mike Calvert
Head of Continuing Professional Development
York St John University, YORK, UK
M.Calvert2@yorksj.ac.uk Tel +44 (0)1904 876886

Abstract

The UK government’s Department for Education and Skills (DfES) has recently published several major policy documents (Every Child Matters & The Five Year Strategy) relating to Children’s Services and how the various professions can work more closely together. As part of this initiative the DfES set up a body called the National Remodelling Team (NRT) to strategically look at workforce reform and improvements in inter-agency working practices. As part of this major review of policy the NRT in partnership with the Children’s Workforce Development Council (CWDC) has recommended the implementation of an Integrated Qualifications Framework (IQF) that will help to link the plethora of various professional qualifications across all the professions related to delivering children’s services, i.e. health, education, social services, the police etc. With the recent integration of English Local Authority (LA) structures of education and social services combined into a new single responsibility of Children’s Services and with a new regional Directorate and National Children’s Services Commission, the implications for the future of professional learning are profound. The consequences of this UK ‘grand design’ for the entire rethinking and reformation of Children’s Services, including education, has potential international significance and impact. The professional learning and development of the Children’s Workforce is therefore a top UK government priority. This national initiative, combined with the need for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to interpret the IQF in terms
of both cross-professional programme design and the integration of vocational and academic standards, represents the focus of this paper. This paper proposes a draft IQF postgraduate framework that can be adopted for new UK regional partnerships across HEIs, LAs and other providers of Children’s Services. This draft IQF framework is being reviewed and developed as part of a major policy initiative through the CPD committee of the UK’s Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET). UCET has formed a Special Interest Group (SIG) on the wider workforce for schools that is focusing on CPD issues related to the government's children's workforce and Every Child Matters agenda. This SIG was recently renamed as the ECM and IQF group. The work of this SIG has also formed part of a recent proposal for a small catalyst research grant from ESCalate, which is the UK’s Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Education. This paper will report the findings of this UCET SIG and share CPD developments related to the UK's children's services English workforce, which is challenging traditional professional learning boundaries, both inside the university system as well as the workplace.

Children’s Services and the Every Child Matters agenda

In 2003 the UK government published the ‘Every Child Matters’ (DfES, 2003a) legislation in response to the Victoria Climbi enquiry, from which the core lesson of multi-agency working was drawn from this terrible case of child abuse that could have been prevented if all the various children’s agencies had worked more closely together. This Act of Parliament was followed by the ‘Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners’ (DfES, 2004) that cited the following problem:

“Children’s services and education have been too compartmentalized. Services have not been joined up. Funding has been too fragmented” (p.6).

The five key principles underpinning children’s services education and training for Every Child Matters (ECM) are as follows:

1. Greater personalization and choice.
2. Opening up services.
3. Freedom and independence.
4. A major commitment to staff development.
5. Partnerships.
Out of these major reforms arose the wider workforce in schools, which is seen as a sub-set of the total Children’s Workforce. Since 2005 most Local Authorities in England have been reformed such that previous divisions between social services and education have been amalgamated into a common Children’s Services Directorate.

The DfES wider workforce initiative saw the creation of a National Remodelling Team (NRT) to reform working practices and services in schools, which has recently been amalgamated into the Training and Development Agency (TDA) for schools under their new remit of being the TDA’s Development Directorate (http://www.tda.gov.uk/remodelling.aspx) responsible for implementing two major initiatives: The National Agreement, and, Extended Schools. Another major agency responsible for developing children’s services is the Children’s Workforce Development Council (CWDC) (http://www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/), which funds the new Early Years Professional qualification (allegedly equivalent to normal UK qualified teacher status in England). The CWDC has also pioneered the goal of achieving an integrated qualifications framework (IQF) so as to provide clear progression routes across existing professional barriers in Children’s Services and thereby “Facilitate continuing professional development (CPD) for the whole workforce based on a recognition of common skills and knowledge that are applicable across the whole of the children’s workforce and in all settings” IQF Implementation Plan (CWDC, 2006) (http://www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/pdf/IQF/IQF_Implementation_Plan_1Nov06.pdf)

Recently, UCET (2007) has published a position paper looking at the issues connecting the ECM agenda and teacher education. It highlights the ECM agenda for inter-professional collaboration and multi-agency working and the need for new professional learning CPD opportunities for such professional groups. In the section considering ECM and teacher education the UCET position paper maintains that:

The revised standards for classroom teachers already impose certain requirements with regard to the ECM agenda… Children’s Centres, extended schools and integrated services all derive their meaning and purpose from that central commitment (p.15).
The Integrated Qualifications Framework

The following mission statement and rationale has been provided by the CWDC (2006) regarding the IQF:

The vision for the IQF is to establish a qualifications framework that has acceptance and credibility across the children’s workforce at all levels and that:

- Helps people deliver services that improve the lives of children, young people and those that care for them.
- Raises the profile and status of the children’s workforce.
- Meets the needs of employers.

