

# THINK AHEAD

## Invitation to Partner

March 2015



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## Foreword

Thank you for your interest in applying to host Think Ahead participants.

We want to partner with people who share our passion for transforming the lives of service users. We will work with forward-looking NHS Mental Health Trusts and Local Authorities to pioneer new models for training social workers and maximising their contributions to mental health services. Backed by central government funding, we're on our way to becoming a transformational initiative— and we invite you to join us at the beginning of this project.

If you work with us, we will provide you with exceptional mental health social workers. We are using the best recruitment techniques to attract some of the country's most talented and dedicated individuals, and putting them through a rigorous selection process.

We will train our participants intensively to Master's degree level in internationally-recognised social work best practice, with a focus on mental-health-specific, ready-to-practise social interventions. They will be well-placed to rapidly become Approved Mental Health Professionals and Best Interests Assessors, and we will give them training to equip them for leadership positions in the future. We hope that they will build a relationship with your organisation that will last throughout their careers.

We will also provide a new route for your existing talented social workers to develop their careers, by leading Think Ahead units as Consultant Social Workers. They will receive specialist training from our partner university, and we will provide you with funding to give them increased salaries in their new roles.

To partner with us, you will need to make an initial commitment to host at least four Think Ahead participants for the duration of their two-year programme, which includes employing them as newly qualified social workers in their second year. You will also need to demonstrate your desire and capability to implement the Think Ahead model, and provide the challenging and supportive environment needed to create superb social workers with a mental health focus.

This Invitation to Partner document provides more details on the programme and what partnering with us will involve. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact our Programme Director Kate O'Regan on [k.o'regan@ippr.org](mailto:k.o'regan@ippr.org), or Craig Thorley on [c.thorley@ippr.org](mailto:c.thorley@ippr.org).

We hope that you choose to apply, and that together we can enable outstanding people to deliver highly effective services.

Best wishes,



**Prof Dame Carol Black DBE**  
Chair, Think Ahead



**Ella Joseph**  
Chief Executive, Think Ahead

## Executive Summary

### ➤ Introduction

The Think Ahead programme aims to help create more effective mental health services, by recruiting and training outstanding individuals to become mental health social workers. It will attract exceptional candidates into the social work profession, whether straight from university or as part of a career change. After undergoing a rigorous selection process, participants will be part of a specially designed training programme, which will involve extensive on-the-job training in integrated community mental health services.

By enhancing the strength of the social work workforce in mental health services, and designing an innovative recruitment and training programme that will promote a particular role for social workers within multidisciplinary teams, Think Ahead will help to create the conditions in which some of society's most vulnerable people have a greater chance of receiving the holistic care and treatment they need.

This document provides information for NHS Mental Health Trusts and Local Authorities on partnering with Think Ahead as host organisations for Think Ahead participants. It describes the Think Ahead programme, and how Think Ahead and the host organisations will work together. It also sets out the criteria to be used by Think Ahead when making decisions on which organisations to partner with to host participants.

The document also contains detailed information on the design of the programme, which is the result of consultation with a range of stakeholders, including representatives of both Trusts and Local Authorities, service users, social workers and senior figures from within the social work profession. It is representative of the views of Think Ahead, and should be used as the basis on which interested Trusts and Local Authorities apply to host participants.

Section One provides a brief overview of the Think Ahead vision for the future of mental health social work. This provides the foundation for the programme's design, and host organisations will be required to demonstrate a shared belief in this vision in order to jointly deliver the programme.

Sections Two, Three and Four describe the criteria for partnership (alongside adjoining background information) relating to the time prior to the programme starting, Year One of the programme, and Year Two of the programme respectively.

Section Five summarises the financial implications to Trusts and Local Authorities of partnering with Think Ahead to host participants, before Section Six brings together the final set of criteria that applications must demonstrate they are able to meet, and provides further instruction on the process through which organisations are able to make an application.

This executive summary also gives an overview of:

- Background to Think Ahead
- Timescales for the first cohort of participants
- Benefits to host organisations
- Requirements of host organisations
- Instructions for application

## ➤ **Background to Think Ahead**

Think Ahead is a new initiative aimed at transforming the lives of people with mental ill-health by recruiting and training a new cohort of social work students for a career in mental health services. The programme will attract exceptional candidates in to the social work profession, whether straight from university or as part of a career change. Participants will be part of a specially designed training programme, which will involve extensive on-the-job training in integrated community mental health services.

Think Ahead has been developed in response to some of the challenges currently being faced by mental health services. The programme should be understood within the wider context of the pressing social, economic and moral imperatives to improve the quality of care and treatment received by people experiencing mental ill-health, and to provide them with the best support and chance of recovery (whatever this means to the individual service user).

The number of people experiencing mental-ill health has continued to grow over recent years, with demand for services rising as a result. A growing consensus has emerged, therefore, on the need to adopt practices that are preventative, build resilience rather than simply treat symptoms, and support family and community relationships.

Social work is ideally placed to be at the heart of this movement. The development of the social work workforce within Trusts and Local Authorities should be considered as an important way to meet the challenges thrown up by the rising incidence of mental ill-health. Social workers have often been underutilised in mental health settings, and have increasingly seen their role become more generic and admin-based. Social workers who are able to build resilience within communities, implement a number of evidence-based interventions, and respond to the needs of the service user are absolutely vital.

By recruiting a new cadre of excellent candidates and putting them through an innovative training programme, Think Ahead will prepare this new generation of social workers to reassert their professional identity within integrated settings, and demonstrate how valuable they are to effective mental health services.

Think Ahead is funded by the Department of Health.

## ➤ **Timescales for the first cohort of Think Ahead participants**

Applications for the first cohort of participants will open in September 2015, with successful participants beginning their training in summer 2016. This document relates specifically to this

initial cohort of participants, and applications should therefore be made to host a specified number of participants in Cohort One.

### ***Pre-placement programme (PPP)***

***July 2016 – August 2016***

Participants will spend 3-6 weeks in a residential classroom setting, learning the theoretical foundations of a social work curriculum. The PPP will use a range of inputs to provide an inspiring and comprehensive introduction to the fundamental components of social work theory and practice. The PPP will be run by Think Ahead's partner university (to be announced in April 2015).

