**The Professional Capabilities Framework: what are the implications for social work education and practice in England?**

**Abstract**

This is a discussion paper which considers the potential implications of the introduction of the Professional Capabilities Framework as part of social work reform in England. The paper compares and contrasts the 2002 degree with the Professional Capabilities Framework, which is one of the changes introduced by the Social Work Reform Board. The 2002 degree is argued to have contained a double curriculum, which reflected the existing tensions within contemporary social work. The Professional Capabilities Framework has replaced the double curriculum and installed a unified model of academic and professional requirements as part of the social work reform agenda. It remains to be seen whether (and if) the framework can transform practice as well as the degree. Ironically, the double curriculum may better mirror the contradictions of social work than the Professional Capabilities Framework and the existing reform process. The key message of this paper is that the Professional Capabilities Framework has changed the social work curriculum but it is unclear whether the framework and social work reform will change practice.

Keywords: professional capabilities framework, capability, social work reform, curriculum, social work practice

**Introduction**

The aim of this review paper is to investigate in what ways the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) has transformed social work education and whether the PCF will also change social work practice. Since the death of Peter Connelly in 2007 (Haringey Local Safeguarding Board, 2009) there has been a continuous reform process (The Social Work Reform Board, 2010). The Social Work Reform Board (SWRB) was established to implement changes recommended following the death of Peter Connelly (Social Work Task Force, 2009). One of the key implementations was the PCF, which replaced the competency-based key roles of the social work degree (Department of Health, 2002). The reforms were implemented in September 2013. Despite the radical nature of the changes and, in particular, the PCF there has been relatively limited critical consideration of the reform process (Taylor and Bogo, 2013) and the leading authors of the PCF, for example, have yet to provide a full explanation of the underlying theoretical justification for the PCF (Burgess et al., 2014). Taylor and Bogo (2013) are the first to provide a substantive consideration of the PCF. Burgess et al. (2014) plan to submit an article on the theoretical foundation of the PCF and a rationale for its introduction.

It is in this wider context of the implementation of the reforms that this paper intends to offer a review of the PCF, which may contribute to a more critical consideration of the PCF than hitherto. It differs from the positions of Taylor and Bogo (2013) and Burgess et al. (2014) by emphasising the importance of linking curriculum changes to the wider context of contemporary social work practice. Having explored the background and approach to analysis, the 2002 degree is first considered and how the PCF and the reform process have altered social work education. Consideration is then given to the wider context of social work practice. Links between social work reform and social work elsewhere in Europe are explored. Finally, the key message of this paper is that the PCF has changed the social work curriculum but it is unclear whether the framework and social work reform will change practice.

**Background**

It may be argued that social work education and practice has a history of continuous change (Parton, 1994). The Seebohm (1968) establishment of municipal social services departments resulted in the merger in 1971 of existing training bodies into one central body (Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work) and the setting up of a single social work qualification.

Subsequent years saw various developments in social work education and practice. Prior to the introduction of the social work degree in 2002 (Department of Health, 2002) social work was taught at diploma level for two years either at non-graduate or postgraduate levels for students who already had a first degree. Despite frequent changes there continued to exist concerns about social work education. Some of the reservations about the Diploma in Social Work were (Evaluation of the Social Work Degree Qualification in England Team, 2008):

• Many social work educators were critical of the competency based model of the diploma.

• There was a steady decline in student numbers

• A public perception that many social workers were not discharging their professional responsibilities properly (Laming, 2003)

• Concerns about the quality of the teaching and the relevance of some of the curriculum on the Diploma in Social Work

The Labour government sought to modernise social work education and practice (Department of Health, 1998) by establishing the social work qualification at degree level for the first time, setting up a new regulatory body (General Social Care Council: now replaced by the Health and Care Professions Council), a research body (Social Care Institute for Excellence), a code of practice for social care workers and employers, and a social care register with social work becoming a reserved title. The competences on the Diploma in Social Work were replaced with the National Occupation Standards or key roles. However, the key roles remained a competency-based model.

The death of Peter Connelly 2007 (Haringey Local Safeguarding Board, 2009) was the focus for a review of the 2002 changes to social work education and practice. Following a number of inquiries (Haringey Local Safeguarding Board, 2009; Laming, 2009) a social work group was established to investigate the state of social work in England (Social Work Task Force, 2009). The Social Work Task Force made fifteen recommendations and the SWRB was set up to oversee and implement these recommendations (Social Work Task Force, 2009). The changes to social work education were implemented in September 2013.

