

Accreditation

Frequently asked questions

The **'post graduate certificate in family group conference co-ordination'** is designed for new and existing FGC co-ordinators. Family Rights Group and the University of Chester have developed it in conjunction with colleagues and projects involved in the national FGC Network.

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- **I am currently undertaking the award, will these changes affect me?**
- **When will the system change?**
- **How can I find out more?**

What is the context to the development of the post graduate certificate?

The certificate is the culmination of years of joint working that began with a specially convened FGC network meeting back in February 2006 to explore options and a possible route forward for accreditation.

The drive to establish the award came about due to concerns increasingly expressed by the FGC community and by other key stakeholders that there was no established system of ensuring that FGC services being offered to families were of a consistent acceptable standard. The aim in developing the postgraduate certificate was to set a benchmark where-by coordinators could demonstrate a clear understanding and application of the values that underpin the FGC model and a level of competence commensurate with the complexity of the task. The certificate would enable projects to satisfy others (including family members, commissioners, policy makers etc) of the quality of their service.

The need for FGC projects to demonstrate consistency and quality is now greater than ever. As a result of the public law outline, FGCs are becoming increasingly used prior to care proceedings, and are thus being exposed to greater external scrutiny. This was emphasised by Kevin Brennan MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary at the Department for Children, School and Families

“An FGC is a complex service to provide and requires high levels of skill and competence. We have responded to concerns from stakeholders that there is a lack of skill and knowledge available in the field to deliver effective family group conference services.”

Why have the FGC Network chosen this route?

In developing the certificate the FGC network explored different routes to accreditation.¹ A number of projects had already gone down the route of establishing programmes through the open college network. The University of Chester however offered a route to accreditation that was work based and which we feel more accurately reflected the task of coordinating.

¹ Including the Open College Network, the Open University and other academic providers.

Are there other programmes of FGC accreditation?

The certificate in FGC coordination is the world's first postgraduate qualification in family group conferencing. In addition to the open college network route already mentioned, we are aware of a small number of postgraduate qualifications that offer some assessment of FGC coordination.

The University of Ulster offer a postgraduate diploma/Masters in Restorative practice, which has a module concerning FGC's.

In New Zealand the university of Waikato offers a postgraduate certificate in counselling with a component covering coordinating FGC's thus enabling applicants to practice as coordinators subsequently.

However there is no postgraduate award which is solely focused on the role of the coordinator and which offers a practice based framework for accreditation. Because of the unique nature of the certificate there has been considerable interest expressed by our international and European partners in the development of the award. And we are currently exploring whether students based in other countries could undertake the certificate.

Who has been involved in developing the award?

The certificate is the culmination of work undertaken by a partnership involving FGC projects, Family Rights Group and the University of Chester. The FGC Network has driven the development of the accredited award, with a sub-group of the Network developing the learning outcomes. Subsequently this sub-group became the accreditation development group, which also includes representation from Family Rights Group, the University of Chester and Professor Peter Marsh the independent academic evaluating the programme.

We will continue to raise awareness and canvass the views of the membership of the Network through discussion about 'accreditation' at Network meetings, writing articles for the 'Together' magazine and presenting information at other relevant forums.

Who accredits the award?

The University of Chester can now kite mark external trainers.

In May 2008 Family Rights Group was accepted by the University of Chester as responsible for accrediting the first half of the postgraduate award. The University will accredit and mark the second half.

In doing this Family Rights Group satisfied the University that its systems and structures were sufficiently robust to be accredited by the University.

This partnership arrangement between the University and Family Rights Group will not affect what is required of the student. There remains two routes to achieve the award and the content, learning outcomes and assessment measures remain the same.

What is the route to achieve the award for new people with no experience of coordinating FGCs?

- New co-ordinators will have to complete three modules to achieve the award:
 - § The first module includes the 3-day FGC co-ordinator training² with a requirement for the student to produce work that demonstrates an understanding of the FGC model.
 - § The second module is work-based and requires the student to observe 2 FGCs and provide evidence of learning
 - § The third module is again work-based and requires the student to directly run an FGC and provide portfolio evidence of their learning.

What is the route to achieve the award for FGC coordinators with some experience of coordinating FGCs?

- The programme also sets out an agreed framework for the accreditation of existing coordinators:
 - § In order to be eligible existing co-ordinators will need to have completed at least 10 FGCs.
 - § Existing co-ordinators will then need to submit evidence of their reflection on the principles and ethos of FGC and how they apply this to practice. Their work will be measured against the learning outcomes.

