

## **Continuing Professional Development – What difference does it make?**

At a time when social work is under pressure because of diminishing resources, raised expectations and changing structures, post qualifying study arguably should be valued as enabling social workers to address these pressures through updating knowledge and skills. Instead, employers and practitioners query whether PQ Awards make a positive difference. In this pressured climate, Skills for Care West Midlands explored the impact of PQ by providing funding during 2009-10 for 25 social workers in adult services to undertake modules at PQ Higher Specialist level in Leadership and Management and Practice Education at the University of Birmingham and Coventry University, and by funding informal Master Classes at the University of Worcester and Coventry University on topics that supported changes in social work roles.

A base line study, a focus group, learner evaluations, telephone interviews, and questionnaires evaluated PQ's impact on social workers' practice. The findings reported that the PQ modules helped social workers become more confident in engaging with and helping others deal with change, in challenging effectively within multi disciplinary teams, and in using critical reflection. The Master Classes provided interactive learning opportunities that social workers perceived as relevant.

The PQ modules and informal Master Classes previewed the new hybrid CPD model recommended by the Reform Board (2010). The findings will be of interest to educators considering how to re-develop their PQ awards. The findings argue that PQ and CPD represent good investments for helping social workers address pressures on practice; recommend that CPD should be linked to individual professional development plans and the Professional Capabilities Framework; and support a strategy for meeting the workforce development gap identified by the Social Work Task Force and the Munro interim report (2011). Problems of limited resources are addressed by advocating shared responsibility for funding CPD.