From this IQF initiative it is clear that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) need to rethink their vocational curriculum from Foundation Degrees (FDs) up to postgraduate qualifications linked to the allied professions contained within Children’s Services. A first attempt to ‘map’ these vocational curriculum areas was proposed at Bath Spa University in February 2006 and is illustrated in figure (1). Later that year in 2006 the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET – see http://www.ucet.ac.uk/) CPD committee set up a number of new Special Interest Groups (SIGs), one of which was to look at issues connected to the Wider Workforce and the Every Child Matters agenda. This then later became the SIG for ECM and IQF.

The UCET CPD SIG on ECM and the IQF (formerly the Wider Workforce)

The UCET CPD committee has been heavily engaged in joint partnership with the Training and Development Agency TDA for schools to help develop appropriate CPD solutions for the so-called wider workforce (teachers, teaching assistants, administrators et al) located in England’s schools. UCET has provided its members with regular information materials on this initiative (originated by the DfES) and set up a Special Interest Group (SIG) to investigate and report on all matters connected to CPD matters related to the Wider Workforce in schools. The UCET SIG on the Wider Workforce produced an agenda for action which highlighted a nine-point set of recommendations for UCET to take forward in its negotiations with key stakeholders, namely the DfES and TDA and this was recently reported at the annual conference of the International Professional Development Association (IPDA) (Coombs, 2006 – abstract available at http://www.ipda.org.uk/). It was from a number of UCET wider workforce SIG meetings during 2006 that many questions and issues were raised that concentrates upon the focus group question “key issues regarding the wider workforce”. This exercise has been followed up by the key focus question: “What are the issues surrounding the development of the IQF from a Higher Education perspective?”
School of Education – IQF routes

Work-based Access Modules into FDs

For U/G low skilled professionals

Foundation ‘content’ Degree

For highly skilled U/G and graduate professionals

Work-based Access Modules into the PMP

Academic ED validated modules

Partner FE College NVQ IQF work linked to APL credit-rated

G Cert PL award route for U/G highly skilled professionals

PG Cert PL award route for all graduates – all career titles

Higher awards: PG Dip and MA/MTeach PL relative to range of career track titles spread across BSU

Research awards across all the IQF professional fields: M Phil & EdD, PhD

PG ‘content’ awards PGCE DipQSW etc.

Other MA ‘content’ awards

For ‘content’ read vocational content related to IQF professions: education, social work and caring, police & health etc.
The biggest issue for HEIs to grapple with is the need to provide smooth transition across the current vocational and academic qualifications divide, i.e. between the academic degree levels and the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Whilst there is rough equivalency between these levels there is as yet no automatic progression and straightforward universally accepted accreditation of prior learning (APL) across this education and training philosophical divide. The flow-chart in figure (1) is an attempt to interpret the CWDC’s IQF for progression of NVQs into various postgraduate qualification routes.

With this agenda in mind a small collaborative research project to develop this new CPD framework has been organised under the auspices of the UCET CPD committee special-interest group and was recently proposed to ESCalate, the UK’s Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Education (http://escalate.ac.uk/). The key research question the special-interest group seeks findings for is “who are the new professionals that operate across the children’s workforce, such that we might serve their common interests for CPD”?

