



Department
for Education

Consultation on knowledge and skills statement: achieving permanence

Government response

November 2016

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Foreword from the Chief Social Worker

I am delighted with the level of interest in this consultation and I am grateful for the thoughtful and constructive responses we have received.

I would like to thank everyone who has taken the time to help shape and test the content of this statement, through participating in pre-consultation conversations and responding to the formal consultation document online.

This statement will be used to form the basis of a continuous professional development (CPD) programme on achieving permanence and it is crucial that the content reflects everything a child and family social worker must know and be able to do in order to successfully undertake permanence planning. Achieving permanence for children is a key goal for child and family social work as we know from evidence that stability and sense of belonging is a key indicator for future positive life chances, and for those who have experienced abuse and neglect, necessary for the best chance of recovery. It is right that we set out the standards for undertaking this work in a knowledge and skills statement.

The publication of this statement represents a key milestone toward the development of a permanence CPD programme. The CPD offer is important in promoting depth of practice in this key area of child and family social work and for building confidence in the workforce.

I look forward to the publication of this statement and the continuation of work to develop the permanence CPD programme.

Isabelle Trowler, Chief Social Worker for Children and Families, England

Introduction

From 4 July to 9 September 2016, the Department for Education ran a consultation setting out proposals to publish a knowledge and skills statement for achieving permanence for child and family social workers involved in permanence planning for children who are looked-after or on the edge of care. The purpose of this consultation was to seek views as to the effectiveness of the knowledge and skills statement as:

- a statement of what social workers need to know and be able to do in order to successfully undertake the assessment, analysis and permanence decision making we require of them, and progress permanence plans with urgency and skill; and
- a statement to inform the content of the CPD programme.

This consultation was conducted as an online public consultation exercise; respondents were asked to answer a series of questions and provide any other comments via the department's online consultation system, Citizen Space, or via email in exceptional circumstances.

Respondents provided suggestions for additions and changes to the statement which have informed the final version of the knowledge and skills statement for achieving permanence. The statement will be used to shape the content of the CPD programme on permanence for all child and family social workers.

Main consultation findings and summary of responses received

We have consulted widely with the children and families social work sector through the development stages of the knowledge and skills statement for achieving permanence. Prior to the formal Government consultation, the statement was shared with many in the sector for comment, including the Principal Social Worker Network, Cafcass, Coram-Baaf, ADCS, BASW, The Fostering Network, Adoption UK and a number of local authorities. Face to face conversations with social workers were also held at a number of local authorities. Comments from the pre-consultation were considered prior to the formal consultation where possible. Many gave further comments in the formal consultation.

A total of 99 responses, many of which were group responses, were received as part of the formal consultation.

Respondents were asked to identify which interests they represented. The below table sets out the distribution of responses received per respondent type:

Table 1: Distribution of formal consultation responses across respondent types

Respondent type	Number of responses	Percentage of total responses received
Adopter	4	4%
Foster carer	30	30%
Local authority representative ¹	33	33%
Voluntary community sector ²	13	13%
Other ³	19	19%
TOTAL	99	100%

¹ A number of local authorities, including Bracknell Forest Council, Wigan Council and Lincolnshire County Council have collated feedback from groups of front line staff and team managers.

² Includes representatives from Coram, The Children's Society, The Who Cares? Trust, The Family Rights Group, The Fostering Network, The Principal Social Work Network, Research in Practice and Barnardo's.

³ Includes student social workers, universities, judiciary and independent reviewing officers.

The consultation asked seven questions:

1. Are the five sections in the statement the right ones?
2. Are there any knowledge and skills that a child and family social worker needs to have to decide on the best permanence option for a child that are missing from section 1?
3. Are there any knowledge and skills that a child and family social worker needs to have to negotiate the legal process that are missing from section 2?
4. Are there any knowledge and skills that a child and family social worker needs to have to help a child find permanence quickly that are missing from section 3?
5. Are there any knowledge and skills that a child and family social worker needs to have to support families in transition that are missing from section 4?
6. Are there any knowledge and skills that a child and family social worker needs to have to support the placement, including managing disruption and breakdown, that are missing from section 5?
7. Which child and family social workers should the permanence CPD programme be aimed at? (*For example, newly qualified social workers, social workers newly involved in permanence work, any social worker who wants to gain depth of practice in this area and/or leaders?*)

Respondents were asked to indicate responses to questions 1 to 6 from a set list of options ('yes', 'no' or 'undecided') and were also invited to offer commentary.

Respondents were asked to indicate a response to question 7 via a free-text box only.

