



Department
for Education

Confidence in practice: child and family social work assessment and accreditation system

Equality impact assessment

December 2016

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Confidence in practice: child and family social work

1. Government is committed to reforming social work practice to deliver better outcomes for children. Our ambition is to transform the quality and impact of children's social care through a focus on people and leadership, governance and accountability and systems and practice as set out in 'Putting Children First'.¹
2. Our vision is for a social work profession that has confident and highly capable child and family social workers who have been properly trained and have the knowledge and skills to perform well.
3. The Chief Social Worker has published definitive statements on the knowledge and skills that child and family social workers should have at three levels:²
 - **Child and family practitioner:** those employed in front-line social work roles.
 - **Practice supervisor:** qualified social workers whose primary function is to supervise the practice and decision-making of practitioners, and to develop the skills of individuals and teams within child and family social work services.
 - **Practice leader:** qualified social workers with the day to day operational responsibility across the whole local system for child and family social work practice, and for practitioners and practice supervisors. Often the practice leader will be referred to as the Assistant Director of Children's Social Care or Director of Family Services.
4. The statements, which were developed in consultation with social workers and others, aim to provide clarity for individuals, employers and the public about the knowledge and skills that can be expected from all child and family social workers at all levels.
5. Accreditation will bring consistent rigour to child and family social work and allow individual social workers and employers to gain a better understanding of their practice, driving conversations about support and development for the profession.
6. Over the last year we have worked with a consortium led by KPMG alongside Morning Lane Associates and the University of Leeds to develop and test different elements of an assessment as part of a proof of concept phase. Between December

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https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/554573/Putting_children_first_delivering_vision_excellent_childrens_social_care.pdf

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/knowledge-and-skills-statements-for-child-and-family-social-work>

2015 and March 2016, almost 1,000 social workers took part in this proof of concept phase.

7. The proof of concept phase established that a multi-part assessment consisting of knowledge questions, a simulated assessment and a written exercise could be delivered at scale and provide a sound way of assessing social workers' knowledge and skill against the relevant knowledge and skills statements for frontline practitioners and practice supervisors.
8. This document is an equality impact assessment, pursuant to the public sector equality duty, of the potential impact of the proposals set out in the consultation document for the new National Assessment and Accreditation System (NAAS) that can be found on GOV.UK. A separate assessment of the equality impact of the assessment for practice leaders will be produced in parallel to the development of that assessment.

The public sector equality duty

9. The Equality Act 2010 identifies the following as protected characteristics for the public sector equality duty:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- pregnancy and maternity
- race (including ethnicity)
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

10. Under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the Secretary of State is under a duty to have due regard to the need to:

- a. eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010
- b. advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it, in particular the need to:
 - remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic.
 - take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it.
 - encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.
- c. foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it, in particular the need to:
 - tackle prejudice
 - promote understanding.

Consideration of the protected characteristics identified in the Equality Act 2010

11. Our initial assessment of the policy as set out in the consultation document is that it relates to several audience groups which may have protected characteristics:
 - children
 - families; and
 - social workers.

12. Where there are risks that there may be some negative impact from this policy for people with protected characteristics, we have set out below how we plan to mitigate these.

Equalities impact on children and families

13. This policy is expected to contribute to raising standards and improving the quality of social work. It is expected to have a positive impact on all protected groups who come into contact with children's social care. As there are a greater proportion of children from black and minority ethnic backgrounds in the child protection system than in the population more generally, child and family social workers will be working with these children often. It is therefore expected that this policy will have a positive impact for black and minority ethnic children and for those with disabilities, who are by definition children in need.³

14. Social workers will be assessed against the knowledge and skills statements which set out an expectation of equality in working with children and families through taking every step to understand, and act on, individuals' needs. For example, child and family practitioners are expected to:

- build effective relationships with children, young people and families, which form the bedrock of all support and child protection responses;
- listen to the views, wishes and feelings of children and families, understanding the physical and emotional world in which they live and helping parents and carers understand and support the ways in which their children communicate;
- provide support based on best evidence, which is tailored to meet individual child and family needs, and which addresses relevant and significant risks.;
- establish the pattern of development for each child, promoting optimal development, taking account of typical age-related physical, cognitive, social, emotional and behavioural development and the influence of cultural and social factors;
- make realistic child centred plans within a review timeline, which will meet the needs of the child, ensuring sufficient multi-disciplinary input into the process at all stages; and
- seek advice, and second opinion as required, in relation to immigration, housing, welfare benefits, mental health and learning disability assessment, education and support for children with learning difficulties.

