



Step Up To Social Work Programme

1. The Step Up Programme

1.1 In 2010, the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) developed a new programme, Step Up To Social Work. The programme is a national initiative designed to attract high calibre, professionals into children's social work. The programme offers candidates an 18 month bursary totalling £22,500 leading to an MA in social work. The programme also funds the higher education provider fees of £20,000 per candidate. It is a condensed, work based entry route to social work and enables the employers to work closely with the higher education provider to ensure that the programme reflects the world of work.

1.2 In May 2011 the CWDC announced that they would be funding a second cohort of candidates through the programme.

1.3 The CWDC states that Step up to Social Work "aims to develop a condensed, bespoke, work based entry route into children's social work for high calibre experienced candidates."¹

2. Establishing the partnership

2.1 In order to be able to access the programme, local authorities had to group together and form regional partnerships (RPs). Eight RPs took part in cohort 1 of Step Up and with the announcement of the second cohort, more RPs were invited to join. The London Boroughs of Bexley, Bromley and Lewisham agreed to form the South East London Regional Partnership, with the London Borough of Bromley as the lead authority. This formed a successful bid for cohort 2. Ten RPs are taking part in cohort 2.

¹ CWDC Step Up To Social Work – A definitive guide

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2.2 A steering board was formed, involving all partner authorities as well as the HEI. The Board's role is to oversee and monitor the operational implementation and actively participates in the strategic development of the project to make sure that it is delivered to the highest standards and to timescales. They also take key decisions regarding the use of funding.

3. Funding

3.1 Step Up To Social Work is designed to be a cost neutral programme for RPs.

3.2 Bromley as the lead authority is responsible for accessing and administering the funding on behalf of the South East London Regional Partnership. The Partnership will receive total funding of £786,000 over a period of 2 years (based on 14 students).

3.3 The Partnership operates under a Memorandum of Understanding which states that all decisions regarding the detailed use of the funding to meet the objectives must be agreed by all partners.

3.4 Funding is released in phases as project milestones set by the CWDC are met and evidenced.

4. Commissioning an HEI

4.1 The partnership tendered for and successfully commissioned a higher education institution to work with on the design and delivery of the MA course. Goldsmiths were appointed to the work and have a reputation of producing high calibre social work graduates. The contract is based on £20,000 per student and is therefore worth £280,000 based on 14 students.

4.2 One of the key benefits of the programme is that RPs are able to work with a higher education provider to create a "bespoke" Masters programme that better reflects the world of work within the partner organisations. This required a major piece of work between the partnership and Goldsmiths to develop our bespoke course which must meet the General Social Care Council (GSCC) requirements and the National Occupational Standards (NOS).

4.3 As the South East London Partnership's Step Up programme will be a new course, the partnership was required to complete a validation process with the GSCC in order to get official agreement that this course met the GSCC requirements and the NOS. Goldsmiths led on the completion of the validation report to the GSCC and in January 2012 confirmation was received that the

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South East London and Goldsmiths' Step Up programme had received GSCC approval.

5. Recruitment and selection of students

5.1 Advertising for the programme opened on 1 August 2011 and was run both at a national level by the CWDC and locally by the RPs.

5.2 The CWDC ran campaigns both in the run up to applications opening and during the period when applications were open. The CWDC also created a pre-registration form for candidates to register their interest in the programme which resulted in over 6,000 contacts.

5.3 The CWDC provided supporting materials for RPs to use in their own advertising to achieve a consistent message. The London Boroughs of Bexley, Bromley and Lewisham all advertised the scheme on the recruitment pages of their websites.

5.4 The eligibility criteria for the programme were set at a national level by the CWDC. This was:

- A 1st or 2:1 degree in any discipline (apart from social work)
- Grade C or above in GCSE (or equivalent) in both English and Maths
- Experience with children, young people and their families.

5.5 Applications closed on 29 August 2011. 2,799 applications were received nationally with 211 expressing a first preference for the South East London Regional Partnership.

5.6 The CWDC managed the initial screening of applications at a national level against the criteria set out above. The South East London Regional Partnership then undertook a thorough shortlisting process using guidelines provided by the CWDC on how to score the applications against the assessment framework which examined competencies such as the candidate's child-centred approach, motivation, values, written communication and self awareness.

5.7 Through this process the South East London partnership reduced 211 applications to 52 candidates to progress to assessment centre.

5.8 The CWDC stipulated that RPs should run an assessment centre to test key competencies in candidates that are crucial to success on the programme. The assessment centre had to use a range of exercises to assess candidates across the full range of competencies. The South East London partnership used the templates provided by the CWDC for four exercises which were modified to our needs. The exercises were a formal panel interview, a group discussion, a telephone simulation role play and a written submission. Representatives from all three boroughs, Goldsmiths and service users were engaged to be assessors.

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5.9 Of the 52 candidates invited to assessment centre, 42 attended and 24 achieved or surpassed the benchmark set by the CWDC. The partnership agreed a ranking system based on the scores that candidates had achieved across all competencies and activities. Initially the partnership were looking for 12 students across the three boroughs, however, due to the high calibre of candidates seen at assessment centre, this was increased to 14. Lewisham are taking 6, Bromley are taking 5 and Bexley are taking 3.

5.10 Offers were made to the 14 top performing candidates at the end of November, with a reserve pool established from the other 10 candidates. This was followed up with a bursary agreement, developed by the partnership based on a CWDC template in December.

6. The Programme

6.1 One of the key benefits of the Step Up programme is that regional partnerships (RPs) are able to work with Goldsmiths to create a bespoke Masters programme that better reflects the world of social work.

6.2 In order to achieve this, a curriculum planning group was established in November 2011. This group had representatives from Goldsmiths, social work practitioners & managers from across the three LAs and a care leaver. They looked at the finer detail of the course content, including shaping, modifying and writing teaching materials. This also gave an opportunity for practitioners and managers to deliver some of the teaching.

6.3 Practitioners from LBs Bromley and Lewisham taught study units within the programme. LB Bexley taught a session during the introductory week entitled 'becoming a professional social worker'.

6.4 Colleagues from the CWDC praised the work of this group and highlighted it as one of the best examples of employer involvement in MA Step Up courses across all ten RPs involved in cohort 2 of the programme.

6.5 The progress of students has been consistent and feedback on work placements has been most positive; formal evaluation of key stages of the programme has been carried out by Goldsmiths. In addition the RP has also carried out its own review.

6.6 Overall feedback has been positive and attendance on the programme exemplary. Lessons learned will be carried forward to any further bursary schemes.

7. Withdrawal of Student

7.1 On 1 June one student decided to withdraw from the programme due to health reasons. This student was earmarked for employment with LB Bexley following successful completion of the programme.

7.2 Under the bursary agreements signed by the students, the partnership stipulated that all bursary money that the student had received should be paid back, although the CWDC did not require this as part of the terms of the grant.

8. Transition from bursary to employee

8.1 The calibre of all the students is considered to be high and it is anticipated that, subject to achieving the qualification and registering with HCPC, offers of employment will be made later this year.

9. The future

9.1 The next round of the bursary scheme has been announced. The scheme has been amended to offer a post-graduate diploma and the funding available has been reduced. However, it is still considered be a very worthwhile scheme and work is already in hand to submit a bid to run another cohort, subject to the agreement of our existing partners.