The SWRB made a number of significant changes to social work, which ranged from a revised curriculum, an assessed and supported year in employment, and a college of social work. The revised curriculum and, in particular, the PCF is the subject of this paper. The rationale for focussing on the PCF is that its purpose extends beyond the curriculum to social work practice. The PCF is “an overarching professional standards framework – which will set out, for the first time, consistent expectations of social workers at every point of their career and will be used to inform the design and implementation of education and training and the national career structure” (Social Work Reform Board, 2010, p. 3).

The PCF has been mapped against the standards of proficiency required by the regulatory body for social work in England, which is the Health and Care Professions Council. The Health and Care Professions Council has regulatory responsibility for a number of health professions as well as social work. The capabilities framework is distinct from the standards of proficiency because it is a *social work* professional model and is applicable from prequalifying students to advanced practitioners. The standards of proficiency contain generic standards as well as some specific social work ones, and are applicable only at the point of qualification.

The PCF claims to provide an explicit model or approach which integrates qualifying social work education with social work practice from newly qualified social workers to advanced practitioners. If the PCF is successful in unifying not only the social work curriculum but also the relationship of the curriculum to qualified practice, social work will have an integrated approach (Spours et al., 2000) to both education and practice, to thinking and doing within an underlying ethical base. The PCF will create a unified pedagogy of thought, deed and ethical principles, which are the common features of a professional pedagogy (Shulman, 2005). The aim of this paper is to investigate how the PCF has transformed social work education and whether it will change practice.

**Approach to analysis**

The aim of this paper is to investigate the implications of the PCF and social work reform for social work education and practice. This discussion paper adopts a ‘thinking-based policy approach’ to its analysis of the topic (Davies, 2009; Porter, 2010). What matters is how policy-makers use evidence to inform their thinking (Porter, 2010). Accordingly, the title of this paper is posed in a way to seek to find an answer as far as that is available. The literature is selected to indicate what answer(s) may exist. The paper is a ‘realist’ synthesis (Pawson, 2006) to the extent that it focusses on the impact or effectiveness of an intervention or policy in an iterative and theory-driven fashion. The justification for this approach is that social work like other professions is involved in a complex series of interrelationships within which research is simply a (relatively minor) part of an intricate network of dynamic interconnections (Pawson, 2006; Moriarty and Manthorpe, 2013).

Although this is a discussion paper and does not require ethical approval and informed consent, good practice in research recommends the researcher reviews whether the identified literature indicates ethical difficulties. It is the author’s opinion that the paper does not contain ethical issues. None of the literature cited had information, which could breach anonymity.

**The social work degree (2002): a double curriculum**

The requirements for social work training (Department of Health, 2002) established the social work degree. The overall structure of the degree may be construed as containing four ‘maps’ (Doel, et al., 2007). These were:

* Requirements for social work training (Department of Health, 2002)
* National occupational standards (2002)
* Codes of practice for employers of social care workers and social care workers (General Social Care Council, 2002)
* Benchmark statement for social work (Quality Assurance Agency, 2008)

It is arguable that the creation of the social work degree alongside the Quality Assurance Agency benchmark statement transformed social work education’s academic standing by positioning it firmly within higher education at degree level for the first time (Preston-Shoot, 2004). However, closer scrutiny may indicate that these four maps evidenced a divide or ‘double curriculum’ within which there was a contrast between a broad and a narrow approach to social work education (Higgins, 2013).

The concept of a double curriculum is developed from the idea of the ‘hidden’ curriculum in education (Haralambos and Holborn, 2000) and the ‘secret curriculum’ in social work (Preston-Shoot, 2012). Within the school context the content of teaching materials is seen as less significant than the way in which teaching occurs. The hidden curriculum is what students learn by attending classes rather than the official curriculum. Preston-Shoot (2012) contends that the original social work degree (Department of Health, 2002) contains a ‘secret’ rather than a hidden curriculum. It is secret because it is not taught as such but the secret curriculum contradicts the official or taught curriculum.

What distinguishes the idea of a ‘double curriculum’ in the social work degree is the argument that there were explicit and competing aspects within the degree, which together could be understood to be a double or dichotomised curriculum. The two parts of the double curriculum may be described as a ‘broad’ and a ‘narrow’ curriculum (Higgins, 2013; Higgins, 2014).