15. Practice supervisors are expected to, for example:

- build positive relationships with children and families and other professionals;
- interrogate decisions, ensuring they are underpinned by theory and the best evidence and that they will contribute to the goals of the family and their social

³ 26% of all children in need at 31 March 2016 with known ethnicity were black and minority ethnic; there were 394,000 children in need at 31 March 2016

work plan, whilst ensuring that the safety of children remains the highest priority;
and,

- facilitate use of the best evidence to devise effective interventions, which are most likely to support family welfare and reduce risk to children.

16. A child-centred approach is, of course, supported by the Children Act 1989 and by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Equalities impact on social workers

17. These reforms, together with others, are expected to improve the standard of practice and confidence of social workers across all protected groups. The assessment will provide social workers and their employers with an opportunity to understand what their areas of development are and will introduce a career pathway open to all.
18. However, we must ensure, as far as possible, that we eliminate bias in both the design and the delivery of the proposed assessment of social workers for accreditation to ensure that the assessment is a fair reflection of performance against the knowledge and skills.
19. We have tested the equality impact of the assessment for child and family social workers through the proof of concept phase, between some of the groups with protected characteristics, looking at different performance. A full report on the proof of concept work can be found on GOV.UK.

Equality issues from the proof of concept assessment

20. Of the protected characteristics that need to be considered as part of the Public Sector Equality Duty, data on performance in the proof of concept is available for gender, race and age.
21. The information that is available about those who identified themselves as having special requirements is a proxy for some social workers with a disability. Whilst there is limited information about how these candidates compared to the wider cohort, it does provide an indication of issues to address as part of the delivery contract.
22. Social workers' scores and ratings on all parts of the assessment varied widely. However, on the digital assessment only 15% of the variation could be modelled by reference to some of the factors tested (statistically significant):
 - *Ethnicity* – the 'white' group (however defined) outperformed all other groupings of ethnic categories.⁴
 - *Age* – performance generally declined between the different age bands tested, with social workers in older groups performing worse.

⁴Three different categories of the 'white' group are used throughout this report: 'White British', 'White British/Irish' and 'White All' (where 'White All' includes 'White British', 'White Irish' and 'Other White Background')

- *Gender* – female social workers performed better in both the digital scenarios and the simulated observation, but there was no difference in the general and applied knowledge.
- *Service area* – social workers in specialist teams performed less well
- *Ofsted rating of employer* – social workers in employers rated as ‘inadequate’ performed less well.⁵

23. The analysis below is drawn from that produced in the proof of concept report. Numbers account for all those who sat the assessment. However, the results section only includes those who completed that particular section. For the scenarios in the digital part of the assessment, only those completing all scenarios were considered.

Gender – child and family practitioners

24. The table below gives the results for child and family practitioners for the digital aspects of the assessment, by gender. Of those sitting the digital assessment, there were 620 social workers declaring themselves as female and 131 as male, 11 preferring not to say.

	General knowledge (% scored)	Applied knowledge (% scored)	Scenarios (% scored)
Female	66.6	63.6	74.2
Male	65.9	64.5	72.9

25. The analysis of the results of the digital assessment shows that the differences in the general knowledge and the applied knowledge are not statistically significant. The differences in the scenarios are statistically significant. The scenarios will not be included in the final assessment for rollout.

26. With regard to the simulated observation, women perform better, with an average of 21.2 (60.4%), than their male counterparts, with an average of 18.9 (53.9%). All simulated observations were marked out of 35. Of those scored, there were 127 social workers taking the simulated observation declaring themselves as female and 32 as male, with 2 preferring not to say. Although women outperform men the results are, according to the KPMG analysis, highly sensitive to three underperforming men.

Gender – practice supervisors

27. The table below shows the outcomes of the different elements of the digital assessment for practice supervisors by gender. The differences in results on the

⁵ Please refer to section C1.2.1 of the proof of concept document for the assessment and accreditation of child and family social workers on GOV.UK

general knowledge and the scenarios are not statistically significant. The differences in applied knowledge are only marginally statistically significant but small. Of those sitting the digital assessment, there were 151 practice supervisors that declared themselves as female and 40 as male and one preferred not to say.

	General knowledge (% scored)	Applied knowledge (% scored)	Scenarios (% scored)
Female	69.2	83.0	74.5
Male	69.3	80.3	73.5

28. With regard to the simulated observation, women perform better, with an average of 23.0 (65.8%), than their male counterparts, with an average of 22.1 (63.0%). This difference is not statistically significant. There were 28 practice supervisors taking part in the simulated observation declaring themselves as female and 15 as male.

Ethnicity – child and family practitioners

29. The table below gives the results for child and family practitioners by ethnicity. For all categories of the digital assessment, the ‘white’ category outperformed the black and minority ethnic (BAME) group. All these differences are statistically significant. Of those sitting the digital assessment, there were 521 social workers taking the digital assessment declaring themselves as ‘white’ (white British, white Irish, any other white background) and 200 declaring themselves in any of the other ethnic group categories. 41 preferred not to say/unknown.

