

Continuing professional development pathway for
**Social Work with
Autistic Adults**



Department
of Health &
Social Care

Introduction

This post-qualifying Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Pathway for social work with autistic adults is an innovative and practice-focussed framework, underpinned by principles of co-production. The Pathway is in keeping with the statutory requirements that:

“local authorities should be providing general autism awareness to all frontline staff in contact with adults with autism, so that staff are able to identify potential signs of autism and understand how to make reasonable adjustments in their behaviour and communication. In addition to this, *local authorities are expected to have made good progress on developing and providing specialist training for those in roles that have a direct impact on and make decisions about the lives of adults with autism, including those conducting needs assessments*”.

(Department of Health, 2015; p. 11; emphasis added)¹.

Local authorities therefore have a statutory responsibility to provide relevant training for social workers working with autistic adults. Consequently, there should be an expectation that social workers will be able to access the CPD suggested in this Pathway.

This Pathway should be read in conjunction with the [Capabilities Statement for Social Work with Autistic Adults](#), which outlines the knowledge, skills and values required in this area of social work. The domains of learning, training, and development within this Pathway are drawn from the [Professional Capabilities Framework](#) (PCF)² and are consistent with the [Knowledge and Skills Statement for Social Workers in Adult Services](#)³.

Figure 1: Professional Capabilities Framework



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¹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/422338/autism-guidance.pdf

² www.basw.co.uk/professional-development/professional-capabilities-framework-pcf

³ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/411957/KSS.pdf

Explaining Continuing Professional Development

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is the reflection and learning activity that social workers do throughout their career to maintain and improve their practice.⁴

Social workers require CPD for regulatory and ethical reasons. In England, in order to maintain their registration and legal title, social workers need to demonstrate their participation in regular CPD activities. However, there is also an ethical aspect of CPD, based on the premise that *in order to make positive impact for people who use services, social workers need to have the optimal knowledge and skills, and these can be attained through regular self-directed learning or instructor led CPD activities.*

An underpinning principle of this Pathway is that social workers should engage in lifelong learning and reflective practice. Furthermore, as social workers are required to evidence their CPD activities, they need to keep records and reflect on how they can demonstrate how their learning has positively impacted on their practice.

Components of CPD

CPD includes trainer-led activities and self-directed learning – *it is about the content of the learning rather than how it is delivered.* CPD includes:

- training facilitated by an approved trainer, a colleague, or person with lived experience of disability or using statutory services
- Receiving formal and informal feedback from people who use services
- self-directed learning through listening to podcasts, watching videos, reading (for example, research articles, books, case records), participating in research, or evaluating services
- group supervision and peer-supported learning
- online and web-based learning
- insights gained from (self) reflection and evaluation
- shadowing and observing colleagues and allied professionals or people who use services
- attending conferences

Employers should recognise the multiple sources and forms of learning and provide enabling CPD environments by ensuring access to learning opportunities for social work staff.

Each of those activities can be recorded on the Social Work England forms to evidence CPD and assist social workers to meet Professional Standards 4 both explicitly and implicitly.

⁴ <https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/cpd>

Principles of the Continuing Professional Development Pathway

- Autistic adults should be involved in planning, commissioning, and delivering CPD programmes in autism social work. This can be achieved by employers consulting them or contracting user-led organisations or self-advocates to provide the training; social workers seeking (in)formal feedback about their work from them, and providers including them in training.
- A scaffolding approach is necessary – social workers should build incrementally on their existing capabilities. This means that level and intensity of CPD should be commensurate with the social workers' job role, experience and practice wisdom.
- Social workers with more experience in practicing with autistic adults should be assigned more complex work, however they will also have more practice wisdom. Consequently, practitioners at the level of ASYE and NQSW require training in foundational practice issues and those at latter stages of their career need CPD in 'complex' and strategic topics.
- Engaging in CPD activities is a professional and ethical responsibility, however, correspondingly, employers should provide social workers 'protected time' and resources for social workers' learning and development.
- An underpinning assumption of CPD is that social workers have a foundational value-base, knowledge, and skills and that these will be enhanced by further training.
- Good quality CPD training in social work with autistic adults requires support from:
 - The social work profession including social workers, supervisors, educators, academics, researchers, regulators, managers and practice leaders
 - User-led organisations and autistic self-advocates and carers
 - Employers of social workers in the statutory and private, voluntary, and independent sectors
 - Government – local and national
 - Wider stakeholders and organisations

The CPD Pathway for social work with autistic adults

The Pathway explains the proposed content for CPD activities in social work with autistic adults from Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE), through to Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) status, and more senior positions.