The broad model of social work education can be located in the benchmark statement for social work (Quality Assurance Agency, 2008). The statement describes social work as a moral practice, which promotes change and the empowerment of human beings with theories and principles of human rights at the heart of social work. In its aims and language it is comparable to the international definition of social work (International Federation of Social Workers, 2000, under review).

The benchmark statement may be described as holistic because its conception of social work involves a socio-political context beyond traditional casework models. As a ‘moral’ practice broad social work engages with notions of social justice and empowerment of vulnerable members of society. The ethical dimension of social work within this broad approach has been discussed in the literature (Lafrance et al., 2004; Banks, 2005; Gregory and Holloway, 2005; Clark, 2006). Students need to be aware of social work values and their own personal value system (Lafrange et al., 2004). Being ethically aware and having the ethical courage to challenge bad practice are considered essential qualities in social work students (Banks, 2005).

The benchmark statement may be contrasted with the other three maps (Doel et al., 2007) of the social work curriculum, namely, the requirements for social work training (Department of Health, 2002), the national occupational standards (2002) and the codes of practice for employers of social care workers and social care workers (2002). These three may be seen to be the other side of the curriculum or the narrow approach to social work education.

The limited or narrow conception of the social work degree is explicitly stated in the foreword to the new course when the minister of state explains that “the emphasis must be on practice and the practical relevance of theory” (Department of Health, 2002, p. i). The degree was not an integrated or linked model (Spours et al., 2000) of academic and practice knowledge because it was made clear that practice was more important or relevant than theory (Preston-Shoot, 2004). Thinking (theory) and doing (practice) were separate with priority given to practice (Singh and Cowden, 2009). The secondary function of the academy in social work education has been noted previously (Green, 2006). Practice is undeniably central in any professional programme, e.g. law and medicine. Generally, however, lawyers and doctors are seen as interested in academic and theoretical developments within their profession (Parsloe, 2001).

The social work degree was also expected to “produce competent practitioners” (Department of Health, 2002, p. i). The introduction of the national occupational standards (2002) or the key roles reiterated the continuing dominance of a competency model of assessment in social work education. There have been numerous criticisms of the competency approach such as it being a tick-box and formulaic approach, which could not ‘capture’ complex learning (Horder and Kelly, 2001; James, 2001; Preston-Shoot, 2004; Orme et al., 2009). Competency models have been described as “repetitive, formulaic, reductionist and unrealistic” (Preston-Shoot, 2004, p. 687).

The codes of practice (2002) can be seen to reflect this competency and narrow approach in three ways (Higgins, 2013). First, there is limited consideration of the ethical complexity of social work practice. The codes are practice rather than professional codes. Finally, the codes apply to all social care professionals. Overall, the codes of practice seem focussed on a narrow or formulaic conceptualisation of social work within which the social work profession was not distinguished from other types of social care.

The contrast between the four maps (on the one hand, the benchmark statement and, on the other, the requirements for social work training, the national occupational standards and the codes of practice) indicate that there existed a “chasm” (Humphrey, 2006, p. 372) within the original social work degree. This divide can be construed as a double curriculum (Higgins, 2013) between the broad or holistic model of the benchmark statement and the narrow or limited approach of the other three maps. These maps or guides explicitly portray a dual or oppositional way of understanding social work education and practice. There are two models of social work articulated within this double curriculum: a restricted approach (Preston-Shoot, 2004; Humphrey, 2006) and a wider notion of the profession (Bywaters and Mcleod, 2001; Lyons and Mannion, 2004).

The contrast within the social work degree between these competing approaches to social work education is important for two reasons. First, the conflicting approaches reflect an underlying debate about the role and function of contemporary social work practice, which continues to exist in England (Croisdale-Appleby, 2014; Narey, 2014). Second, it is within this context of contrasting paradigms (Higgins et al., 2014) that the PCF needs to be understood.