	General knowledge (% scored)	Applied knowledge (% scored)	Scenarios (% scored)
White	67.6	66.1	75.3
BAME	63.9	57.5	70.3

30. In simulated observation white social workers scored an average of 21.5 (61.4%), with BAME social workers scoring an average of 19.1 (54.6%). These differences are statistically highly significant. Of those scored, there were 109 social workers taking the simulated observation declaring themselves as ‘white’ and 44 declaring themselves in any of the other categories, with 8 preferring not to say/unknown.

Ethnicity – practice supervisors

31. The table below gives the results for practice supervisors by ethnicity. For all categories of the digital assessment, the ‘white’ category outperformed the black and minority ethnic (BAME) group. All these differences are statistically significant. Of those sitting the digital assessment, there were 135 social workers taking the digital assessment declaring themselves as ‘white’ (White British, White Irish, Any other White background) and 42 declaring themselves in any of the other ethnic group categories, with 15 preferring not to say/unknown.

	General knowledge (% scored)	Applied knowledge (% scored)	Scenarios (% scored)
White	70.2	82.8	75.0
BAME	67.5	81.8	71.9

32. In simulated observation ethnicity was not a significant factor affecting the results. Social workers who identified themselves as 'white' scored an average of 23.3 (66.6%), with BAME social workers scoring an average of 22.2 (63.4%). Of those scored, there were only 11 BAME supervisors and 29 white supervisors taking the simulated observation and 3 not declaring their ethnicity.

Age – child and family practitioners

33. The table below shows the differences in results by age. The differences are all statistically significant, with the difference in general knowledge and scenarios highly significant. We are dropping the scenarios from the final assessment because they did not accurately identify good and poor performance. Of those sitting the digital assessment, 535 social workers were under 50, with 182 being over the age of 50. There were 45 social workers not declaring their age.

34. In general, older social workers performed less well. However, the results for general knowledge and applied knowledge suggest that those 60 and older performed better than some of the younger groups. This could be due to the small number in that age band compared to those in the 50 to 59 band (32 and 150 respectively) and the analysis shows a higher variability in the results for the 60+ group.

	General knowledge (% scored)	Applied knowledge (% scored)	Scenarios (% scored)
20 to 29 years old	68.4	65.8	76.3
30 to 39 years old	68.3	64.1	75.2
40 to 49 years old	65.8	63.1	73.1
50 to 59 years old	63.2	61.5	71.6
60 years old and over	65.1	65.1	70.4

35. The results for the simulated observation for child and family practitioners of different ages are not quite statistically significant. Social workers under 50 scored an average of 21.5 (61.4%), with over 50 social workers scoring 19.3 (55.1%). There were 107 social workers under the age of 50 taking the assessment with 45 over the age of 50 and nine not declaring their age.

Age – practice supervisors

36. As for child and family practitioners, the table below shows the differences in results by age for practice supervisors. The differences are not statistically significant. 108

social workers were under 50, and 70 were over 50 (of which only 11 were aged 60 or older), with 14 not declaring their age.

	General knowledge (% scored)	Applied knowledge (% scored)	Scenarios (% scored)
20 to 29 years old	68.0	82.3	73.3
30 to 39 years old	72.5	83.7	74.7
40 to 49 years old	70.2	83.7	75.3
50 to 59 years old	68.0	81.6	73.5
60 years old and over	67.5	79.4	75.0

37. The difference in the results for the simulated observation for practice supervisors of different ages was found to be not statistically significant. Social workers under 50 scored an average of 23.1 (65.9%), with over 50 social workers scoring 22.8 (65.3%). There were 27 social workers under the age of 50 taking the assessment with 13 over the age of 50 and three not declaring their age.

Disability – child and family practitioners

38. During proof of concept, social workers were asked to declare any disability affecting their accessibility. This is used as a proxy for disability in this analysis. The table below shows the results from the proof of concept phase. From the proof of concept, we cannot tell whether those not declaring accessibility requirements have a disability or not. Of those sitting the digital assessment, there were 46 declaring accessibility requirements.

	General knowledge (% scored)	Applied knowledge (% scored)	Scenarios (% scored)
No accessibility requirements	66.6	63.9	74.1
Accessibility requirements	64.8	60.8	71.9

39. For simulated observation, social workers that declared accessibility requirements scored lower than those not declaring an accessibility requirement. There were eight social workers taking the assessment that declared accessibility requirements. The difference in results cannot be tested for statistical significance.