### ***Year One (Practice Placement)***

***Sep 2016 – August 2017***

After completing the PPP, participants will begin their year-long practice placement. This will be based predominantly in integrated community mental health services delivered by the Trust or Local Authority, but will also require that participants receive exposure to additional practice settings in order to ensure that the development of specialist knowledge in mental health is balanced by an ability to work with a range of service user groups.

Year One will see participants develop key practice skills and knowledge of social interventions, as well as theoretical knowledge delivered via a number of 'further teaching days' spread throughout the year. Successful participants will qualify at the end of Year One with a Postgraduate Diploma (PG Dip) in Social Work, enabling them to practise as qualified social workers.

Participants will be social work students funded by bursaries in Year One, paid by Think Ahead.

### ***Year Two (ASYE Programme & Master's Degree in Social Work)***

***Sep 2017 – August 2018***

Following completion of Year One, participants will begin working as newly qualified social workers within their host organisation. Participants will be required to undertake the Assisted and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) programme during this time, and will also complete a Master's Degree in Social Work. This is to be developed more fully by our partner university, but we are keen to ensure that the Master's provides opportunities for participants to either develop a specific practice skill or conduct research that is relevant to their practice in Year Two.

In Year Two, participants will be newly qualified social workers employed and salaried on a fixed-term one-year contract by the Trust or Local Authority.

### **➤ Benefits to host organisations**

Trusts, Local Authorities and voluntary sector providers have told us during consultation that they would benefit from the following features of the Think Ahead programme. Think Ahead will:

- **attract exceptional candidates to join the social work profession**

The programme will attract high-performing graduates and career switchers who will go on to become exceptional mental health social workers. After making it through a rigorous selection process, participants will receive a high-quality training experience, which will be jointly designed by the Think Ahead team, our partner university and our range of host organisations. These new recruits will possess the full range of competencies and characteristics needed to be effective social workers, combining a strong intellect with softer skills such as resilience and compassion. Only the very best applicants will be selected for the programme.
- **provide a long-term recruitment solution by developing future leaders**

Participants will be trained to Master's Degree level, and will complete the programme having developed significant expertise specific to mental health, knowledge of key interventions and considerable levels of practice skill. This will mean that they are well placed to take on leadership positions with host organisations in the near future, as well as going on to train as Approved Mental Health Professionals (AMHPs) and Best Interests Assessors (BIAs). Think Ahead therefore has the potential to deliver a long-term recruitment and training solution for the social work workforce in mental health services.
- **pioneer a new model to ensure the social work role is fully effective**

As well as placing emphasis on recruiting exceptional candidates, Think Ahead will provide host organisations with the opportunity to cement the role that social workers play in multidisciplinary teams. Our host organisations will be at the forefront as we pioneer a new model for delivering mental health services by promoting the contribution of social work in integrated settings.
- **provide a new career progression opportunity to existing social work staff**

Think Ahead will deliver specialist training to a new cadre of Consultant Social Workers (CSWs) from host organisations' existing staff. The CSW will supervise Think Ahead participants during their practice placement, sharing a caseload with them to gradually increase their practice abilities and relating their learning to the academic curriculum throughout. This role will provide a new career progression opportunity for social workers who want to develop their careers while retaining a caseload, and will contribute to an increased status of social workers in integrated settings.
- **provide ongoing support to host organisations throughout the programme**

Think Ahead will provide a centralised Professional Support Team, consisting of experienced practitioners. This team will be on hand to help host organisations ensure that the programme is running effectively on the ground, and that participants, Consultant Social Workers and management are all satisfied with the quality of the Think Ahead experience.
- **provide host organisations with financial support throughout the programme**

Host organisations will receive per-participant funding of approximately £7,000 (final amount and distribution between Years One and Two to be confirmed). This is intended to contribute to reasonable costs incurred by host organisations, increasing CSW salaries to 'team manager' level, and contributing to participants' salaries as newly qualified social workers in Year Two.



## ➤ Requirements of host organisations

There are several components of the Think Ahead programme which are fundamental to its success, and which together will enable us to create an innovative and consistent model across our host organisations.

### **Participants are based predominantly in integrated multidisciplinary teams in Year One**

- During Year One on the programme, participants will spend the majority of their time on placement working in integrated community mental health services. Host organisations will be required, therefore, to deliver high-quality placements, which will see participants learning together in units of four, overseen by a specially selected and trained Consultant Social Worker.
- Although social workers have historically been employed by Local Authorities, Think Ahead does present an important opportunity for Trusts to take the lead and employ social workers themselves where appropriate. Similarly, there will be other locations where the Local Authority continues to be best placed to employ social workers themselves. Either way, hosting Think Ahead participants will require strong relationships to exist between Trusts and Local Authorities, and with local voluntary sector providers who together are able to form 'local delivery partnerships'. All of our host organisations will be required to share our passion for improving the social component of mental health care delivered to service users.
- Within the partnership, there must be a designated 'lead organisation', either the Trust or Local Authority, with whom we work most closely to develop the programme and ensure that it is delivered effectively

### **Participants are exposed to a wide range of practice settings during Year One**

- Host organisations must be able to offer participants experience of working in additional practice settings outside of integrated community mental health services during Year One.
- In order that participants receive a well rounded and generic social work education, albeit with a strong mental health focus, they will need to spend some time in settings that might include adult social care teams, forensic social work services, or Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). They may also need to spend a short amount of time in Children and Families Social Work teams in order for the programme to receive approval from the regulator.

### **Participants are employed as newly qualified social workers by host organisations in Year Two**

- Think Ahead participants will be paid a bursary in Year One by Think Ahead, at the end of which they will receive a PG Dip in Social Work. They will then become newly qualified social workers in Year Two, and will be employed on a one-year, fixed-term contract by the host organisation, where they will hold their own ASYE-equivalent caseload.
- In Year Two, it is not a requirement that participants are directed in to roles in the same integrated community mental health teams in which they were based in Year One. Their roles in Year Two will, however, need to be aligned with the Think Ahead vision and enable participants to utilise the learning delivered through the Think Ahead curriculum and experienced gained during Year One.

## **Host organisations enable participants to practice the key social work interventions taught via the Think Ahead curriculum**

- Participants will be trained in order to undertake key social work functions and duties (such as care coordination and safeguarding), but must also be enabled to practice more innovative therapeutic approaches and interventions (such as systemic therapy techniques and 'open dialogue' approaches (see 1.3)).

