

## Criteria for assessing social work qualifications gained outside the UK

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# Criteria for assessing social work qualifications gained outside the UK

## Introduction

1. This document sets out the assessment framework that the General Social Care Council (GSCC) uses when assessing whether social work qualifications gained outside the United Kingdom (UK) are equivalent to the UK Social Work standards. The framework has been established with reference to the:
  - [National Occupational Standards for Social Work \(2002\)](#);
  - [Quality Assurance Agency \(QAA\) Subject Benchmarks for Social Work \(revised 2008\)](#); and
  - [Code of Practice for Social Care Workers](#).
2. The framework sets out a statement of the key professional activities, knowledge and values required for the practice of social work that reflect the standards for entry to the profession in England as set out in the [Department of Health \(DH\) Requirements for the Social Work Degree \(2002\)](#).
3. The GSCC recognises that social work is an international discipline and defines the key purpose of social work in accordance with the international definition as:<sup>1</sup>

“A profession which promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.”
4. The GSCC acknowledges that there is no internationally prescribed curriculum for social work in Europe or elsewhere. In each country of training that the GSCC deals with social work has evolved within different social traditions that have been shaped and influenced by

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<sup>1</sup> International Federation of Social Work, Ethics and Statement of Principles, paragraph 2.

legislation, historical developments and social attitudes. To quote the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)<sup>2</sup> this means:

“In an international context, distinctive national approaches to social welfare policy, provision and practice have greatly influenced the focus and content of the social work degree programmes.

Social work, both as occupational practice and as academic subject, evolves, adapts and changes in response to the social, political and economic challenges and demands of contemporary social welfare policy, practice and legislation”.

5. It is within this context that the GSCC assesses the social work education content of accredited qualifications and the social work practice of internationally qualified applicants.

## **Registration decisions**

6. Registration decisions will be made in accordance to the Regulations set out at Section 64 of the Care Standards Act.
7. A key principle for the GSCC is to remove barriers that prevent suitably qualified social work professionals from exercising their profession in this country. However, the regulatory responsibility of the GSCC to protect the public means that it must ensure that only those with a relevant social work qualification and experience are registered to practise and use the protected title of ‘social worker’ in England.

## **Compensation measures**

8. To this end, the GSCC may require a social worker from outside the UK who applies for registration to undertake a compensation measure to demonstrate that they have the required skills and knowledge to practise the profession.<sup>3</sup> This occurs when the GSCC:
  - is satisfied that an applicant holds a relevant social work qualification; and
  - the assessment has identified a significant shortfall in the education curriculum and post-qualifying learning when compared to the requirements of the UK.

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<sup>2</sup> The QAA subject benchmark statement (2008) focus on academic standards and integrated social work practice for education providers.

<sup>3</sup> A compensation measure refers to the choice an applicant has of either undertaking an adaptation period including a period of supervised practice; or to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding an aptitude test.

9. The criteria for assessing qualifications are set out in paragraphs 20 to 43 below. The application is placed 'on-hold' whilst the applicant completes their compensation measure.

## **Refusals**

10. The GSCC will refuse an application for registration on the grounds that:
- there is insufficient evidence that the social work qualification has been awarded at the time of the application for registration as set out at paragraph 11 to 12;
  - the applicant does not hold a qualification that is geared towards the profession of social work and the assessment has identified a significant shortfall in the education curriculum that is not made up by post qualifying learning or employment in a social work role when compared to the requirements of the UK as set out at paragraphs 29 to 44; or
  - the level of the applicant's social work qualification(s) is not equivalent to the minimum requirement as set out in paragraph 21 to 28 and the assessment as set out at paragraphs 28 to 43 has identified a shortfall in the breadth and depth of the social work education curriculum that has not been made-up by post-qualifying learning and experience when compared to the requirements of the UK.

The criteria for determining whether these grounds exist are set out from paragraph 11 onwards.

## **Evidence that the qualification has been awarded**

11. The qualification must have been awarded or conferred at the time of the application to join the social care register. To evidence this the applicant must provide a verified copy of the original qualification certificate that clearly records all of the following:
- the title of the qualification;
  - the awarding body;
  - the training establishment where the applicant studied if different from the awarding body; and
  - the date the qualification was awarded or conferred.
12. In addition, one of the following documents must be provided that will provide evidence of the following:

- a course transcript or student handbook which lists:
  - all of the courses/modules/units studied throughout the training period;
  - supervised and assessed practice placements including any periods of block placements; and
  - the marks, grades or credits awarded; or
- a Diploma Supplement (available since 2005 in EEA states) which includes:
  - all of the courses/modules/units studied throughout the training period;
  - supervised and assessed practice placements including any periods of block placements;
  - a description of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS); and
  - the nature, level, context, content and status of their studies.

