

Agored Cymru Level 3 Diploma in Physiotherapy Support (QCF) 2015 **Briefing paper**

Background

In 2014 the Welsh Physiotherapy Leaders Advisory Group (WPhLAG) agreed that there was a need for a consistent approach to accredited learning and development for support workers working within physiotherapy services so it was agreed to look at what was available and develop a suitable qualification. The result was a decision to develop a Level 3 Diploma in Physiotherapy Support through Agored Cymru, one of the main FE qualification awarding bodies in Wales.

A steering group, containing all key stakeholders and including a senior Welsh physiotherapy support worker and a patient representative, worked together to agree (and where necessary develop) the learning units that would make up the qualification. The Diploma in Physiotherapy Support was shared with the Care Council for Wales who scrutinised the content and gave their support, it was submitted to the CSP's Quality Assurance Enhancement Group (QAEG) and it was endorsed by Skills for Health, the sector skills council that reviews these types of qualifications. Finally, it was submitted by Agored Cymru to the Welsh Government who approved it for use in Wales.

The qualification 'went live' on the 1st of October 2015 and details can be found on the Agored Cymru website

<http://www.agored.cymru/Units-and-Qualifications/Qualification/127569>

Contents of the Diploma in Physiotherapy Support

The qualification includes a suite of units covering services for adults, children and young people across health and social care, learning disabilities, mental and physical health services.

65 credits are required to achieve the qualification. Credits are gained by undertaking units of study. The units are split into mandatory units where 44 credits are required and optional units for which 21 credits are required out of a possible 198 credits. This will allow support workers to build a Diploma in Physiotherapy Support that is relevant to their area of work. The optional units cover:

- General knowledge and skills
- Physiotherapy profession specific knowledge and skills
- Condition and client group specific knowledge and skills

All units have a title, describe a purpose and aim and highlight the learning outcomes expected with their associated assessment criteria. It is envisaged that the learning and development will be predominantly work based, with physiotherapists within services being the assessors. There is a commitment from physiotherapy services across Wales to sharing workbooks and resources for both the support workers and assessors. Some units currently do not have workbooks so on-going development will be required. Resources will be shared across Wales as they are developed.

There are also still some areas highlighted where there is currently no unit available, for example:

Wheelchair skills, burns and plastics, spinal injury, passive movements, cancer care and palliative care. These units (and others that may be identified) will be developed over time.

Costs

There is a £5.00/credit cost to Agored Cymru for each credit so the total cost for a Diploma (at 2015 costs) is £325.00 for the whole Diploma in Physiotherapy Support. It must be noted, however, that support workers do not have to enrol for the whole qualification and can just undertake individual units. These units can then be combined together to achieve the full Diploma.

It is envisaged that support workers interested in completing the Diploma will do so over a number of years and the qualification will be included within their continuous professional development (CPD) and as part of their personal development review (PDR).

Roll Out of the Qualification across NHS Wales

The Diploma in Physiotherapy Support provides the education and learning to support several of the pillars of the Welsh Government's NHS Wales Skills and Career Development Framework for Health Care Support Workers. This framework will, in time, be mandatory for the support worker workforce across Wales so physiotherapy is ahead of the game in terms of supporting the clinical element.

Physiotherapy services will be assessing the needs of their support worker workforce and putting in place a programme that will allow support workers to study at a pace that suits them individually, but that is also equally realistic in terms of service provision, for both the support workers themselves and for the physiotherapy assessors involved in the process. This will take into consideration costs, both financially and in terms of time for support workers to study in work-time and assessors to complete assessments and sign-off workbooks.

The Welsh Physiotherapy Leaders Advisory Group (WPhLAG) will keep a watching brief over the work assigning an 'implementation group' to oversee the roll-out across Wales. There will be a wide range of actions required by the implementation group to ensure that both support workers working in physiotherapy and physiotherapists who will be involved as assessors are quite clear about how the qualification will be delivered locally whilst maintaining a national approach.

Support workers will need to be realistic that the Diploma in Physiotherapy Support will take several years to complete. There will be some discussions to be had about recognition of prior learning which will need to be explored with Agored Cymru and, due to the number of support workers the profession has working with/linked to physiotherapy services, patience will be required to allow all support workers the opportunity to study and acquire accredited training if they are keen to do so.

Review of the Qualification

Now that the qualification is approved it is to be found on the register of regulated qualifications and it will be subject to regular review. The next review will be in 2017. WPhLAG will be able to consider the current units contained within the qualification,

remove or replace units and add new units as appropriate. Any new units will go through the Agored Cymru approval process.

Transferability across the UK

The Diploma in Physiotherapy Support is only available in Wales as it has been created in Wales with an awarding body (Agored Cymru) that only operates in Wales. However, now it is available on the register of regulated qualifications other awarding bodies across the UK can consider its applicability and can discuss the option of following the qualification in their part of the country. There will need to be a demand from NHS services locally to use and award accredited learning for their support worker workforce. Open College Networks, in particular may be able to take a similar qualification forward but they will only do this if it is financially viable to do so.

Conclusion

This qualification is a first for the UK and provides an opportunity for the physiotherapy services in Wales to demonstrate how they are professionalising the support worker workforce and giving an assurance to their patients and the public on the standards of services that support workers provide.

The Diploma in Physiotherapy Support provides an opportunity for physiotherapy support workers in Wales to study and develop new skills but also to have recognition for the skills and expertise they already possess. The qualification will form an important indicator for career development.

It is very much hoped that through the development in Wales, other parts of the UK will also look to push for training and development for their support worker workforce and adopt this, or a similar, type of qualification.

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October 2015