## **Host organisations set out clear progression routes for participants beyond Year Two**

- At the end of the two-year programme, participants will have completed a Master's Degree in Social Work alongside the ASYE programme, and will have gained two years of high-quality experience working with service users in community mental health settings.
- Host organisations are under no obligation to commit to provide full-time posts for participants after the end of Year Two. Similarly, participants are under no obligation to remain with the host organisation beyond this point. However, we hope that both parties will have had a good experience during the course of the programme and so look to continue their involvement with one another.
- Host organisations are therefore required to set out clear progression and CPD opportunities for social workers, how their services align with the Think Ahead vision, and how social work forms a strong part of the organisation's leadership and culture. The presence of all of these will provide the foundations on which participants will be able to forge successful careers in mental health social work.

## **➤ Instructions for application**

This document provides a set of criteria on which Think Ahead will make decisions on which Trusts and Local Authorities to partner with to host the programme's participants, listed together in Section Six.

This document is part of the following process for selecting host organisations:

- January 30<sup>th</sup> 2015 - Consultation period on placement design completed
- March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2015 - *Invitation to Partner* published
- April 6<sup>th</sup> 2015 - Deadline for receipt of Partnership Applications
- May 2015 - Partnership agreements with host organisations finalised

Interested Trusts and Local Authorities are required to submit an application document, clearly setting out how they satisfy each of the criteria listed in Section Six.

## **The deadline for submission of applications is midnight on April 6<sup>th</sup> 2015.**

Interested Trusts and Local Authorities are encouraged to remain in regular contact with the Think Ahead team prior to submission of their application. The period between March 3<sup>rd</sup> and April 6<sup>th</sup> 2015 will be one of ongoing liaison, whereby Think Ahead and interested Trusts and Local Authorities work together to design applications which satisfy the criteria for partnership.

Similarly, the period following submission of the application will consist of continued liaison and negotiation, in order to discuss any outstanding issues or concerns raised, and reach a position

with each of our host organisations which is mutually agreeable and which can lead to a formal partnership agreement (a contracted commitment to host at least four participants).

The application document should be sent by email to the Think Ahead team, who are available to answer any questions or queries prior to the deadline.

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## **1) Foundations of the Programme**

### **1.1) Initial commitment to host participants in Cohort One**

This document relates specifically to the first cohort of Think Ahead participants. In their application, host organisations will therefore need to make an initial commitment to host at least four participants on the programme's first cohort (see 3.1). This will mean hosting them for the duration of their two-year programme, which includes employing them as newly qualified social workers for the duration of their second year (see 4.2). There will however, be opportunities to make a longer-term commitment to host participants in future cohorts once Cohort One is underway.

Host organisations are under no obligation to offer participants permanent contracts beyond completion of the two-year programme, and similarly participants are under no obligation to remain with the host organisation beyond this point. Our aim, however, is to ensure that both participants and host organisations benefit from their experience on the programme, and so wish to continue working with one another.

### **1.2) Integration and partnerships**

Think Ahead will provide high-quality practical experience to participants in integrated community mental health services.

The integration agenda in mental health was born of a belief that service users require both a medical and social component of care and treatment if they are to be aided towards recovery, whatever that means for the individual. It is Think Ahead's adherence to this agenda that drives its calls for a strong, rejuvenated social work presence within multidisciplinary teams, where social workers are able to perform a role that uses their professional training by delivering a number of key, evidence-based interventions. A strong social work presence in integrated community mental health services can lead to an increased focus on wellbeing and recovery.

Integrated settings are the most appropriate place within which to strengthen the links between social workers and other mental health professionals, and to communicate the value of the social work role in ways that resonate across professional boundaries.

Although the integration of mental health services remains the long-term direction of travel, financial and other pressures have put some integrated arrangements under strain in recent years. Despite these challenges, Think Ahead aims to partner with those organisations which value integration and have strong and resilient relationships with one another. Think Ahead aims to be a vehicle through which the status of social work is raised within mental health services, by working with those organisations who are committed to enabling social workers to use the full range of their skills within integrated settings.

Although social workers have historically been employed by Local Authorities, Think Ahead does present an important opportunity for Trusts to take the lead and employ social workers themselves where appropriate. Similarly, there will be other locations where the Local Authority continues to be best placed to employ social workers themselves. Either way, hosting Think

Ahead participants will require strong relationships to exist between Trusts and Local Authorities, and with local voluntary sector providers who together are able to form 'local delivery partnerships'. All of our host organisations will be required to share our passion for improving the social component of mental health care delivered to service users.

Within the partnership, there must be a designated 'lead organisation', either the Trust or Local Authority, with whom we work most closely to develop the programme and ensure that it is delivered effectively. All applications to partner with Think Ahead require the endorsement of both Trust and Local Authority, and should clearly state the name of the lead organisation

### **1.3) The Think Ahead vision for the role of the mental health social worker**

Think Ahead does not exist solely to attract new groups of graduates and career changers into mental health social work. A core part of the Think Ahead programme is its aim to provide greater clarity on the role of the social worker in mental health settings. Think Ahead will provide a new model for the future, which will maximise social workers' ability to benefit service users.

Working with our partner university and host organisations, Think Ahead will offer a clear articulation of exactly what social workers can offer to mental health services. Many mental health social workers have told us that their role is increasingly indistinct, and that their professional identity can feel blurred within multidisciplinary teams. Think Ahead will respond to this challenge by ensuring that participants, and the settings in which they are placed, are clear about their role.

Mental health social workers need to be assigned to cases which allow them to utilise a number of evidence-based social work interventions, and be free from unnecessary administrative duties wherever possible. Social work is a profession, and so should be afforded the requisite levels of status and responsibility.

The following framework builds on the work already undertaken by the sector and sets out how mental health social work interventions relate to one another, and should form the basis for the social work role.

### **1.4) Evidence-based social work interventions**

In integrated community mental health services, social work interactions should begin with a holistic assessment to identify which interventions are appropriate to the service user. Mental health social workers can intervene at different levels across an individual's life: individuals, their families and close relationships, and their communities and wider social relationships. Interventions at each level are focused on different aspects of an individual's life and require different sets of skills, knowledge and expertise.