**The PCF: an integrated curriculum**

This paper contends that the PCF has changed the curriculum of the 2002 social work degree by replacing the double curriculum with a unified model of social work education, which can be used as well in practice. This approach can be seen to adopt the broader paradigm or understanding of social work education discussed in the previous section. There are five ways in which the PCF can be seen to have produced an integrated or unified model of qualifying education and practice: These are (Burgess et al., 2014):

* Introduction of capabilities
* A conceptual integrity to the nine domains
* An integrated approach to assessment and learning
* Four qualifying levels to end of final placement
* Adoption of a developmental and broad conception of social work education both at qualifying and post-qualifying levels

The concept of ‘capability’ has replaced the key roles. There is debate about what a ‘capability’ is (Taylor and Bogo, 2013) and the theoretical source for its use in the revised curriculum (Higgins, 2014). Further discussion of the concept of capability and its relationship to competence and social work practice will be discussed later in this paper. For now capability may be defined in the terms used by the SWRB as:

“An integration of knowledge, skills, personal qualities and understanding used appropriately and effectively- not just in familiar and highly focussed contexts but in response to new and changing circumstances.” (Price, 2004, cited in, SWRB, 2010, p. 13).

It is this concept of the integration of knowledge and skills applicable to novel situations, which evidences the replacement of a competency approach with an integrative and development model. It is also holistic in the sense that it includes ’higher-order’ fields such as ethics and continuous professional development (Burgess et al., 2014).

Compared with the four maps of the 2002 degree there is an integration of the nine capabilities in terms of their emphasis on knowledge, values and social justice (Higgins, 2013). For example, there are specific areas or domains on values and ethics, and rights, justice and economic well being. If there was any criticism of the domains it could be argued that there is relatively little on skills and, in particular, skills in the assessment of risk (Higgins, 2013). Unlike the key roles the domains provide a model, which reflects both the benchmark statement and the international definition of social work (International Federation of Social Workers, 2000, under review). This integrative model may be understood to be a ‘professional turn’ (Allen, 2003) in the social work profession.

Unlike the 2002 degree the approach adopted in the new curriculum is holistic with teaching and assessment intended to be linked across the nine capabilities. For example, within the knowledge domain theory and critical knowledge are explicitly addressed. The 2002 degree, by contrast, has a relatively short list of ‘areas’ or topics needed to be covered, which do not appear to have any clear interconnection and within which list theory is not explicitly addressed.

Finally, the revised curriculum extends from prequalifying education to advanced practice. Each stage of professional development is mapped against the PCF to indicate what is expected of a professional at the relevant stage. This holistic approach to a professional social work career progression evidences its developmental conception of learning by adopting a staged approach to knowledge acquisition, which may be compared to Dreyfus and Dreyfus’ (1986) model which has been explored both in social work (Fook et al., 2000) and elsewhere (Eraut, 1994).

**The change from competences to capabilities**

It is perhaps surprising that there has been relatively little *critical* consideration of the SWRB reforms (but see: Garrett, 2012; Preston-Shoot, 2012; Moriarty and Manthorpe, 2013; Moriarty and Manthorpe, 2014). Taylor and Bogo (2013) make this point in their article on competences and the PCF. Taylor and Bogo offer also the first substantive critical analysis of the rationale for replacing the key roles with the PCF, which is to be welcomed.

Burgess et al., (2014) have offered a brief rejoinder to Taylor and Bogo’s critique of the move to the PCF but have yet to follow it up with a more in depth justification of the introduction of the PCF. It is to be hoped that Burgess et al. (as leaders in the establishment of the PCF) will be able to provide some insight into the theoretical origins of the PCF. Taylor and Bogo (2013) rightly make the point that there has not always been a clear differentiation between competences and capabilities. They also note that Eraut (1994) among others suggests capabilities have as a core feature the notion of a future potentiality of the student to learn. This sense of potentiality is not explicit in the definition of the PCF given above. It may be that models of capabilities which contain potentiality will provide a more clearly developmental approach to learning than the existing stages of the current PCF.

The aim of this paper is to explore the impact of the PCF on social work education and practice, not to compare and contrast the relative advantages of the competences and the capabilities. However, it is suggested that the debate between Taylor and Bogo, on the competences side, and Burgess et al., on the capability side, is only one part of the wider context of social work practice. As Taylor and Bogo and Burgess et al. acknowledge the context of practice is the crucial issue. It is therefore suggested that the real debate about the PCF lies elsewhere in the context of contemporary social work practice. The real questions needing answers are (adapted from Preston-Shoot, 2012):

* To what extent is what students learn in practice settings consistent with the aims of the PCF?
* How can the PCF be successfully implemented in practice?