Within the new framework Family Rights Group associate tutor will assess modules one and two of the modular route; and under the APEL route will assess the first half of the award.

On successful completion both modular and APEL students will receive a certificate, which the University of Chester will recognise as equivalent to 30 credits. All applicants will then be eligible to proceed to the second half of the award, which will be administered and managed by the University. For modular students this would constitute module 3 and for APEL students part two.

² There are also new quality assurance measures in relation to the 3 – day training

What are the requirements within the framework for the initial 3-day co-ordinator training?

As part of the development of the accredited certificate we had to how we can ensure consistent quality in the delivery of the initial 3 day coordinator training throughout the country.

A special meeting of the accreditation development meeting considered this and we are now placing a number of requirements on those delivering the 3 day co-ordinator training in order for it to be eligible within this framework.

- § The training must be delivered by at least one Associate Tutor
- § The trainer must submit a registration form with Family Rights Group for prior approval setting out how the training will comply with set requirements including:³
 - That the trainer is required to use a range of approaches over a period of 3 days including small and large group work; role play of a FGC; use of case study; use other training materials such as DVDs etc.
 - The 3 days course covers a core agenda
 - That all participants receive *The Family Group Conference Toolkit*⁴ as part of their training pack, as a good practice reference guide.
 - That the trainer can demonstrating that the they intend to incorporate the views of service users either through their direct involvement in training or by other means
 - Setting out clear objectives that the training aims to achieve, and which will be shared with participants.
 - That the training must include a minimum of 18 hours of engagement time with trainees ideally over a period of 3 days.
 - There should be a ratio of no more than 15 students to each trainer
 - All trainees should have opportunity to complete an evaluation form, which should be returned to Family Rights Group.
- § Trainers will be required to provide details to Family Rights Group of all participants who complete the 3 day training satisfactorily and provide them with a certificate in order for them to be able to evidence this at a later date.

How is the student supported during the award?

This is an award that embeds practise-based support and assessment by independent associate tutors

All students applying to Family Rights Group to undertake the certificate are allocated an associate tutor who will support and guide the student during the

³ FRG 3-day training accreditation approval form (available on FRG website)

⁴ Ashley, C, Holton, L, Horan, H and Wiffin, J (2006) *The Family Group Conference Toolkit - a practical guide for setting up and running an FGC service* (Family Rights Group, London)

first half of the award. Their role is to provide guidance and support to the student and to provide constructive feedback and to mark work undertaken by students.

How does Family Rights Group ensure associate tutors can do their role effectively?

Considerable effort has therefore been invested in defining their role, recruiting suitably experienced and qualified associate tutors and working through their support needs.

- § To date we have recruited and trained 28 associate tutors. The recruitment process was open and rigorous.
- § Associate Tutors must receive training from the University of Chester
- § Priority has been given to enable associate tutors to complete the award. There is a requirement that Associate Tutors have at least achieved the mid way point prior to assessing others.⁵
- § A clear framework for support and supervision of associate tutors is being instigated, with a requirement that they attend at least 2 advanced training sessions per year.

How are students assessed?

In conjunction with the University we have developed a coherent framework for the assessment of students: -

- § Agreed learning outcomes
- § An agreed framework with the University of Chester concerning assessment for both the modular and APEL routes
- § Assessment briefs to guide students which have been formulated to encourage:
 - The student's reflecting on their own practice
 - Practice based assessment that requires direct experience of FGC practice
 - Assessment measures that are accessible to a wide range of applicants
 - A requirement to include peer and service user feedback on the student's practice

How will we ensure consistency of marking by associate tutors?

In order to ensure consistency of marking 10% of the work will be randomly assigned to a second associate tutor for second marking.

The university will have an annual review of the system and will have access to submitted work and to the associate tutors assessment of it.

⁵ They will be required to complete it in future.

During the second half of the award all students' work will be marked by the university and will fall within their quality framework.

Will this award form the basis for future coordinator development?

The intention is that in addition to coordinators having their skills and experience accredited at an appropriate level, the award would enable co-ordinators to subsequently access other graduate and postgraduate qualifications.

- § The certificate is transferable to postgraduate masters level awards at other universities.
- § The university are also currently working to have the award recognised within the post-qualifying framework for social workers.