Assessments should be strengths-based, recovery-oriented and systemic. Practitioners need to take the time to get to know the individual in order to identify their strengths and the goals which they wish to achieve. Routinely assessing the relationships and assets of an individual, their family and wider social context, will provide an in-depth understanding of their social

circumstances and context. Social workers need to have the skills to devise detailed care and support plans in partnership with the individual, and carer where applicable, which build on a sound understanding of legislation, advocacy, safeguarding, local community resources, human relationships and of how their role fits into the wider network of professionals.

Our partner university will develop and build on the below framework of interventions when designing the Think Ahead curriculum to ensure that participants are trained as confident practitioners at each level of intervention. While mental health social workers may not personally undertake all of these interventions, they ought to be practice-ready in many of them, and engage other practitioners with necessary expertise to ensure that the full-range of required social interventions are provided to service users.

This list is not exhaustive, but does provide the starting point from which our partner university and host organisations should work together to help us design an effective training programme rooted in an innovative curriculum.

**a) Interventions at the ‘individual’ level**

- Fundamental generic social work skills, which aim to meet fundamental human needs; for example, supporting an individual to claim the benefits they are entitled to and improving housing conditions have a positive impact on mental health
- Working with individuals to help them set goals and work towards them, such as motivational interviewing and solution-focused therapy
- Leadership of adult safeguarding, including positive risk-taking where appropriate
- Action planning and co-productive working with individuals to help them take control of their own recovery and manage their own mental health, such as through Wellness Recovery Action Planning (WRAP)
- Aiding self-management through personal budgets
- Making use of evidence-informed social interventions such as supported employment programmes, even if the social worker does not deliver these themselves

**b) Interventions at the ‘family/social network’ level**

- Working with the people surrounding the individual, to help them build and maintain social relationships and supportive networks that can be accessed during episodes of mental distress and their aftermath
- Assisting the individual in the process of identifying this group by drawing an ‘eco-map’ during initial assessments
- Working with couples where one has a mental health problem, together with the complexities of being labelled a ‘carer’
- Utilising emerging systemic practices, such as family group conferences or the ‘open dialogue approaches’<sup>1</sup> which see an individual’s family or close social group as assets in that person’s recovery

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<sup>1</sup> Open Dialogue is a model of crisis care used in Finland, and which is currently being trialled in the UK. The open dialogue approach involves practitioners trained in family therapy working with an individual’s family or network when they are in crisis. This approach also involves working with the local community so that everyone in contact with that person is involved in discussions about their care and support, where it is

## c) Interventions at the 'community' level

- Building 'social capital' beyond the immediate social networks, supporting individuals to develop more resourceful networks based on healthy relationships
- Enhancing the community integration and social participation of individuals by implementing interventions which use asset-based approaches, support the development of social skills, and find community resources to enhance an individual's community participation
- Community capacity building, with a good knowledge of local community networks

## 1.5) Aligning service delivery with the Think Ahead vision

Think Ahead will work with host organisations to develop a job description for Think Ahead participants. This will be based on the Think Ahead vision for the future of mental health social work, and will set out the type of role that it is expected participants are enabled to undertake when on the programme.

Host organisations will therefore be required to demonstrate that their services do not operate in a way that contradicts this vision. Services should be structured so as to attach value to distinct professional expertise. For example, an effective system of needs-based assessment and triage among care coordinators, where service users are allocated to a care coordinator from the particular profession which is best suited to their needs, allows mental health social workers to add their unique value.

## 1.6) Availability of clear progression and CPD opportunities

Think Ahead presents an important opportunity for host organisations to grow their own social work workforce. Think Ahead participants will be well placed to take on leadership positions in the future, as they will have received a strong academic social work education tailored specifically to mental health, will have gained two years of high-quality practice experience, will have been exposed to thinking about how to make integrated community mental health services work more effectively, and will have received tailored leadership training as part of the programme.

Participants will be highly ambitious, with the motivation to improve the lives of vulnerable people by transforming services. They will, therefore, also be well placed to go on to become Approved Mental Health Professionals (AMHPs) and Best Interests Assessors (BIAs). Both of these workforces are known to be ageing nationally, with demand to fill these roles expected to increase due to recent legal rulings.<sup>2</sup> Think Ahead therefore presents an opportunity for host

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appropriate to do so. It has been found to reduce hospitalization and the use of neuroleptic medication, and is also suggested to be associated with a reduced incidence of psychosis. Mental health social workers are ideally placed to lead its introduction into NHS Mental Health Trusts in the UK.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.communitycare.co.uk/2014/03/19/supreme-court-ruling-heralds-sharp-rise-deprivation-liberty-safeguards-cases/>

organisations to improve the quality and quantity of these areas of their workforce, and secure this improvement for future years.

Although host organisations will only make a formal commitment to host participants for the duration of the two-year programme, they are required to clearly set out possible career trajectories for mental health social workers, and to provide adequate opportunities for career progression and professional development for participants after completion of the programme.

Research suggests that retention should not be a major cause for concern for a fast-track programme such as Think Ahead. From the experience of Teach First, a similar programme for teaching, it is clear that an emphasis on graduates being free to leave the profession after completing the programme is an important recruitment tool, but not one that actually translates into poor retention rates.<sup>3</sup> Two-thirds of Teach First participants remain employed in teaching for at least one year beyond their completion of the two-year programme – which is 5 percentage points higher than comparable figures for teachers in maintained schools who trained via the traditional PGCE route. In terms of long-term retention, 57 per cent of those who started their training in standard postgraduate routes are still in teaching five years later, similar to the 54 per cent of Teach First participants who remain in teaching in the long-term.<sup>4</sup>

The main driver of retention rates in social work will be the support available to new entrants in their first few years in the job, rather than the way in which they are recruited into the profession. Given the high quality of Think Ahead participants, host organisations will no doubt want successful participants to remain with them after they have completed the programme. Our focus groups with graduates have suggested, however, that if participants cannot see clear opportunities for meaningful progression, they are unlikely to be motivated to remain in the host organisation.

## **1.7) Strong social work leadership and appropriate organisational culture**

A culture in which social work is valued, and where social workers occupy leadership positions, is an important prerequisite to the success of the Think Ahead programme and its participants. With participants set to be among many other (non-social work) professionals within multidisciplinary teams, it is vital that they have strong professional support, management and direction throughout the host organisation.

Applications are required to demonstrate the presence of both strong social work leadership and a wider organisational culture which values the social work contribution and social models of care.

