

# Scottish Practice Learning Project

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## Practice Learning Qualifications (Social Services) Briefing Sheet



## **Practice Learning Qualifications (Social Services)**

The new PLQ(SS) qualification will be for all workers in the social service sector who are involved in supporting the learning of others at a range of different levels in the workplace. The qualification will be approved by the SSSC and delivered through the Learning Networks. It will replace the Practice Teaching Award, but will also have much wider application. As a new qualification a number of queries have arisen which this briefing paper attempts to answer. We recognise that it takes time to become familiar with the many aspects of such a wide-ranging and innovative approach to supporting learning. This guide provides answers to a number of questions around the PLQ(SS).

There is also an FAQ section on the SPLP website [www.splp.uk.com](http://www.splp.uk.com) which is regularly updated. Detailed information can be found in the PLQ(SS) submission document which is available to download on the website and questions in this guide give a reference to the submission document for further reading.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Is the PLQ(SS) just for people supervising social work students?**

The PLQ(SS) recognise the roles played by an increasing number of employees across the workforce in supporting the learning of others in the workplace. Although it will replace the Practice Teaching Award, it has a much wider application than that, acknowledging that all staff are now expected through the Codes of Practice to contribute to the learning of others. This could include the induction of new staff, supporting staff through training programmes, mentoring, assessing practice on all kinds of courses or having a strategic or management role in training as well as working with students in the role of link supervisor or practice teacher. The PLQ(SS) will also be relevant to service users and carers who contribute to work based learning and to people in related professions who are involved in the training of social workers.

### **Can I do the PLQ(SS) if I'm not employed in a social work or social service setting?**

A social service worker is someone who is registered with the SSSC or is eligible for registration as defined in Section 77 (1) of the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001. This allows that person to gain a qualification that is recognised by the SSSC as a specialist course, i.e. the PLQ(SS). If a person is not eligible for registration with the SSSC then they will not gain the PLQ(SS) but instead will have the Practice Learning Qualifications (PLQ).

The SSSC is only authorised to approve specialist courses for social service workers. The rules for specialist courses are set out in the SSSC Rules and Requirements for Specialist Training for Social Service Workers in Scotland 2005 which can be downloaded from the SSSC website (see PLQ(SS) Submission Document section 2). If you work in a setting related to social work or care, such as early years, education, health or housing, you also have a valuable contribution to make to the practice learning of social work students and may be involved in supporting the learning of other workers. You would be able to undertake the PLQ, which would give you access to the same learning as the PLQ(SS) and you would gain the same academic credits, as well as contributing to your own continuing professional development.

### **Will my Practice Teaching Award still be recognised?**

The Practice Teaching Award is still a recognised and valued qualification for practice teachers. Those who hold the Practice Teaching Award will still remain as qualified practice teachers in the future.

### **Should I complete the Practice Teaching Award?**

If you are already working towards the Award and are concerned about whether it is worthwhile completing your portfolio for the Award now when it is coming to an end in December 2007, we would encourage you to do so. Qualified practice teachers are in high demand and are a very valuable resource.

### **I am an SVQ assessor/ hold the Registered Manager's Award. Why should I do the PLQ(SS) as well?**

The PLQ(SS) is a very wide-reaching qualification at a range of levels, which will allow people to gain recognition for all kinds of activities that support learning in the workplace. So you might want to look at the activities you currently do in this area to see if you could gain a further qualification. For example, perhaps you are also acting as a link supervisor for a social work student. Once the PLQ(SS) is fully developed there will be a clear framework for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) which will allow people with SVQ awards to see exactly how these will fit in with the different Stages and their outcomes for the PLQ(SS), and what additional evidence, if any, you would need to provide to gain the PLQ(SS) (see PLQ(SS) Submission section 1.2.2)

### **What are the benefits of the PLQ(SS) to me as an employer?**

The current climate of change in social services is about a more competent and confident workforce and to ensure that standards of practice are raised. This is recognised in the Codes of Practice and the National Strategy for the Development of the Social Service Workforce in Scotland, which requires employers to have plans in place to support practice learning for social work students. Registered workers must evidence their continuing professional development (CPD) through Post Registration Training and Learning (PRTL). One of the key recommendations of the report of the 21st Century Review, *Changing Lives*, is that social services must develop a learning culture that commits all individuals and organisations to lifelong learning and development.

The PLQ(SS) will encourage staff at every level to become involved in supporting learning in the workplace and will recognise the contribution many of them are already making in this area, and supporting them to do the PLQ(SS) will demonstrate that yours is a genuine learning organisation. It will also contribute to recruitment and retention of high quality staff and help you to ensure that your staff and future staff are properly supported in gaining the learning necessary to provide high quality services. As the PLQ(SS) is still being developed, we cannot be sure about the costs yet, but these will depend on the method by which workers gain the qualification. Some will require to undertake taught programmes, for which there will access to distance learning, but many will be able to use their experience of supporting learners through Recognition of Prior Learning.

### **Who will assess the practice of candidates under the PLQ(SS)?**

Each candidate will be provided by their employer with a mentor for support and guidance, and they will also have a course tutor from the university or college PLQ(SS) provider. As candidates will have different learning support needs, the amount of time expected from the mentor is not prescribed. The mentor will not have a role in assessing the candidate's practice. Candidates will provide a portfolio of evidence selected by them demonstrating

that they have met the outcomes for assessment. Explicit guidance will be provided about the compilation and content of portfolios, but evidence of direct observation of practice will be an absolute requirement. This could come from a range of people who have been involved with the candidate, including the candidate's manager, colleagues, service users and carers, practitioners in other related disciplines. The candidate's line manager is required to verify the evidence. The SSSC Rules and Requirements for Specialist Training, under which the PLQ(SS) is approved, clearly state that there must be direct and verifiable evidence of practice competence. Assessment panels will determine how strong the portfolio evidence is, and those panels will be made up of qualified and experienced practitioners as well as academics (see PLQ(SS) Submission Document section 3).

### **Where do values lie within the PLQ(SS)?**

Social work values are an intrinsic part of every aspect of the PLQ(SS). The PLQ(SS) Standards and Learning Outcomes are set out in a format that reflects that of the Standards in Social Work Education (SiSWE). Values are fully integrated into the Standards and Outcomes so that it is clear how they relate to practice for candidates at each Stage. For example, in the Standard "Create an Environment for Learning" for Stage 3 one outcome is "work in an anti-oppressive way which acknowledges the power differentials inherent within a learning situation".

SSSC approved Specialist Training providers "must make sure that the content and delivery of the course is consistent with and promotes the Council's Codes of Practice", thus ensuring that social work values underpin all aspects of the qualifications. Working with Diversity is one of the core areas for teaching and learning materials identified in the PLQ(SS) submission document. Moreover, service users and carers have been involved at every stage of the development of the PLQ(SS) and will continue to play a role in the assessment of candidates and the approval and on-going review and evaluation of programmes.

A copy of the PLQ(SS) submission document can be downloaded from the SPLP website at: <http://www.splp.uk.com/documentuploads/120.pdf>

The Standards in Social Work Education (SiSWE) can be downloaded from: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/47021/0025613.pdf>

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