## **Criteria for determining whether a qualification is a professional qualification in social work**

13. As part of our assessment of the qualification the GSCC will take into consideration the following:

### **Regulated profession**

14. Where social work is a regulated profession in the applicant's country of training, the applicant should hold a qualification that gives them eligibility to practise, be registered or licensed as a social worker in that country, state or province.
15. As set out in Article 3.1(a) of Directive 2005/36/EC (the Directive), the GSCC applies the following definition to describe a regulated profession both in and outside the European Economic Area (EEA)<sup>4</sup>. It is:

"a professional activity or group of professional activities, access to which, the pursuit of which, or one of the modes of pursuit of which

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<sup>4</sup> EEA countries refer to all countries within the European Economic Area.

is subject, directly or indirectly, by virtue of legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions to the possession of specific professional qualifications; in particular, the use of a professional title limited by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions to holders of a given professional qualification shall constitute a mode of pursuit”.

### **Qualification is regulated or accredited**

16. The qualification should be regulated or accredited by a recognised social work accrediting body in the country of training where this system exists as described below.

### **EEA nationals or those with enforceable community rights**

17. In the case of applicants that have qualified in the EEA where social work education and training is regulated in their home EEA state, their qualification must satisfy the requirements as set out in Article 3.1(e) of the Directive:

“Any training which is specifically geared to the pursuit of a given profession and which comprises a course or courses complemented, where appropriate, by professional training, or probationary or professional practice. The structure and level of the professional training, probationary or professional practice shall be determined by the laws, regulations or administrative provisions of the Member State concerned or monitored or approved by the authority designated for that purpose.”

### **Social work accreditation body**

18. The GSCC will recognise qualifications that have been accredited by an appropriate social work accrediting body. These are accreditation bodies the GSCC has recognised, following research and intelligence gathering, as delivering training that meets the requirements of the UK social work standards.
19. If the qualification is not accredited by the body recognised by the GSCC in the country of training the application will be assessed using the criteria set out at paragraphs 21 to 44.

### **Education accreditation body**

20. The education institution must be accredited by an appropriate authority in that country of training or recognised in the UK as a bona-fide educational institute. Where this applies the criteria as set at paragraphs 21 to 44 will be applied by the GSCC for determining whether it is a social work qualification.

## **Criteria for determining whether the qualification is at the required level**

21. As part of our assessment of the qualification consideration will be given to the level of the qualification.
22. Academic and professional level defines the range, breadth and depth of complexity, relative demand and autonomy expected of a learner on completion of a programme of study who is safe and effective to enter the profession of social work in England. Level is used to design and assess a programme of study. It defines not only knowledge and understanding but cognitive and intellectual skills, performance and practice essential for professional practise. In summary, the academic level defines the vocational and academic performance needed in the work place as much as what someone needs to know and understand.

### **EEA nationals or those with enforceable community rights**

23. The level of qualifications held by EEA nationals or those with enforceable community rights will be assessed in line with the level descriptors as in Article 11 and bridging arrangements, as in Article 13 of the Directive.

### **Non EEA nationals**

24. The academic level of a social work degree must be at the standard of a UK Bachelor degree (either honours or ordinary) and a post-graduate level qualification must be a UK Master's degree in order to be considered equivalent.
25. The minimum length of study required for a social work qualification is either 3 years (or equivalent academic full time study) at Bachelor Degree Level or 2 years (or equivalent academic full time study) at Post Graduate Degree Level.
26. The GSCC will recognise social work qualifications that are one level below the UK Bachelor degree standard and are a minimum of two years in duration.
27. Social work qualifications that are two levels below the Bachelor degree standard and of a shorter duration will not automatically be recognised by the GSCC and the applicant would have to provide evidence of substantial post-qualifying learning and social work experience to make-up for the lack of breadth and depth of the subjects covered during their training.



28. When determining whether a qualification meets the required level the GSCC will use the 'Band Framework' prepared by The National Recognition Information Centre for the United Kingdom (UK NARIC)<sup>5</sup>. The UK NARIC Band Framework is designed to ensure accuracy and consistency of comparability statements accorded to international qualifications. They are also designed with the capacity to accommodate and reflect value comparisons of a wide range of international awards and transferable skills.