What information is there to support students in accessing appropriate research and resource materials to undertake the award?

- § Family Rights Group along with the university library services has begun to develop an on-line resource where applicants will be able to access up to date research and policy publications relevant to FGC practice. (See FRG website)
- § Within the new framework for the delivery of initial 3-day training all students will be given a copy of the FGC toolkit.
- § During the second half of the award students will have access to the student supports available from the university.

How will the programme be evaluated?

Professor Peter Marsh is undertaking an independent academic evaluation of the programme. The evaluation will consider:

- § The efficacy of the model we have adopted for coordinator accreditation
- § The impact of accreditation on quality and standards and how these are perceived by families, partner agencies, policy makers and other key stakeholders.
- § How the programme is impacting from a business and costs perspective on projects and on independent freelance coordinators.
- § The potential reach of the programme in terms of numbers likely to complete it and take up by projects.
- § To formulate plans for the expansion and further development of the accreditation framework.

The intention is that 75 co-ordinators are recruited onto the course and their views sought as part of the evaluation. The evaluation findings will be presented at a seminar in September 2009.

How is accreditation being taken forward?

In 2007 Family Rights Group was successful in its bid to the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation to raise some funding to help take forward the accreditation programme. Until this application was successful there had been no funding stream for this work.

A key task now is to ensure the programme is financially sustainable for the future for the Family Rights Group.

The new framework places a greater burden on the Family Rights Group as the accrediting agency. In order for the programme to be sustainable the costs incurred by Family Rights Group need to be adequately covered by the administration fee charged to applicants.

Those agencies that have their own associate tutors will continue to benefit financially from having this resource, however they and other participants will need to shoulder an increase in the cost of administering the programme. Such projects will be required to pay a £250 administration charge to FRG for each student registered. Family Rights Group will be in touch with projects to help ascertain information necessary to develop a workable, sustainable business plan that also continues to enable the certificate to be accessible

What are the costs of the programme?

Under the new arrangements the costs to the individual student in completing the award will remain the same. They may however, need to be revised in September 2009 following the results of the business planning outlined above.

Costs

For new co-ordinators the cost is:

£450 3 day training course⁶

£950 Associate tutor costs

£100 Admin cost to FRG (£250 for projects with own associate tutors)

£590 Student fees to university

£2090

For existing co-ordinators the cost is:

£500 Associate tutor costs

£100 Contribution to FRG cost incl admin (£250 for projects with own associate tutors)

£590 Student fees to university

£1190

⁶ Figure based upon price of place on FRG 3 day training course

Is there any financial support available to help me undertake the award?

Family Rights Group is currently operating a small bursary scheme for the award

In order to qualify applicants will need to meet at least one of the following requirements:

- Coordinators working with marginalised communities,
- Coordinators who are employed by small projects that are unable to cover the costs of accreditation
- Coordinators who are self-employed
- For associate tutors who are unable to finance their attendance at required training (this may be due to withdrawal of employer funding)
- For self employed associate tutors

How can I register for the award?

You will need to make application directly to the Family Rights Group.⁷ A brief application form is on the Family Rights Group website. If you are pursuing the modular route you will have to attend a 3-day training that is accredited by the Family Rights Group. Once you have made your application you will be allocated an associate tutor and will not be required to register with the university at this point. On successful completion of the work they will receive a certificate that will be recognised as equivalent to 30 credits by the University of Chester.

Applicants will then have to register with the University and complete the remainder of the award.

Do I need to complete the award within a year?

No. You may wish to complete the award within six months, alternatively, you may feel that they would benefit from a break between the two halves of the award and projects may wish to split the costs between financial years in order to make it more affordable.

I am currently undertaking the award, will these changes affect me?

The university has made a commitment to continue to assess those who are registered to complete the award prior to the new framework beginning.

⁷ Application form available on FRG website

When will the system change?

The new arrangement will begin on the 1st March 2009. The University gave its initial approval to the new structure at the beginning of May 2008 and this has now been formalised in a contract between the University and Family Rights Group.

Alongside this we need to ensure that our capacity to assess is adequate for when the change occurs. We envisage that we should be in a position to move to the new arrangement from the beginning of March 2009.

How can I find out more?

Anyone interested in finding out more about this proposal please contact me at Family Rights Group SHaresnape@frg.org.uk

Sean Haresnape
Policy Adviser
Family Rights Group

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