

Graduate entry to Childhood Practice

Guidelines for programmes leading to the postgraduate qualification as practitioner and as manager/lead practitioner in Childhood Practice in Scotland

Introduction

The QAA Scottish subject benchmark statement 'The Standard for Childhood Practice' (2007) specifies what is expected of a worker seeking registration with the SSSC as a manager/lead practitioner in the early years and childcare service in Scotland. It supports the development and delivery of work based bachelor's degrees or other equivalent awards in Childhood Practice at level 9 in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/scottish/earlyYears.asp>

The Standard for Childhood Practice also states that provision should be made for 'direct entry' candidates with existing awards at level 9 or above, i.e. graduates or others with equivalent awards and that this provision should be based on the principles detailed in the integrated qualifications and professional development framework.

The development of graduate entry programmes as an additional route into Childhood Practice presents both significant opportunities and challenges.

Benefits of graduate entry programmes

Among the benefits of postgraduate programmes will be

- enhanced capacity of the system to meet the demand for appropriately qualified staff;
- enhanced opportunities for university and other degree level programmes to lead to employability;
- clear relationship with the European Bologna cycles of undergraduate degrees followed by postgraduate masters level courses;
- improved status and credibility of work in Childhood Practice among careers advisers, in school and post school;
- capacity to build on work done in recognising the general attributes developed through undergraduate studies;
- support for the identification of shared knowledge, skills and values across children's services.

Challenges for graduate entry programmes

Among the particular challenges to be met in designing postgraduate programmes are

- Ensuring that learners have sufficient successful experience of practical work with children and families to enable them to meet the Standard.
- Meeting the requirements of masters awards detailed in the 'The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland' (QAA, January 2001).
- Encouraging compatibility in structure and style of programmes across the higher education system.

A separate but related issue is the existence of masters level awards that meet the CPD needs of staff who are currently working in early years and childcare. These programmes are valuable in their own right and should continue but the term 'Childhood Practice' should be used exclusively for an award that is recognised as leading towards, meeting or building on the Standard for Childhood Practice.

Principles for designing graduate entry programmes for Childhood Practice

Working from the principles established in the 'Guidelines for the Standard for Childhood Practice' (for example in paragraph 2.2 of the guidelines) and taking account of the challenges presented by a postgraduate award, a number of principles for the design of postgraduate programmes have been identified.

- 1 Programmes should allow learners to meet the Standard for Childhood Practice and assess their achievement of it.
- 2 Candidates for entry should normally have a degree or equivalent and be working in an appropriate area of Childhood Practice.
- 3 Programmes should lead to the award of the Postgraduate Diploma in Childhood Practice and consist of 120 credit points of which at least 90 credits must be at level 11 in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework.
- 4 Programmes should be grounded in work based learning and make provision for at least two practice for learning experiences in different and distinct settings. This can include the candidate's own workplace as one of the settings.

- 5 Programmes should have effective procedures in place for the recognition and accreditation of prior learning.
- 6 Programmes should allow for the recognition of relevant existing practitioner or lead practitioner qualifications. These could be obtained concurrently with postgraduate diploma studies.
- 7 Programmes should be offered on a part time basis and should normally be designed to be completed in a minimum of twenty four months.
- 8 The design and delivery of programmes should be managed through partnerships involving, for example, employers, other higher education institutions or other training providers.

Explanations and implications

Reference should be made to the benchmark statement for details of the Guidelines for programmes leading to qualification in Childhood Practice. Further support is available in 'Delivering the Standard for Childhood Practice'.

The following notes relate specifically to issues around the development of a graduate entry route.

1 The Standard for Childhood Practice

The Standard for Childhood Practice is detailed in the QAA benchmark statement. There is no prescribed level attached to the Standard itself but the Guidelines to the Standard specify that the integrated qualifications and professional development framework leading to it should reach at least level 9 in the SCQF. The Guidelines also specify that there should be a 'direct entry' route for candidates who have existing awards at level 9 or above. Normally these awards will be degrees but some Higher Education Institutions may recognise other awards as equivalent.

2 Graduate entry

A graduate entry route to qualification will meet the needs of two definable groups of people

- workers already in post with awards at level 9 or above but who will require to obtain a qualification in Childhood Practice for registration with the SSSC;
- graduates (or their equivalent) seeking to enter the profession.

While provision should be made for both groups in the shorter term, it is likely that in the longer term the second group will predominate.

Some graduates might prefer to take the undergraduate route leading to the BA in Childhood Practice.

3 Level and volume of credit

The level and volume of credit in postgraduate programmes is defined by the 'The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland' (QAA, January 2001). A masters degree is required to consist of at least 180 credits of which 150 must be at SHE M. A post graduate diploma will consist of at last 120 credits of which 90 must be at SHE M. (A postgraduate certificate consists of 60 credits of which 40 must be at SHE M.) There is no specification of level requirements for credits not at SHE M.

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/SCQF/2001/default.asp>

The Higher Education qualifications framework is an integral part of the wider Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework that defines SHE M as being at level 11. Along with the higher education framework, the SCQF defines the outcomes that are appropriate for work at masters level.

Placing the new award at postgraduate level builds on the attributes graduates will have developed during their previous studies. It also fits well with developments in the European Higher Education Area.

4 The Bologna Process

Since 2006, the framework for qualifications in Scottish Higher Education has been verified as compatible with that of the European Higher Education Area. Scottish first degrees are compatible with the first Bologna Cycle and the masters degree with second cycle qualifications. Postgraduate certificates and diplomas are recognised as intermediate awards within the second cycle.

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/SCQF/SelfCertification2007.asp>

5 Employment requirement

The requirement that entrants should be in employment, either paid or voluntary, in Childhood Practice or a related context will ensure that programmes can be grounded in the experience of work. Work based experience should be current and sufficient to ensure an adequate opportunity to meet the requirements of the programme. The agreement and support of employers will be required.

6 Prior learning

Institutions will have a limit on the amount of credit for prior learning they can allow in a postgraduate programme.

Prior learning credit might include

- relevant postgraduate credit from awards at level 11
- credit for learning based on experience
- relevant undergraduate credit

7 Practitioner competence

As part of the programme, learners will be required to demonstrate that they are fit to practise in the early years and childcare sector and are therefore required to provide evidence of practitioner competence.

The evidence must at minimum be the equivalent of the practitioner competence requirements of the Scottish Social Services Council. This will require the assessment of practical performance.

Some learners may already have this evidence on entry to the programme. Others will gain the necessary experience to demonstrate competence during the programme itself.

It is for providing bodies to determine how best they can meet this challenge though they will be aware that drawing on elements of existing quality assured awards can enhance partnership and demonstrate good practice in collaboration.

8 Intermediate and subsequent postgraduate awards

Institutions will expect to have a Postgraduate Certificate as an award for learners leaving programmes before completing the requirements for the Diploma. This will not be a qualification for lead practitioner/manager status.

Some learners will expect to be able to undertake work amounting to a further 60 credits at level 11 in order to achieve the award of a masters degree in Childhood Practice. It will be open to institutions to determine what that further work will consist of but it could be, for instance, in specialist areas relating to Childhood Practice such as child protection or learning support or in work relating to academic studies and possible entry to doctoral programmes.

Please note that these are guidelines for programmes. For information on the rules and requirements for approval providers should visit www.sssc.uk.com