## **Criteria for determining whether the qualification is equivalent to the UK social work standard and for identifying any shortfall in knowledge and skills**

### **Preparation for the social work profession**

29. In order for a social workers training to be assessed as equivalent, it is necessary that the social work qualification held prepares the holder for:
- the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility in statutory social work;
  - decision-making in complex and unpredictable contexts; and
  - safe and effective practise.
30. To achieve this the social work qualification will have given the holder the required knowledge and skills to demonstrate:
- a systematic understanding of social work knowledge;
  - an ability to deploy established techniques of analysis of enquiry;
  - conceptual understanding that enables the holder to devise and sustain arguments, solve problems and utilise established knowledge to change practice;
  - an ability to critically evaluate arguments, assumptions, abstract concepts and data to make judgements to achieve solutions;
  - an intellectual capability, by analysing social work knowledge to inform clear argument, justification or proposal; and
  - an ability to communicate complex ideas, problems and solutions in a clear way to a wide audience.

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<sup>5</sup> The UK NARIC evaluation criteria and methodology based on the Band Framework - NARIC Code of Practice 2008

## **Social work professional activities – key roles**

31. The education curriculum (normally evidenced in the course transcript or Diploma supplement) shows sufficient breadth and depth of social work content to enable a social worker to transfer their knowledge when carrying out these core professional activities in England.
32. When making an assessment the GSCC seeks to make sure that on balance there is sufficient key content to enable a positive transfer of the learning and for safe and effective practice. Social workers at entry to the profession in England must be able to undertake the five key roles of social work identified in the National Occupational Standards for social work<sup>6</sup> as set out below.

### **Key Role 1:**

#### **Prepare for and work with individuals, families, carers, groups and communities to assess their needs and circumstances**

- a. prepare for social work contact and involvement;
- b. work with individuals, families, carers, groups and communities to help them make informed decisions; and
- c. assess needs and options to recommend a course of action.

### **Key Role 2:**

#### **Plan, carry out, review and evaluate social work practice, with individuals, families, carers, groups and communities and other professionals**

- a. respond to human crisis situations;
- b. interact with individuals, families, carers, groups and communities to achieve change and development and to improve life opportunities;
- c. prepare, produce, implement and evaluate plans with individuals, families, carers, groups, communities and professional colleagues;
- d. support and development of networks to meet assessed needs and planned outcomes;
- e. work with groups to promote individual growth, development and independence; and

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<sup>6</sup> National Occupational Standards for Social Work (May 2002) TOPSS Partnership - Pg 12

- f. address behaviour which presents a risk to individuals, families, carers, groups, or communities.

### **Key Role 3:**

#### **Support individuals to represent their needs, views and circumstances**

- a. advocate with and on behalf of individuals, families, carers, groups and communities; and
- b. prepare for, and participate in, decision making forums.

### **Key Role 4:**

#### **Manage risk to individuals, families, carers, groups, communities, self and colleagues**

- a. assess and manage risks to individuals, families, carers, groups and communities; and
- b. assess, minimise and manage risk to self and colleagues.

### **Key Role 5:**

#### **Manage and be accountable, with supervision and support for your own social work practice within your organisation**

- a. manage and be accountable for own work;
- b. contribute to the management of resources and services;
- c. manage, present and share records and reports; and
- d. work within multi-disciplinary and multi-organisational teams, networks and systems.

### **Social work standards - key requirements to practise**

33. To evidence that the social worker has the required knowledge and skills to practise in England the following key requirements must be evidenced in the:
  - education curriculum;

- supervised and assessed practice learning undertaken as part of their training; and
- relevant post qualifying learning and employment.

### **Applied theory, methods and the place of research in social work practice**

34. Social workers at entry to the profession must understand and apply theory, methods and use of research to inform practice covering:
- Understanding of sociological, psychological, and social science theories and perspectives that relate to individual, group and organisational behaviours in respect of social policy and social welfare.
  - Integration of theoretical perspectives and evidence from research into day to day practice assessment and decision-making.
  - Methods of assessment, testing the relevance of information, the nature of professional judgement and processes in keeping with agency procedures.
  - Methods for intervention, planning and review to ensure the needs of people who use services and their carers are addressed.
  - Approaches to involve people who use services, ascertaining their wishes and feelings and options for care that best suit their needs.
  - Frameworks for risk assessment and safeguarding practices.
  - Appropriate use of research in decision-making about practice and in the evaluation of outcomes including analysis of the nature and validity of explanations for circumstances of service users.

### **Legal and policy frameworks in social work**

35. Social workers are expected to apply legal and policy frameworks in their work. The education curriculum must include knowledge of the legal frameworks in their home country and understanding of how the law and social work policies interact and demonstrate:
- Application of the legal framework and service delivery standards, with understanding of legal authority in practice, statutory

accountability and the tensions between statute, policy and practice.