## **1.8) Evaluation**

The evaluation of the Think Ahead Programme is key to its future. In order to ensure progress is being made towards delivering the Think Ahead vision, clear assessment of the effectiveness of the programme will be required. Successful evaluation will lead to ongoing funding and

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.ippr.org/assets/media/publications/pdf/ThinkAhead\\_May2014.pdf](http://www.ippr.org/assets/media/publications/pdf/ThinkAhead_May2014.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmeduc/1515/1515we31.htm>



expansion of the programme. Think Ahead will develop a final set of goals and key performance indicators around which to base the evaluation.

A robust evaluation of the Think Ahead programme will provide more clarity about what works in mental health social work by evidencing outcomes and developing a stronger research base. Host organisations will be expected to contribute information to allow for such an evaluation to take place, and it is hoped that they will be the foremost beneficiaries of the new approaches developed.

### **1.9) Contingency planning**

There are a number of ways in which it will be possible for difficulties to emerge during the delivery of the Think Ahead programme. For example, participants may choose to leave the programme before completion, or Section 75 agreements may be discontinued while participants are working within integrated teams. Think Ahead will set out contingency planning for such eventualities for the duration of partnership agreements with host organisations.

## **2) Prior to Year One**

### **2.1) Selection of host organisations**

Think Ahead will choose whether to partner with organisations based on their ability to meet the criteria described throughout this document (see Section 6) and their commitment to the Think Ahead vision for mental health social work.

We will also take into account the geographical locations of organisations, as we will be seeking to create a small number of regional clusters, each containing several high-quality host organisations. Decisions on where to locate these clusters will be based, in part, on our continuing research in to the preferences of graduates and career changers. Although Think Ahead will focus on working within a small number of regional clusters in the programme's early years, we do aim to expand outwards in order to deliver future cohorts.

### **2.2) Development of curriculum and practice placements**

Think Ahead will use a radically new way of training its participants in order to ensure that they rapidly acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to perform their role, and that they are ready for qualified practice at the end of Year One. Together with our partner university, and informed closely by service users, Think Ahead will devise an excellent curriculum which blends a focus on mental health with a grounding in generic social work skills. The curriculum will teach a key set of evidence-based interventions, alongside fundamental theory and relevant law.

The programme will bring together theory, research and practice. The academic learning and placement experience will be mutually reinforcing to ensure students receive a consistent education which develops sufficient levels of practice ability and confidence.

Placement design will therefore require collaboration between our partner university, the Think Ahead team and host organisations. This will take place following the completion of partnership agreements with host organisations, and will cement how the newly-designed social work curriculum will fuse with the year-long practice placement in Year One. Think Ahead's partner university is currently being selected via a formal procurement process, and is to be announced in April 2015.

Both the academic curriculum and the practice placements will be required to gain accreditation from the Health & Care Professions Council (HCPC), in order for participants to be able to qualify as professional social workers through the Think Ahead programme. It is therefore vital that host organisations work with Think Ahead and our partner university to ensure that the placement design satisfies the HCPC's standards. This design phase must be completed by October 2015.

### **2.3) Selection of participants**

Think Ahead participants will be recruited via a rigorous selection process.

Think Ahead aims to attract high-performing graduates and career changers into mental health social work. Evidence from the Think Ahead research report conducted by IPPR shows that Local Authorities currently observe many newly qualified social workers to be lacking in areas such as analytical ability, leadership and critical thinking.

These skills will be required in addition to the full range of attributes necessary to be an effective social worker – such as communication skills, the ability to relate to a wide range of different people, empathy, resilience, compassion, confidence, and reflectiveness. Think Ahead is developing a full list of core competencies with the help of a ‘Professionals Network’ of mental health social workers.

Applicants will be required to undertake a rigorous assessment centre during which they will be tested for the full range of attributes necessary to be a successful Think Ahead participant. Only the very best applicants will be selected for the programme. Host organisations are assured of the rigour and robustness of the assessment process and selection criteria, and how professionals will continue to be engaged during this process.

The first cohort of successful applicants will have been identified by Think Ahead early in 2016.

## **2.4) Allocation of participants to host organisations**

Following the final decision on the makeup of Cohort One, there will be a process whereby participants are allocated to each of our host organisations. This process will be co-ordinated centrally by Think Ahead. Every effort will be made to ensure that this process is transparent and takes into account as far as possible the preferences of participants and host organisations. Host organisations will be given the opportunity to work with Think Ahead to develop and refine this process.

## **2.5) Selection of Consultant Social Workers**

The Think Ahead programme requires a new type of Consultant Social Worker (CSW) role to be developed, in order to provide day-to-day supervision and professional guidance to participants. The CSWs are a vital part of the programme.

Host organisations will be required to create one CSW post per unit of four participants. The CSW role is intended for highly-capable social workers, and is a CPD opportunity for ambitious practitioners with a desire to guide the learning of new generations of mental health social workers. They must have a strong belief in the Think Ahead vision for improving the profession, and want to progress their careers while retaining a caseload.

The CSW post will be full-time, and cannot be combined with a pre-existing role. CSWs will be required to supervise, and share their existing caseload with, a single ‘unit’ consisting of four Think Ahead participants (see 3.1). They will play a pivotal role in ensuring that participants develop the necessary levels of practice skill, and are able to relate this to their theoretical understanding of key social work interventions.

CSWs are required to work only with participants up to the point at which they qualify at the end of Year One. Should host organisations commit to take successive cohorts of participants, then when one cohort completes Year One, CSWs will immediately begin working with the following cohort as they enter Year One (see 4.3).

It is expected that the CSWs will receive an enhanced payment as a result of taking on the new role, in order to bring their salary up to the level required for a CSW. This will be funded by Think Ahead via the 'per participant funding' allocated to the host organisation (see 3.4).

A full job description for the CSW role will be developed by Think Ahead in conjunction with host organisations and our partner university. This will create an additional career progression opportunity for mental health social workers in integrated community mental health services, who will go on to become a new cadre of high-quality trainers.

Choosing the right CSWs will be critical to the effectiveness of the unit model and the success of the programme, and consequently the process will be undertaken jointly by the host organisation and Think Ahead. In general, we expect host organisations to appoint CSWs from their existing workforce, as we foresee the role as an excellent development opportunity for promising social work staff. However, should host organisations have any difficulty identifying suitable candidates, we would explore options for external appointments. If no suitable candidate can be found for the role of CSW (either internally or externally) we will not place participants within that host organisation.