It is envisaged that the ASYE level capabilities in this Pathway will be integrated into current ASYE programmes – particularly where social workers are working with autistic people. Alongside this Pathway, social workers at the level of ASYE and their supervisors can use the *Capabilities Statement for Social Work with Autistic Adults* to underpin their practice and as reference point for their supervision. As an underpinning principle of this Pathway is progression, social workers can also use it to plan their CPD needs as they advance in their careers and do more challenging work, including managing the care needs of autistic adults with complex needs.

Social workers advance at different levels in their capabilities and some ASYEs may well be able to demonstrate some capabilities at higher levels within their first one or two years of practice. For this reason, the [Capability Statement for Social Work with Autistic Adults](#) will also meet the learning and practice needs of social workers post-ASYE. The ASYE level capabilities may also be relevant for more experienced social workers new to autism social work practice.

The terminology and educational elements that frame the Pathway are:

● **Specialist Post Qualification:**

Postgraduate Certificate (PGCert) or equivalent for social worker and experienced social worker level. The aim is to ensure that this level of learning and attainment is recognised and valued as 'specialist'. It should be core CPD as it will apply to most social workers in direct face to face practice. It can stand alone or be the foundation for the Postgraduate Diploma or Masters.

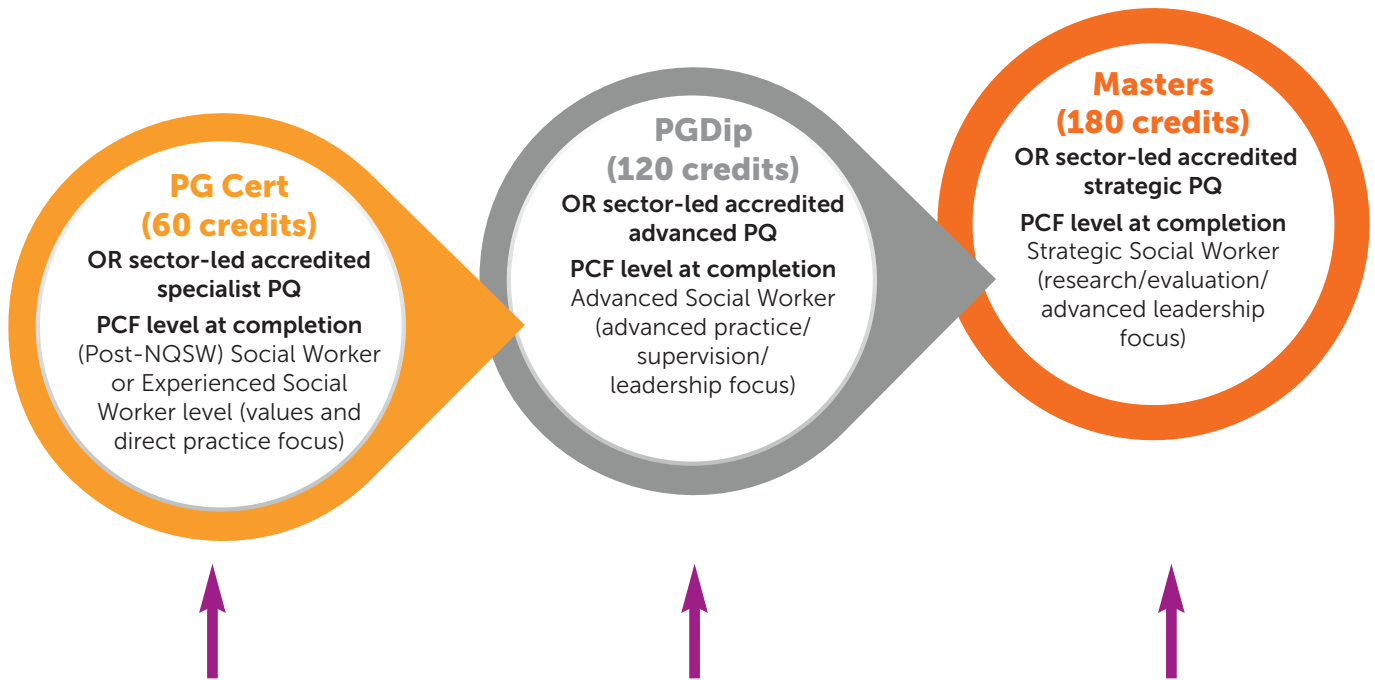
● **Advanced Post Qualification:**

Postgraduate Diploma (PGDiP) or equivalent for advanced and/or strategic level social worker. The CPD offers at advanced and strategic levels are combined to ensure that strategic social worker development relates to practice, and practice leadership is connected with strategy and wider systems influence.

