

## **Development of the Mental Health Officer Award Background**

The Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) was asked by the Scottish Executive, as part of its duties under the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001, to lead in the development of a replacement for the Mental Health Social Work Award (MHSWA).

The need to develop the new award arose from the introduction of the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 which introduced a new range of duties and requirements for MHOs along with the outcome of work undertaken by the SSSC during 2005 to review the mode of delivery of the MHSWA. Whilst there was a general view that the competences on which the award is based remain fit for purpose and there were no significant concerns about quality assurance, it was acknowledged that greater standardisation and consistency across the programmes was required given the increased legislative requirements. Opportunity was further supported by the review of the post qualifying framework and the commitment of the SSSC to the creation of specialist awards for social service workers where necessary.

A short life working group (SLWG), chaired by council member Kate Pryde, was established to support officers of the SSSC to undertake this work and this initial phase was completed in 2008. Following formal consultation a framework of standards and practice competences was agreed as the basis of a new award to be called the Mental Health Officer Award (MHOA). This award is to be developed at SCQF level 11 and as such will attract 60 credits at Masters level. The Standards can be accessed at <http://www.sssc.uk.com/Education+and+training/Continuing+professional+development.htm>

### **Current work**

The phase 2 development of the new award is being overseen by the Mental Health Officer Award Advisory Group also chaired by Kate Pryde. This group comprises a wide range of stakeholders who are working to principles which will ensure the award is fit for purpose. These principles are

- Partnership
- Service user specialist involvement
- Accountable and accessible
- Grounded in the Codes of Practice
- Take responsibility for communication with constituency

- Avoid duplication
- Focused on deadlines
- Value for money
- Fit for purpose
- Focus on practice

Within the oversight of the Advisory group three collaborative partnerships have been identified to progress the creation of the actual training /learning programmes which will eventually be approved by the SSSC under the Rules and requirements for Specialist Training for Social Services Workers in Scotland.

Each of the partnerships has employer and university representation able to contribute their discrete knowledge and expertise to the development of the Award and to draw on the positive experience of the previous award. The importance of local authorities being able to discharge their statutory duties in the provision of MHOs remains central and an emphasis on training workers who have had practice experience and are fit for purpose will reflect that.

The partnerships reflect the Learning Network boundaries in the North and West while the new East partnership represents a joining of Tayforth and South-East. Each partnership has set up its own management group but there will also be an emphasis on cross working wherever that is possible.

The SG Mental Health Division has allocated funding to assist development and each partnership has received £26 K to progress tasks such as constructing modules, establishing an assessment strategy, involving service users and carers and moving to validation with a university partner. Each of the partnerships will report their progress to the Advisory Group and this information will inform reports to the SSSC Learning and Development Committee.

It is anticipated that this work will be completed by March 2009 when the existing programme ends and each of the partnerships is setting target dates for validation and then SSSC approval. The Advisory group will keep stakeholders informed of progress via a range of e-bulletins, newsletters and websites, [www.learningnetworks.org.uk](http://www.learningnetworks.org.uk), [www.sssc.uk.com](http://www.sssc.uk.com) and any specific enquiries can be directed to [karen.mclaughlin@sssc.uk.com](mailto:karen.mclaughlin@sssc.uk.com)