Host organisations will be required to have shortlisted suitable candidates for CSW positions by January 2016.

## **2.6) Training of Consultant Social Workers**

Following their appointment, CSWs will be required to undertake an intensive, specialised training programme before taking up their posts in September 2016. This training programme will be designed, delivered and funded by Think Ahead and will ensure that CSWs are aligned with the mission of the programme and that they are equipped with the skills they need to succeed in such a specialised role. Particular focus will be placed on training CSWs to continuously link the Think Ahead curriculum to participants' practical experience. It is anticipated that CSWs will receive approximately four weeks of training prior to taking up the role.

## **2.7) Pre-Placement Programme (PPP)**

Participants will undertake a pre-placement programme in the summer prior to beginning their year-long practice placement in September. This will last for 4-6 weeks, and will be based in a residential classroom setting. Here, participants' training will focus on the theoretical foundations of the Think Ahead social work curriculum, and will also include a number of leadership development days. The PPP will be intensive, and will:

- Give participants a broad understanding of the skills and knowledge they need to be an effective mental health social worker

- Build a sense of being part of a cohort and start to generate peer support
- Instil in participants the sense of being part of an important social mission

The PPP will be delivered by Think Ahead in conjunction with our partner university.

Participants will not be paid a salary during the pre-placement programme, but all residential/living costs will be met.

## 2.8) Summary - Roles and responsibilities prior to Year One

### *Think Ahead / Partner University*

- Selecting host organisations
- Developing the curriculum
- Recruiting participants and allocating them to host organisations
- Selecting Consultant Social Workers alongside host organisations
- Training Consultant Social Workers
- Designing Pre-Placement Programme
- Delivering Pre-Placement Programme

### *Host Organisation*

- Completing application to partner with Think Ahead, including sign-off from both senior leadership
- Liaising and negotiating with Think Ahead to reach a partnership agreement to host a specified number of participants in Cohort One
- Providing input on placement design and how this will relate to curriculum development, in order that the Think Ahead programme receives accreditation from the Health & Care Professions Council (HCPC)
- Recruiting Consultant Social Workers alongside Think Ahead
- Releasing Consultant Social Workers in order that they are able to complete their training before taking on the new post
- Ensuring that additional practice settings (see 3.2) are set up in order to receive and supervise participants
- Aligning service delivery with the Think Ahead vision, and undertaking small service/structural alterations in preparation for setting up the unit(s) in Year One
- Being open to adopt new ways of working in delivering mental health services, which utilise innovative approaches such as those comprising 'open dialogue'
- Setting out clear progression and CPD opportunities for Think Ahead participants (and social workers more generally)

## 3) Year One

### 3.1) Placement Design

Given the belief in integrated working which lies at the heart of Think Ahead, participants must be based in integrated community mental health settings during the year-long practice placement in Year One.

Think Ahead participants will begin their placement in host organisations just a few weeks after first being exposed to social work theory. This means that placements need to be designed so as to provide participants with maximum support. For Think Ahead to be a truly transformative educational experience, academic teaching and practical training experiences must be seamlessly and continuously linked in a challenging yet risk-managed environment.

The Think Ahead placement model will see participants organised into 'units' of four. Each unit will be overseen and supervised by a Consultant Social Worker (CSW).

The CSW will be a practicing social worker who has a caseload that they share with the four participants comprising the unit. As the placement progresses, the CSW will gradually share more of their caseload with the participants, increasing participants' level of responsibility and independence. This model of support and supervision will provide participants with the requisite oversight and support.

Unlike the traditional Practice Educator model, the CSW will have the capacity to co-work cases with the Think Ahead participants throughout Year One. The CSW will ensure that the unit as a whole receives an appropriately complex and diverse caseload – sufficient to challenge but not overwhelm participants.

The unit model provides participants with opportunities for peer support, joint reflection and learning, and very high-quality supervision. An average Community Mental Health Team (CMHT) will contain 3-4 mental health social workers. However, as the size of these teams can vary dramatically, so too can the number of social workers within them, both within and across Trusts. Given this, it may not always be suitable to inject a unit of four Think Ahead participants into a single team, as it could distort the team's dynamic and composition.

The Think Ahead participant unit will, therefore, be likely in many cases to exist outside of any particular multidisciplinary team within an integrated community mental health services structure. This will mean that participants are able to gain experience of working across more than one team, and thus are able to experience working with more than one service user group during Year One (as required by HCPC).

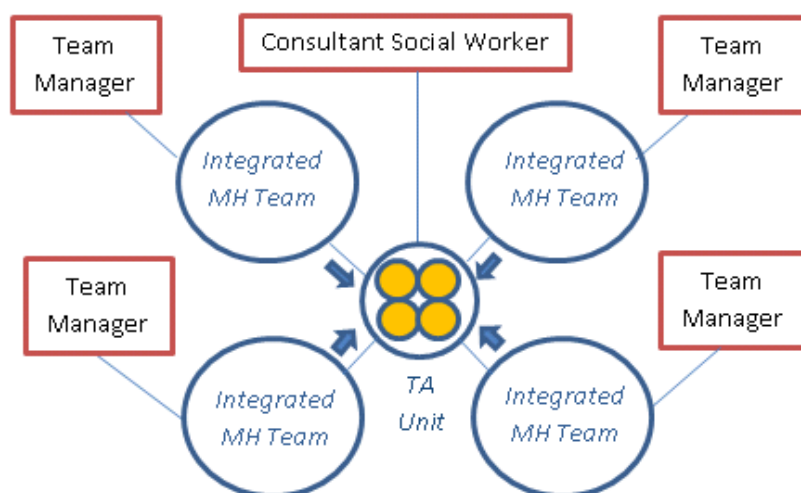
Figure 1 sets out the preferred placement model, according to which units will 'float' outside of a rigid team structure. Host organisations do retain the option on how to implement and deliver the placement model locally. There are a number of non-negotiable components of the placement design, which host organisations must ensure are illustrated in their application:

- Units are comprised of four participants, overseen by a single CSW
- Participants are based predominantly in integrated community mental health services

- Participants are not isolated from one another and so do not lose opportunities for peer support and joint reflection

Host organisations will, however, have the option to set out how they will implement this model locally. Figure 1 and the description below sets out our preferred model. Applications should set out the extent to which this is feasible locally, whether slight amendments will be necessary, and what these amendments will look like in practice. Any proposed amendments must reflect the non-negotiable components listed above.