● **Strategic Post Qualification:**

Masters equivalent for advanced and/or strategic level social worker. The emphasis is on wider and more strategic issues, service improvement and (essential for Masters level) engagement in knowledge production through research and/or evaluation, as well as higher level application of knowledge and evidence.

Figure 2: The CPD Pathway



Underpinned throughout by integration of:

- Evidence from lived experience: emphasising values, ethics and personal behaviours; promoting human rights, anti-oppressive practice, tackling health and other inequalities
- Evidence from research
- Evidence from practice

The diagram above explains the scaffolding approach envisaged with this Pathway. Progression is mapped onto a conventional academic pathway – PG Cert, PG Dip, Masters – which, it is proposed, could also be pursued through a sector or professional body-led accreditation route, with or without formal academic credits. This recognises that CPD needs to be available to all, flexibly and affordably, but also needs to meet agreed quality standards, which are usually assured through Higher Education Institutions. However, although the model proposed here is structured on a university qualification framework for quality assurance purposes, other options and models, including sector-wide accreditation, may also apply.

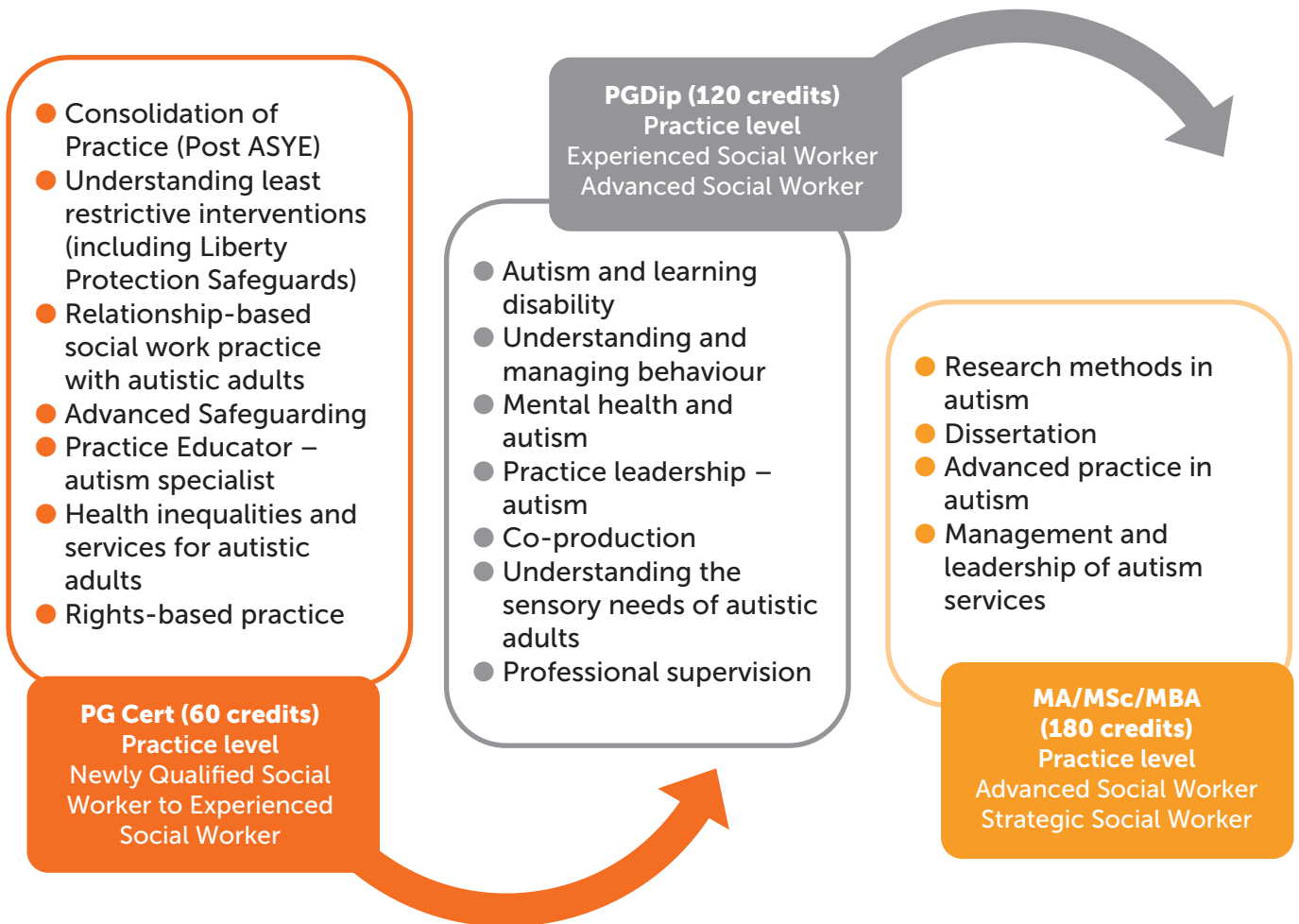
Curriculum overview

The table below explains the proposed content and likely duration of each level of accreditation. The duration of training assumes that it will be combined with full-time employment – this means that some social workers will complete it before the stated time, depending on their circumstances.

Specialist Social Work with Autistic Adults CPD	Advanced Social Work with Autistic Adults CPD	Strategic Social Work with Autistic Adults CPD
<p>Likely duration: 9-12 months</p> <p>Curriculum level: Specialist Social Work with Autistic Adults level is the starting point for the <i>Capabilities Statement</i>. It is therefore the level which all social workers and experienced social workers should be attaining in order to meet expected practice standards with autistic adults.</p>	<p>Likely duration: 18-24 months part time</p> <p>Curriculum level: Advanced Social Work with Autistic Adults level includes all the capabilities within the <i>Capabilities Statement</i> and augments these with the additional capabilities provided in the level descriptors document in Appendix One.</p> <p>This level is aimed at both Advanced and Strategic social workers with a focus on practice, supervision and operational leadership.</p>	<p>Likely duration: 24-36 months part time</p> <p>Curriculum level: Strategic Social Work with Autistic Adult level - includes all the capabilities within the Specialist and Advanced levels and augments these with additional capabilities as in Appendix One.</p> <p>This level is also aimed at both Advanced and Strategic social workers, but its focus moves on to research, evaluation and more advanced and strategic leadership which would include systems leadership and interagency impact. This reflects its position at master's level within academic context and the need for a relevant strategic influence and leadership focus for the most senior practice and strategic leaders and managers.</p>