**The PCF and the wider context of contemporary social work practice**

To some extent it is arguable there has been a ‘transformational rhetoric’ (Garrett, 2012) in the reform process, which has hindered contrary voices and critical questions. Garrett (2012) uses the phrase ‘transformational rhetoric’ to challenge the uncritical optimism of the SWRB reform agenda. On the one hand, it is difficult to pour doubt on the worthy ideals of the SWRB and the broad and visionary language of the PCF, which reflect international conceptions of social work (International Federation of Social Workers, 2000, under review). However, on the other hand, what is really going on in practice (Preston-Shoot, 2012)?

 Models and theories may best be seen in some sense as ‘material products’ of a particular ideology (Althusser, 1971). The PCF is a result of a particular way of understanding contemporary social work in England. As a material product or outward expression of this approach, the PCF reflects this underlying foundational model. This paper argues that the PCF has transformed social work education by creating an integrated and intellectually coherent approach to social work, lacking in the double curriculum of the 2002 social work degree.

It must be acknowledged that it is early days in the implementation of the PCF. The SWRB reforms were implemented only in 2013. However, there are indications that the ideals of the PCF may not easily transform practice in a way similar to its changes in social work education (Garrett, 2012; Preston-Shoot, 2012). Students feel that there is a gulf or dichotomy between what they learnt in the academy and the realities of field practice (Delaney, 2007; Higgins et al., 2014; Preston-Shoot, 2012). Studies of newly qualified social workers prior to the introduction of the PCF indicate that the existing climate of contemporary social work practice will not be fertile soil to the educative seeds of the PCF. For example, a number of research studies suggest that the experiences of newly qualified social workers are similar to that of students: what they are taught to expect is not what they experience in practice (Bates et al., 2010; Jack and Donnellan, 2010). There exists in contemporary social work in England a “reality shock” of practice for newly qualified practitioners (Jack and Donnellan, 2010, p. 309). Burgess et al., (2014, p. 3) agree that contemporary social work practice was “assessed in a mechanistic and atomised way”. However, they assign responsibly for this narrow approach to the competences. It is suggested that the competences were more a material product of a narrow and limited notion of field practice.

It is accepted that Burgess et al. may rightly argue that it is premature to conclude the PCF has not changed social work practice. The studies in the paragraph above were all before 2013. However, there is some evidence to suggest that the PCF is unlikely to transform practice. A parliamentary report on social work reform published in December 2013 (All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Work, 2013) expressed concern that there was already a danger that the SWRB changes would not be implemented successfully. There was not sufficient funding to bring about the improvements. There was evidence also from social workers that social work practice had not changed. Preventative projects were being closed. New requirements were increasing bureaucracy rather than diminishing it. The aims of the reform agenda for higher standards, better supervision, less bureaucracy and better professional development were not in evidence. One social work manager reported:

“The Social Work Reform Board – is the work it has done translating onto the frontline? No it isn’t. I ask my staff if they know what’s happening with the Social Work Reform Board or The College of Social Work (TCSW) and it is clear it is completely irrelevant to them – there is a complete disconnect between what’s happening on the frontline and what’s going on elsewhere.” All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Work, 2013, p. 12).

The reason for the lack of impact of the PCF and the reform agenda on practice seem to be that the government and employers have moved away from preventative work and have returned to a focus on targets and bureaucracy (All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Work, 2013). For example, the Children and Families Act 2014 (Great Britain, 2014) has imposed statutory timescales on the assessment process in care proceedings. However well intentioned, this type of legislation seems to herald a return to targets and time limits rather than a concern for the welfare of children (Munby, J., 2013).

It is not simply that the PCF and other SWRB reforms have not yet transformed practice. It appears that the government may not intend to continue with the reforms (at least in children and families social work). A report (Narey, 2014) commissioned by the Secretary of State for Education (the Department of Education in England has responsibility for children’s services) has criticised the aspirations of the SWRB reforms. Narey (2014) queries the appropriateness of the nine domains of the PCF. He explicitly rejects the international definition of social work (International Federation of Social Workers, 2000, under review) as irrelevant to social work in England. The Benchmark Statement for Social Work (Quality Assurance Agency, 2008) is considered “unbalanced” (Narey, 2014, p. 8) because it does not sufficiently address child protection. Indeed for Narey children and families social work appears to be equivalent to child protection.