Main findings from the consultation

Respondents welcomed our plans to publish a knowledge and skills statement for achieving permanence. Many recognised the content of the statement as representing what child and family social workers need to know and be able to do in order to achieve permanence for children. Where respondents gave suggestions of additions or changes to the statement, some common themes emerged which are explored below.

Question analysis

Question 1

Are the five sections in the statement the right ones?

Option	Total	Percent of responses to this question	Percent of total respondents to consultation
Yes	69	71%	70%
No	15	16%	15%
Undecided	13	13%	13%
TOTAL	97	100%	98%
<i>Did not answer</i>	2	n/a	2%

Summary of narrative responses

Of those who responded to this question, 71% agreed that the five sections in the statement were the right ones, while 16% felt that the sections in the statement were not correct. 55% of those who responded to this question left comments, and many of these comments included suggestions for additions or changes along similar themes.

Many respondents felt that the use of the word 'quickly' in section 3 suggested that timeliness was more important than quality and were concerned about rushing decisions; some suggested alternative terms such as 'without undue delay' or 'with urgency'. Some felt that the use of the word 'permanence' did not reflect the child's journey and could mislead families and hold out promise; some preferred the term 'journey' or 'stability'. Other respondents felt that missing from the five sections was reference to matching tasks, multi-agency working, and values and ethics.

Question 2

Are there any knowledge and skills that a child and family social worker needs to have to decide on the best permanence option for a child that are missing from section 1?

Option	Total	Percent of responses to this question	Percent of total respondents to consultation
Yes	57	62%	58%
No	22	24%	22%
Undecided	13	14%	13%
TOTAL	92	100%	93%
<i>Did not answer</i>	7	n/a	7%

Summary of narrative responses

Of those who responded to this question, 62% felt that there were knowledge and skills missing from section 1. 76% of those who responded to the question made further comments, and many gave suggestions of additional knowledge and skills which should be included.

The most common suggestion was that social workers need to have the knowledge and skills to be able to give due consideration to the child's views, and, through effective relationship-building, be able to achieve a personal understanding of the child. Many respondents suggested the inclusion of the use of relevant research to inform decision-making.

Other suggested changes to section 1 included comments relating to the following areas:

- Multi-agency working (particularly across education and health sectors);
- Consideration of values and ethics;
- Knowledge of different permanence options available;
- Knowledge of options for re-unification with birth families; and
- Drawing on the knowledge and experience of the people caring for the child.

Question 3

Are there any knowledge and skills that a child and family social worker needs to have to negotiate the legal process that are missing from section 2?

Option	Total	Percent of responses to this question	Percent of total respondents to consultation
Yes	41	44%	42%
No	31	33%	31%
Undecided	22	23%	22%
TOTAL	94	100%	95%
<i>Did not answer</i>	5	n/a	5%

Summary of narrative responses

Of those who responded to this question, 44% felt there were knowledge and skills missing from section 2. 57% of those who responded to the question made further comments, and many gave suggestions of additional knowledge and skills which should be included.

The most common suggestion was the need for child and family social workers to have strong and up-to-date knowledge of the law and be able to respond to the changing legal climate. Many respondents suggested the inclusion of the ability to clearly communicate the legal process to children, birth parents and carers.

Other suggested changes to section 2 included comments relating to the following areas:

- Having confidence in court, including the confidence to challenge;
- Presenting clear evidence;
- Report writing skills;
- Navigation of pre-proceedings with an understanding the Public Law Outline; and
- Representing the views of the child in court.

Question 4

Are there any knowledge and skills that a child and family social worker needs to have to help a child find permanence quickly that are missing from section 3?

Option	Total	Percent of responses to this question	Percent of total respondents to consultation
Yes	47	52%	47%
No	28	31%	28%
Undecided	16	17%	16%
TOTAL	91	100%	92%
<i>Did not answer</i>	8	n/a	8%

Summary of narrative responses

Of those who responded to this question, 52% felt there were knowledge and skills missing from section 3. 69% of those who responded to the question made further comments, and many gave suggestions of additional knowledge and skills which should be included.

The most common suggestions related to the importance of consulting the network around a child, such as foster carers, birth parents and other professionals, and the importance of skills relating to making matching decisions.

Some respondents reiterated their concerns over the use of the word 'quickly' as they felt it implied timeliness was more important than quality of decisions.

Other suggested changes to section 3 included comments relating to the following areas:

- Evaluating the support needs of a child and assessing whether a placement will be able to meet these needs;
- Considering the views of the child;
- A personal knowledge of the child gained through effective relationship-building; and
- Knowledge of attachment theory, and the ability to evaluate impact of attachment disorders.

Question 5

Are there any knowledge and skills that a child and family social worker needs to have to support families in transition that are missing from section 4?