<p>Curriculum content starting points</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Familiarity with Capability Statements – online on BASW website ● Evidence and policy in social work with autistic adults – referencing the literature review that underpinned the development of the <i>Capabilities Statement</i> (on BASW website) ● Written learning resources on distinct elements of the <i>Capability Statement</i> on BASW website ● Further resources on BASW website ● Mapping resources and integrating other key standards/frameworks with the <i>Capability Statement</i>. 	<p>Curriculum content starting points</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● As for Specialist level ● Additional materials on advanced practice, supervision and education/leadership/support of others in operational contexts ● Focus on application of best practice evidence ● Focus on practice with higher levels of complexity, ambiguity and risk ● Emphasis on confidence and role-modelling good practice and values and enhancing ethics and professionals' behaviours ● Influence and practice leadership beyond social work, to interagency and multi professional contexts ● Quality evaluation, improvement and audit ● Advanced responsibilities to show positive impact and outcomes at team or organisational level as well as individually ● Advanced responsibility and understanding and responding to issues of intersectionality ● Advanced partnership and co-production skills and knowledge, including advanced skills in community-oriented practice ● Increased emphasis on understanding the wider landscape of social work practice with autistic adults, partner organisations, key influencers and sources of good practice and innovations ● Mapping onto Practice supervisors and practice leadership KSS. 	<p>Curriculum content starting points</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● As for Specialist and Advanced levels ● Additional materials on strategic practice and organisational leadership, research/evaluation ● Focus on systems leadership within and beyond single organisations, to interagency and community systems at all levels ● Focus on strategic and lasting improvement ● Integration of social work Capability Statement with wider drivers, policy and imperatives including those for multiagency partners. ● Further emphasis on sources of innovation and good practice for the future of services, across disciplines, while promoting the social work role and capability set.

Development Pathway

The diagram below shows the content mapped onto the duration and university postgraduate qualification pathway for further study.





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