- b. Understanding of statutory codes, standards, frameworks and guidance relevant to social work including collaborative practice across agencies, data protection and confidentiality.

### **Social work ethics**

36. As an outcome of professional training social workers must apply understanding of the rights and choices of individuals including the:
  - a. Impact of injustice, social inequalities and oppressive social relations and ability to make constructive challenge of individual, institutional and structural discrimination.
  - b. Relationship between justice, care and control and duty to uphold the law in respect of discrimination.
  - c. Ethics applied to resolution of value dilemmas and conflicts in a professional context.
  - d. Define ethical practice, and upholding the values of the profession at all times.

### **Applied social work knowledge and skills**

37. Professional social workers have a key role to co-ordinate services across delivery agencies and respond to the complex needs of people who use services. Keeping informed and updated on best practices and exercising professional judgements is essential to the role.
38. This means that social workers need an understanding of social services delivery, the service context, and essential knowledge and skills for practice including:
  - a. assessment skills;
  - b. gathering, analysing and recording information;
  - c. problem solving and planning techniques;
  - d. intervention, review and evaluation approaches;
  - e. advocacy approaches and skills;
  - f. collaborative working across professionals;
  - g. risk and safeguarding skills and knowledge; and

- h. effective communication skills showing ability to:
- make effective and purposeful contact with individuals and organisations;
  - clarify and negotiating purposeful engagement and boundaries for intervention;
  - listen actively and engage with the life experiences of people who use services; respond appropriately to complex personal and interpersonal situations;
  - use verbal and non-verbal cues to guide interpretation; and
  - write accurately and clearly in styles adapted to the audience, purpose and context of communication.

### **Supervised and assessed practice placements**

39. To demonstrate applied social work knowledge and skills it is a requirement that the social worker's training that lead to the award of the qualification includes a period of supervised and assessed practice of a minimum of 130 days<sup>7</sup> in a social work role that prepares the individual for practice.
40. If the social worker has less than 130 days of practice learning or the nature of the practice learning does not prepare them for practice in England, the gap may be made up through achieved and relevant post-qualifying learning in social work.
41. Practice learning may cover the following areas that help prepare a social worker for professional practice, for example:
- a. Professional practice placements applying the legislative and policy frameworks and service delivery.
  - b. Working within the community with people who use services and those in vulnerable situations.
  - c. Working with and promoting the well-being of young people and their families.
  - d. Working within statutory, voluntary and private agencies providing community-based, day-care, residential and other services.
  - e. Working with and understanding the interrelationship with other related services, including education, health, housing, income maintenance, welfare and criminal justice.

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<sup>7</sup> The minimum standard of 130 days supervised and assessed practice is less than that required for social work training in England (200 days) thus taking into account variations in social work qualifications worldwide while retaining the value of social work as an applied discipline.

42. The practice learning must be:
- a. Organised through the teaching institution in partnership with community agencies in social work and subject to university quality control systems and credits; and
  - b. Of sufficient duration to enable the learning outcomes to be clearly evidenced and can include:
    - practice observation and shadowing;
    - analysis and research;
    - clinical observational activities (child development detailed study, interviewing skills);
    - court visits and judicial skills development; and
    - direct contact and engagement with people who use services and in welfare communities.

### **Post-qualifying social work learning**

43. Where there is an identified shortfall in the education curriculum or the supervised and assessed practice learning, the GSCC will take into account relevant post-qualifying learning. The learning must be supervised by either a qualified social worker or an expert professional in a related part of social work.
44. The GSCC will seek to ascertain how the identified gap in the education curriculum or practice learning can be made up using evidence of:
- a. The nature of employment or activities and where it is carried out in a social work field practice, residential, project or community setting.
  - b. The job role and professional activities that involve public welfare and services to promote the wellbeing of people who use services.
  - c. The role in whole or part that involves statutory responsibilities as relevant to social work in the country of practice.
  - d. The role involves case work responsibilities and duties, project or group management for specific welfare activities.
  - e. Non-paid work that involves giving help to benefit others or the community environment or in specialist services supporting the independence of vulnerable adults or children, palliative care, prison welfare, juvenile justice or advocacy organisations.
  - f. Continuing social work education and training that has relevance for social work practice.

## **English language testing**

45. Fluency in the English language – both written and oral - is not routinely assessed by the GSCC in recognising qualifications gained outside the UK. The GSCC has the power to ask for evidence of fluency where it is made aware that the applicant might not be sufficiently fluent in English for safe practice. A registrant seeking employment should expect that employers in the sector will seek evidence of sufficient fluency in English to be assured of competent and safe practice.