Option	Total	Percent of responses to this question	Percent of total respondents to consultation
Yes	44	49%	45%
No	30	33%	30%
Undecided	16	18%	16%
TOTAL	90	100%	91%
<i>Did not answer</i>	9	n/a	9%

Summary of narrative responses

Of those who responded to this question, 49% respondents felt there were knowledge and skills missing from section 4. 54% of those who responded to this question made further comments, and many gave suggestions of additional knowledge and skills to be included in this section.

The most common suggestion related to assessing the appropriate level of contact with previous carers for each child. Some commented that section 4 should recognise that contact can be positive. Another common suggestion was the need for social workers to be able to communicate decisions and transition plans to children and current/future carers.

Other suggested changes to section 4 included comments relating to the following areas:

- Supporting previous carers through the impact of the loss;
- Allowing time for stable transition;
- Skills in preparing life story work;
- Preparing children and carers for transition; and
- Sustaining a child's support network, including relationships with previous carers, peers and school support network.

Question 6

Are there any knowledge and skills that a child and family social worker needs to have to support the placement, including managing disruption and breakdown, that are missing from section 5?

Option	Total	Percent of responses to this question	Percent of total respondents to consultation
Yes	56	61%	57%
No	28	30%	28%
Undecided	8	9%	8%
TOTAL	92	100%	93%
<i>Did not answer</i>	7	n/a	7%

Summary of narrative responses

Of those who responded to this question, 61% felt that there were knowledge and skills missing from section 5. 69% of those who responded to this question provided further comments and many gave suggestions of additional knowledge and skills to be included in this section.

The most common suggestion was that social workers should have the knowledge and skills to provide support and advice to carers, which should continue post-placement, as well as providing advice on managing behaviour.

Other suggested changes to section 5 included comments around the following areas:

- Knowledge of interventions (including therapeutic interventions) suitable to individual children;
- Personal knowledge of the child and family in order to assess their support needs; and
- Sustaining relationships beyond breakdown.

Question 7

Which child and family social workers should the permanence CPD programme be aimed at? (*For example, newly qualified social workers, social workers newly involved in permanence work, any social worker who wants to gain depth of practice in this area and/or leaders?*)

89% of respondents answered this question. Respondents gave suggestions of which child and family social workers the permanence CPD programme should be aimed at. Many respondents felt that the CPD programme should be aimed at all child and family social workers. However, many gave specific examples of areas of social work that would benefit from CPD, including safeguarding social workers, fostering social workers, looked after children social workers, and adoption social workers.

Government Response

The responses to both pre-consultation discussions and the formal consultation have been important in shaping the knowledge and skills statement for achieving permanence.

The Government has made changes to the content of the statement as a result. Key changes made are as follows:

- The statement now reflects a greater focus on the need to listen to the child and take account of their views in decision making.
- Section 1 now reflects a greater focus on putting the child first, and drawing upon values and ethics.
- The word ‘quickly’ in Section 3 has been replaced with ‘within a timeframe which meets the child’s best interests’.
- The statement now reflects a greater focus on the importance of multi-agency working, and of drawing on the knowledge and experience of the network around the child.
- There is a stronger emphasis on ensuring that research used is relevant to the individual child’s circumstances.
- Section 2 now references the pre-proceedings phase.
- Section 4 has been re-worded so as not to favour a reduction in contact with birth family.

Many suggestions received were already included in the draft statement and where appropriate, we have strengthened reference to these knowledge and skills. Some suggestions have not been reflected in the statement either because the draft statement already adequately addresses the knowledge and skills suggested, or because the suggestion is not relevant to this statement.

The consultation also set out our proposals to develop a CPD programme on permanence for child and family workers. The consultation asked for views on which child and family social workers the programme should be aimed at. The Government has decided that the CPD programme will be aimed at all child and family social workers.

Next steps

The Government is pleased at the level of response to this consultation. We are grateful for the thoughtful contributions that people gave.

We have reflected carefully on all responses and have now published the final knowledge and skills statement for achieving permanence alongside this Government response.

The department will use the final knowledge and skills statement as the basis for a robust CPD programme to support social workers to develop and gain recognition for the knowledge and skills identified in the statement. Whilst the statement is not a curriculum document, the programme(s) we commission will use it to shape the content of courses. We set up an expert working group consisting of experts from the sector, who we have consulted to help us make key decisions on the CPD programme. We are now working to procure a supplier to develop the CPD programme and aim to award the contract in Spring 2017. We will then begin work to procure a supplier(s) to deliver the CPD programme, and we will aim for delivery to early adopters to take place from the summer 2017.



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