Preferably, a number of integrated teams will be able to ‘feed’ cases in to the unit, to be worked through together by the participants and CSW. The unit will therefore benefit from having a diverse caseload that draws upon service user groups in a range of contexts, and with a range of different mental health needs. This will require the CSW to have sufficient knowledge of the range of service user groups that these teams work with. Participants will also benefit from interacting with colleagues (both social workers and medical colleagues) from a number of different teams, allowing them to develop a broad base of practice skill and social work knowledge.



**Figure 1: Participant Unit Model**

The model in figure 1 is advantageous as all four participants are enabled to maintain constant contact with one another, and the unit is not ‘diluted’ into smaller combinations of participants.

Should host organisations be able to demonstrate why the above model is not workable locally, they will have the opportunity in their applications to set out feasible alternatives, so long as they retain the core principles of the model. Applications which propose splitting the unit, with participants based in different teams, are unlikely to be considered as participants would lose opportunities for peer support and join-learning.

## 3.2) Additional practice settings

Although participants will spend the majority of their time working within community-based mental health settings, they will also benefit from being exposed to other practice settings in order to ensure that participants get an excellent grounding in social work.

Host organisations are expected to offer participants exposure to additional settings for a short number of weeks during Year One. The exact nature of these settings will be determined on a case-by-case basis, and host organisations are expected to set out early ideas as to their preferences during the application process. Additional settings which will help participants to gain exposure to a range of service user groups in which mental ill-health plays a part might include the following:

- Older people / dementia
- Forensic mental health
- Adult social care

Host organisations are required to set out the strength of their relationships with any voluntary sector organisations that may be able to host participants during Year One.

In addition to the above list, participants may be required to gain experience of working outside of 'adult' social work settings. Their social work education will be required to be sufficiently generic in order for the programme to be approved by HCPC. It is therefore a possibility that participants may be required to spend time during Year One in settings such as Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) or 'children and families' social work teams based at the Local Authority.

The balance between time spent on 'core' placement in community settings and additional practice settings is yet to be determined. A number of options are available at present, such as participants spending one day per week in an additional practice setting, or participants spending two two-month 'blocks' in additional practice settings following a seven-month block in integrated community settings. Applications should set out how host organisations would prefer to implement this model locally.

## 3.3) Supervision during time in additional practice settings

It is likely that participants will not receive day-to-day supervision from CSWs when operating outside of community mental health services during Year One. In additional settings, participants will be allocated an experienced member of social work staff to supervise their workload and practice development. The CSW will, however, retain responsibilities to provide professional oversight during this time, and ensure that the learning experience remains of a high quality.

Again, the model allows for flexibility as to when participants spend time in additional settings. It may be that they are based in additional practice settings 'one at a time' in order to ensure that the CSW is always working with at least three members of the unit at all times, and so is able to maintain a consistency in caseload. Alternatively, participants may all go out to additional practice settings simultaneously, in which case the CSW's day-to-day supervisory



duties will be reduced and they will continue to work through their caseload independently of the unit. Applications should set out how host organisations would prefer to implement this model locally.

Participants' additional supervisors must be identified prior to Year One commencing. Additional supervisors must be of a suitably high quality to ensure participants' learning experience remains of the level expected.

### **3.4) Funding**

In Year One, participants will receive a bursary, centrally funded by Think Ahead. Day-to-day expenses incurred by host organisations during delivery of the programme must be met by them. However, Think Ahead will pay host organisations per-participant funding in the region of £7,000 over the course of the two-year programme, which it is expected will be used to reduce the costs and also to fund any possible increase in the salary of consultant social workers.

### **3.5) Relationships between participants and non-Think Ahead colleagues**

The CSW will be responsible for ensuring that Think Ahead participants integrate themselves fully with other social workers within the host organisation, creating regular opportunities for participants to experience other working environments and to shadow other mental health and social work staff.

Should the host organisation manage the Think Ahead programme effectively, then our consultation with Trusts and Local Authorities has suggested that it has the potential to contribute to a significant increase in morale among the wider social work workforce. Think Ahead participants and non-Think Ahead colleagues must be encouraged to forge strong working relationships in order for Think Ahead to become compatible with host organisations' wider workforce development strategies.

### **3.6) Further teaching days**

For the duration of Year One, participants will undergo further days of tuition (exact number to be determined, but anticipated to be between twenty and thirty-five), to be delivered in such a way as to cause minimum impact on their daily workload. This approach will allow for participants to constantly relate theory to practice.

### **3.7) Monitoring, assessment and progression**

Alongside the CSW, Think Ahead will provide a centralised Professional Support Team, consisting of a number of social work practice experts with experience of working in mental health settings. Together with our partner university and host organisations, they will develop and monitor placements across all of the host organisations in order to ensure their ongoing quality.

As Think Ahead is primarily a work-based programme, our partner university will work with the host organisations to assess participants' performance on their placement alongside delivery of the course content of the academic curriculum.

At the end of Year One, following robust assessment, participants will a Post Graduate Diploma in Social Work, enabling them to practice and become newly qualified social workers.

### **3.8) Summary - Roles and responsibilities in Year One**

#### *Think Ahead / Partner University*

- Providing bursaries to participants
- Funding all tuition costs
- Providing per participant funding to host organisations (approx. £7,000 over two years)
- Providing a Professional Support Team to support and monitor both participants and Consultant Social Workers, and the wider host organisation, in delivering practice placements
- Delivering further tuition days to participants at predetermined intervals throughout the year
- Assessing participants' learning and performance, in conjunction with Consultant Social Workers

#### *Host Organisation*

- Delivering high-quality practice placements in integrated community mental health services, as designed and agreed prior to Year One
- Ensuring that participants receive high-quality exposure to predetermined additional practice settings, and that supervision when in these settings is to expected standard
- Providing adequate assessment of participants to allow our partner university to accredit successful participants with a PG Dip in Social Work at the end of Year One
- Taking steps to ensure that the wider workforce understand the Think Ahead programme, and that relationships between participants and non-Think Ahead colleagues are strong
- Releasing participants for further teaching days at predetermined intervals throughout the year
- Maintaining strong relationships between NHS Mental Health Trust and Local Authority

## **4) Year Two**

### **4.1) Master's Degree in Social Work**

Participants will complete an MA in Social Work during Year Two, alongside the daily workload of managing their own caseload as newly qualified social workers on the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) programme. Our partner university will develop the curriculum and course content for this part of the programme. It may be that participants are required to focus on conducting original research, or develop extensive knowledge of a particular practice skill, for example.