The establishment of Frontline (MacAlister with others, 2012), a ‘fast track’ graduate qualifying programme in social work, also indicates that practice may not adopt the PCF approach to learning. Frontline’s structure reflects a limited model of both education and practice. The course is significantly shorter than normal master level qualifying programmes and ‘teaching’ is undertaken within the agency, consisting of only 50 days. The focus of the teaching and practice is child protection with limited reference to wider consideration of the role and purpose of social work. This approach to social work education has been criticised by academics in England and other European states (Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee and Association of Professors of Social Work, 2013; European Schools of Social Work, 2014).

Preliminary evidence such as Narey’s report and Frontline may put into question the successful implementation of the PCF. It is here argued that the real problem for the PCF is not theoretical in terms of the competences (Taylor and Bogo, 2013) or capabilities (Burgess et al., 2014). The reality is that what students learn and what occurs in practice is radically different from the ideals of the PCF (Garrrett, 2012; Preston-Shoot, 2012; Higgins, 2013). Taylor and Bogo seem to concur when they quote from a study on the experiences of newly qualified social workers and other professionals. Exploring notions of ‘competence’, ‘capability’ and others in the context of readiness for professional practice, the authors of the study conclude:

“Arguably, it is not the existence of different terms that prevents consensus. Rather, it is a fundamental distinction between those who view qualifying education as a developmental process and those who view it as an end product.” (Moriarty et al, 2011, p. 1351).

It may be that that the PCF’s developmental model of learning is not relevant to the type of practice which employers require. If Narey’s vision of social work reflects contemporary social work, social work is about legal interventions to protect vulnerable children. The organisational context of this type of social work practice is within municipal authorities, which are accountable to central government in terms of implementation of policies and achieving targets. Wider conceptions of social work education and learning are unlikely to feature in this type of social work and the interests and voices of service users are even less likely to be heard

**Social work reform In England and the wider European context**

It was noted in the previous section that social work programmes in other European states have expressed concerns about current changes in social work education such as the setting up of the fast track qualifying programme (Frontline) and its implications for social work in England (European Schools of Social Work, 2014). It is difficult to compare social work systems from different countries because they belong to distinct social and political systems (Boddy and Statham, 2009). However, the PCF and the social work reform agenda in England share with social work in other European states a conception of a broad approach to the profession centred on such statements as the International Federation of Social Workers (2000, under review). Concepts such as social pedagogy inform wider notions of profession practice and theorisation in some European forms of social work. The relevance of the PCF and social work reform in England to social work in other European states is two-fold. First, the PCF demonstrates a commitment to a social work, which shares a common theoretical and practice approach to social work elsewhere in Europe. Second, the tensions between the aspirations of social work encapsulated in the PCF and the wider context of social work practice in England may be relevant to similar debates elsewhere in Europe. For example, a study of child protection systems in a number of European states identified a conflict between a narrow focus on child safety and broader notions of child welfare (Gilbert et al, 2011).

The limitations of practice within mainstream statutory agencies are also not unique to England. One Finnish study reported on the frustration of social workers, who felt they were not able to practise ethically as professionals (Mänttäri-van der Kuip, 2014). Lack of resources and opportunities for early intervention made it difficult to undertake social work in statutory agencies. Social workers believed that the organisational structure of their agencies conflicted with their professional values. It may be that the struggle for social work reform in England may share some of the concerns facing social work elsewhere in Europe. A conflict between the language of social work reform and the wider context of a narrowing approach to social work has also been noted in other European countries (Hojlund and La Cour 2003).

**Conclusion**

Since 2009 social work education has undergone a reform process, which was implemented in 2013. The PCF sought as part of the social work reform agenda to transform the pedagogy of the social work curriculum. This paper argues it succeeded in this aim. The 2002 degree contained a tension between a narrow and a broader conception of social work. The PCF has replaced this ‘double’ curriculum with a holistic and integrated curriculum, which is linked clearly via its domains to such international definitions of social work as that of the International Federation of Social Workers (2000, under review). However, it may be argued that there is a risk that the PCF and social work reform may struggle to achieve a second and more fundamental goal to transform the pedagogy of contemporary social work practice in England (Higgins et al., 2014). Fast track approaches to social work education such as Frontline, and a narrow conception of social work practice evidenced in the Narey report (2014) may indicate that a more limited version of social work continues to dominate social work practice. The key message of this paper is that the PCF has changed the social work curriculum but it is unclear whether the framework and the social work reform agenda will change practice.

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