The UCET CPD committee recently restated its core purpose as adding value to all forms of postgraduate accredited professional learning by invoking the academic notion of criticality as situated in the workplace of professionals, which has been strongly supported by Ofsted (2004) as having a direct impact on school improvement. This CPD imperative is an essential prerequisite for the ‘thinking professional’ who must be able to respond flexibly and cross the existing professional boundaries of the Children’s Workforce in order to achieve the goal of an Integrated Children’s Services support team. We recognise a need to do more than react to government policy regarding CPD and our intentions include the encouragement of the ‘thinking professional in the thinking school’. In England there has been a call by government (DfES, 2003) for cultural change in order to stimulate CPD and provide greater access to higher education across the wider professional community. This project is intended to ensure that any such changes to professional learning do not exclude criticality given the government's emphasis towards higher education accreditation achieved in the workplace of all professional groups. Whereupon, government agency support funds for such vocational higher education (TDA, 2005) is now often linked to the notion of evaluation reports citing work based ‘impact’ evidences (Coombs & Denning, 2005).

This ESCalate project is both timely and ambitious as it sets about developing a common access postgraduate higher education CPD generic framework for qualified members across the children's workforce. Through obtaining new useful educational research (OECD, 2002) knowledge of how the concept of critical professional learning can be applied to both include and engage the wider children’s workforce, we will ensure that the new professional learning environment is not confined just to teachers.

The survey work for this ESCalate project was carried out and conducted over a 3 month period earlier this year. The ESCalate funding included special
provision to attach a dedicated researcher to help carry out complex surveys across many different agencies. In order to identify the salient issues that were emerging, we conducted telephone research undertaken by our dedicated ESCalate researcher from the University of Stirling. A number of key representatives of CWDC and CWN were interviewed and the findings discussed and distilled by the authors in consultation with the researcher.

**Key issues identified by the research findings**

Central to the creation of meaningful career progression routes for the Children’s Workforce is the establishment of an IQF (Integrated Qualifications Framework). This would seek to rationalise the multiplicity of qualifications, ease progression and transfer in and between the various professional sectors and lead to recognition for both generic and specific skills at a range of levels (8 are planned from level 2 to HE and professional level qualifications). According to the CWDC (2006), the vision for the IQF is to ‘help people to deliver services that improve the lives of children, young people and those that care for them, raise the profile and status of the children’s workforce, and meet the needs of employers.’

This will, according to Paul Ennals (Chair of the CWN) ‘require providers to be proactive in looking at existing provision in the light of IQF, and modifying it accordingly’. It will be necessary to ‘map, adapt and rationalise this in the light of IQF (a process of ‘joining up training’). The additional task in relation to ECM and inter-agency working will be the creation of ‘transfer courses’ to enable parts of the workforce to be equally recognised in other professions. This is clearly no easy task. As Emma Westcott of GTCE reminds us: ‘there are hundreds of qualifications across the professions that are implicated. Such a vast undertaking is not going to be perfect in 2010; it is going to be evolving’.

One of the main challenges is to reduce the plethora of qualifications and ‘encourage awarding bodies to seek mutual recognition of prior learning and/or experience’ (CWDC, ibid). Contributors such as Cathy Cairns of the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC?) stated that whilst NMC and Skills for Health are in close contact, she ‘can’t see quite how it is going to be possible to match with other (professional) regulatory standards’.

A further factor which might affect HE is the likelihood that the primary focus may well be lower levels of qualifications initially. Monica Farthing, the TDA representative on the CWN IQF Project Board, stated that Foundation Degrees are likely to be the main focus in the first instance although, as mentioned previously, ‘the IQF is intended to embrace all levels of qualification including postgraduate’. She goes on to say that ‘courses and modules (at HE-level) are less likely to be a priority (for example, support staff who are graduates are not a priority for additional funding when there are a great many support staff who don’t have level 2 and 3 NVQs’). It is important to add that she is very encouraged by the positive response of HEIs so far and a HE reference group has been set up. Emma Westcott of the GTCE
states that ‘whatever you decide IQF means, the processes are more straightforward at lower levels’.

A number of issues relate to training provision. Ennals notes that there is ‘too much variability at all levels of training and not enough of a strategic overview of what there is in order to make more sense of it’. The pressing issues would appear to be a) that new skills and knowledge (particularly leadership and management in relation to inter-agency working) are required b) that appropriate trainers/educators might be difficult to find (and who trains the trainers?) c) there is the issue of the needs of ‘Phase 1’ training (for those in direct contact) and ‘Phase 2’, for those who are in intermittent contact and d) a lack of clarity as to what the wider workforce requires and the difficulty of knowing what courses will be funded and adopted by whom and in what way.