Our partner university will organise a number of further teaching days throughout Year Two which will be set aside for participants to focus on completion of their Master's Degree in Social Work. There will be opportunities for participants to meet with tutors throughout the year to discuss their academic progress with an expert in the relevant field. These will be of a frequency intended to cause minimal disruption to participants' workloads within the host organisation.

### **4.2) Participants become employed as newly qualified social workers**

Participants will begin Year Two as newly qualified social workers, at which point they will transfer from their participant unit to a team within the host organisation. It is at this point that responsibility for paying the participants will shift from Think Ahead onto the host organisation. Each participant must be employed by the host organisation as a newly qualified social worker on the ASYE programme for the duration of Year Two.

The provision of adequate assessment and support during the ASYE programme is the responsibility of host organisations. As newly qualified social workers, participants will need time to develop and host organisations will need to support this through supervision, workload management and a professional development plan – just as would be provided for non-Think Ahead newly qualified social workers. It is possible that successful completion of the ASYE programme may contribute a certain number of credits to the Master's Degree in Social Work for Think Ahead participants. If this is the case, then our partner university will also play an important role in working with host organisations to supervise and assess participants during the ASYE.

Our consultation with Trusts and Local Authorities suggests that host organisations will benefit from providing continuity between Years One and Two. If the settings and roles in each of these years are sufficiently similar, then participants will benefit from possessing a solid understanding of the systems, practices and people within their host organisation, ensuring they are able to hit the ground running in Year Two.

Nevertheless, in Year Two host organisations do have a greater degree of discretion as to which teams and services they choose to base participants in, although participants' roles must align with the Think Ahead vision for mental health social work (see 1.1). Year Two roles must also be suitable for completion of the ASYE programme, during which participants will take on appropriately-sized caseloads of their own.

Applications should set out the roles in which host organisations intend to employ participants in Year Two. Host organisations must provide assurances that roles in Year Two will permit participants to utilise the training developed in Year One, allow time to study for the Master's Degree, and deliver a specific set of evidence-based social work interventions during practice.

Think Ahead does not stipulate whether participants should be employed by the Trust or Local Authority in Year Two, although applications will be required to clearly set out how host organisations intend to employ participants, and to provide information on local accountability arrangements (whether any secondment arrangements will be put in place, for example).

### **4.3) Supervision arrangements**

It is not a requirement that participants continue to be supervised by the CSW in Year Two. Should host organisations commit to take successive cohorts of participants, then the CSW will continually supervise each cohort of 'Year One' participants. However, for those host organisations who do not take successive cohorts of participants, they will have the option to utilise the CSW to supervise participants in Year Two also. Either way, participants' day-to-day supervision and management will be provided by team managers and social work supervisors in the teams in which they are based.

Think Ahead's Professional Support Team will provide an additional source of support to participants in Year Two. Regular contact will ensure that participants' learning experience is progressing as intended, and that they are coping with the demands of an ASYE-sized caseload alongside working towards completing a Master's degree.

### **4.4) Assessment and completion**

Our partner university will be responsible for all assessment relating to completion of the Master's Degree in Social Work. Participants' supervisors will be responsible for assessment relating to completion of the ASYE programme.

Successful applicants will complete the Think Ahead programme at the end of Year Two, having received a PG Dip and Master's Degree in Social Work, and having completed the ASYE programme after receiving two years of high-quality practical experience of practicing social work in mental health settings.

At this point participants' contracts of employment with host organisations will end. There will be no obligation on participants to remain with the host organisation and, similarly, there will be no obligation on host organisations to offer participants permanent roles. However, due to the high-quality of participants and their expected commitment towards pursuing a career in mental health social work, it is our ambition that both participant and host organisation choose to continue their relationship beyond completion of the programme.

#### **4.5) Summary - Roles and responsibilities in Year Two**

##### *Think Ahead*

- Funding all tuition costs
- Providing per participant funding to host organisations (approx. £7,000 over two years)
- Providing a Professional Support Team to support and monitor participants' learning and performance
- Delivering further tuition days to participants, alongside our partner university, at predetermined intervals throughout the year

##### *Host Organisation*

- Employing participants as newly qualified social workers on the appropriate salary, each with an ASYE-sized caseload
- Employing participants in roles which align with the Think Ahead vision for mental health social work, and which enable them to utilise their training
- Ensuring that supervision and management is of a high quality, and supports the ongoing professional development of participants
- Supervising, supporting and assessing participants through the ASYE programme
- Assisting with practice-based assessment to allow our partner university to accredit successful participants with a Master's Degree in Social Work at the end of Year Two
- Taking steps to ensure that the wider workforce understands the Think Ahead programme, and that relationships between participants and non-Think Ahead colleagues are good
- Setting out clear progression opportunities to encourage participants to remain with the host organisation after completing the programme
- Releasing participants for further teaching days at predetermined intervals throughout the year
- Maintaining strong relationships between NHS Mental Health Trust and Local Authority

## 5) Summary of Financial Implications of Partnership

- Host organisations will receive financial support for hosting participants. This will be in the region of £7,000 per participant, split across Years One and Two (exact amount to be confirmed)
- Host organisations will be required to employ all participants as newly qualified social workers with ASYE-equivalent salaries in Year Two (on a one-year fixed term contract)
- Host organisations will be required to employ one Consultant Social Worker per Think Ahead unit (of four participants), with the expectation that they receive an enhanced payment in order that their salary reaches that of 'team manager' level (funded as a portion of the per participant funding allocated by Think Ahead)
- Host organisations will be required to release Consultant Social Worker for a training programme (approximate length of four weeks) prior to them taking on their new role

## 6) Application to Host Think Ahead Participants

Interested NHS Mental Health Trusts and Local Authorities are required to submit an application, clearly setting out how they satisfy each of the criteria listed below and providing sufficient levels of detail.

**The deadline for submission of applications is midnight on April 6<sup>th</sup> 2015.**

The completed [application form](#) should be sent by email to Kate O'Regan and Craig Thorley, who are also available to answer any questions or queries prior to the deadline.

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