In relation to Phase 2, according to Cairns, there is still some lack of clarity as to exactly who comprises the children’s workforce. She identifies an acute problem with intermittent workers that obtain ‘a qualification which is not child-specific and for all workers whose qualification leads to registration with a regulatory body’.

On the subject of leadership and management, Farthing suggests that it would be sensible for providers interested in ECM at postgraduate level to draw in as many professions as possible to courses and modules focusing on leadership and management roles in the context of multi-agency work.

A particular bone of contention is the fact that funding ‘is not very joined up at the moment’ (Monica Farthing, TDA). A clear example of this is the TDA funding of PPD (Postgraduate Professional Development), which is additional funding to promote MA-level engagement to support the drive for school improvement. This funding can only be drawn down for teachers registered on the courses. This means that there is little incentive for courses such as the MA in Improvement, Development and Change at York St John University to widen its intake to take on a range of ECM professionals. Notwithstanding this, the University recruits FE, LA and HE colleagues and is keen to provide the educational richness and benefits that a multi-disciplinary workforce can bring to a Master’s course. UCET has argued strongly that this TDA approach is not in keeping with a Government drive towards meeting ECM and the needs of inter-agency working and training. Clearly, we need a common CPD funding platform for inter-professional development and multi-agency working. Such an inter-professional development CPD training fund was recently proposed in October 2007 by UCET to the newly formed government Department for Children, Skills and Families (DCSF) that partly replaces the old DfES.

In some areas there appears not to be any postgraduate provision that meets the needs of ECM (Steve Batty, Skills for Justice and Steve Woodland, Skillsactive). In addition, each area will have different requirements re:

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1 The word ‘training’ is used by many bodies to describe the up-skilling of their workers. Whilst we would recognise the limitations of the word and its connotations, it is often referred to in this article since it has to recognise the dominant discourse of the wider workforce.
qualifications. Woodland states ‘It is an interesting area of work but will probably not affect our sector much at all. Sporting agencies have a statutory duty, but the level of relevant qualification required to work in sport is still the subject of debate … (and) the level of qualification to work in sport will not be as high as working in e.g. social care’.

Another interesting issue is raised by Steve Batty of Skills for Justice. He alerts us to the need to meet the requirements of the sector skills agreements. He quotes the example of employers looking for ‘bite-size learning’ and that postgraduate courses would need to be broken down to provide ‘short sharp intensive courses’ rather than ‘monolithic’ provision.

Possibly linked to this is the perennial relationship between vocational courses (e.g. NVQs) with their levels of competency and practical feel compared to the more critical models of engagement that are commonly found in HE postgraduate provision. This issue is of course dealt with traditionally, for example, bridging work to ensure that higher level vocational qualifications such as the NPQH for senior school leaders can be APLed into master’s programmes2. However, the criticality of postgraduate provision might sit uneasily in some instances with more instrumental models of training geared up to ensure competent ‘delivery’ of a service or provision without regard to developing a critical disposition on behalf of the learner. That is a shame because such critical thinking skills and dispositions also help to underpin the learner’s ability to transfer and exchange core knowledge into new working areas and applications – vital for the future Children’s Workforce.

Recognising relevant qualifications and experience (APL/APEL) is clearly going to be a further challenge to HE. HEIs consider such matters individually and traditionally this can be up to a maximum of one third of a Master’s programme. As new professionals and their roles become more diverse and complex, this too might make calibration more difficult to achieve. APL/APEL are central to the notion of workforce mobility as Emma Westcott points out but she states that: Difficulties may arise in interpreting whether evidence of learning at a given level on a topic like child protection or child development will suffice across very different job roles.

Social work practice has a good reputation for widening access and APL/APEL according to Cathrine Clark of the GSCC, the regulatory body for Social Care. This is complicated by the fact that the IQF is country-specific, claims Cathy Cairns (NMC), and yet there is a call for cross-recognition of AP(E)L throughout the UK. She quotes Wales as an example of a country which might produce a very different model.

Cathrine Clark spells out the issue of recognition. It can already be difficult within one sector or specialism, but for cross-sector recognition, she states that it will be necessary to bring together ‘commissioning agents such as local

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2 UCET has recommended that an NPQH qualification from the NCSL is given a conditional entry waiver of 60 M-level credits (third of an MA) subject to a critical reflection bridging exercise, often referred to as the accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL).
and regional shareholders, employers, HEIs, service users and the CWDC; not to mention the specific regulatory bodies.

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