Disability – practice supervisors

40. The table below shows the results from the proof of concept phase for practice supervisors according to whether they declared any accessibility requirement or not. This is used as a proxy for disability in this analysis. The table below shows the results from the proof of concept phase. From the proof of concept, we cannot tell whether those not declaring accessibility requirements have a disability or not. There

were nine practice supervisors declaring accessibility requirements. Due to low numbers, the results cannot be tested for statistical significance.

	General knowledge (% scored)	Applied knowledge (% scored)	Scenarios (% scored)
No accessibility requirements	69.3	82.5	74.2
Accessibility requirements	67.7	81.4	76.1

Time taken to complete the assessment

41. The analysis of proof of concept data also focuses on the time to complete the various aspects of the assessment. For the knowledge section (general and applied knowledge) for child and family practitioners, ethnicity and age were identified as being highly significant. In terms of ethnicity, BAME social workers took nearly 27% longer on average than the 'White All' group and social workers who stated that English was not their first language took 21% longer than others. Also highly significant was the time taken to complete the assessment which increased with age with the 60+ group taking 29% longer than the 20-29 group. Gender however had no significant impact.
42. In the scenarios element for child and family practitioners age, ethnicity and gender were all judged to be highly significant. The time taken to complete the scenarios increased with the age of the social worker with the oldest group (60+) taking over 30% longer than the youngest group (20-29). In terms of ethnicity, BAME social workers took 6.5% longer than the 'White All' group, with social workers stating that English was not their first language taking nearly 7% longer. Female social workers had a significantly higher mean time to complete the scenarios when compared to male social workers.
43. For those child and family practitioner participants who identified themselves as having an accessibility requirement there was a significant relationship between the time taken to complete the digital assessment compared to their peers. Child and family practitioner participants with special requirements took, on average, 206 minutes to complete the digital assessment compared with an average of 182 minutes for their peers with no special requirements.
44. For practice supervisors, only ethnicity was identified as a highly significant factor in completing the knowledge section. BAME social workers took 18% longer on average than the 'White All' group and social workers who stated that English was not their first language took 15% longer than others. Gender and age had no significant impact. When it came to the scenarios element, however, in addition to ethnicity, age was also highly significant. The 'White All' took less time to complete all three scenarios compared to BAME social workers and those under 30 years of age

took less time to complete the scenarios. As with the knowledge section, gender had no significant impact.

45. It is not immediately clear which aspect of the assessment prompted the differences in performance associated with age and ethnicity. We will therefore look at all aspects of the development and delivery of the assessment to ensure that equalities considerations form part of the design and delivery from the outset, and that we continue to monitor against the protected characteristics throughout rollout.

Next steps

Overview

46. This equality impact assessment will be updated as the assessment is built and we move through rollout, with a view to maximising potential positive impact and minimising any risk of negative impact.
47. The work led by the KPMG consortium found that some groups performed less well than others. We will be forensic in our attention to detail in rooting out any likelihood of bias as we build the assessment and deliver it through rollout. We are committed to carrying out additional work on the data collected during the proof of concept phase and in particular around the discrepancies between the views of employers on individuals' performance and the assessment results in relation to protected characteristics.
48. There are three specific areas where we will take action to improve our focus on equalities: practice endorsement, assessment design and assessment delivery.

Practice endorsement

49. Practice endorsement, carried out by the employer that has experience of the social worker's practice, is the first stage of the assessment process.
50. Before a social worker takes the assessment we will ask employers to make a judgement about whether they consider that the social worker has the knowledge and skills needed to meet the expected standard, using their existing arrangements.
51. For phase one of the rollout employers will be asked to put forward social workers for assessment who:
 - are carrying out statutory functions; and
 - are considered to be performing at the standard cited in the knowledge and skills statements and therefore ready to undertake assessment.⁶
52. We will work with employers to monitor the diversity of social workers they put forward for assessment, in comparison with the demographic of social workers they

⁶ We are consulting on a list of statutory functions, we consider that child and family social workers carrying out these functions will be a priority to be assessed; see consultation at GOV.UK.

employ throughout their children's services, paying particular attention to whether older social workers and BAME social workers are proportionately represented.

53. Practice endorsement guidance will be published shortly and makes particular reference to the importance of promoting equality of opportunity and minimising disadvantages for those who hold one or more of the nine protected characteristics.

Assessment design

Overview

54. Equalities considerations are a key aspect of the procurement of the content development partner. For every part of the assessment design: knowledge, simulated and written, we are requesting that the provider addresses the issues identified during the proof of concept phase, paying particular attention to the findings in respect of age and ethnicity.
55. We will also ask them to demonstrate how there will be full consideration of how equality impact – across the nine protected characteristics – has been tested to eliminate unintended bias.

Knowledge assessment, simulated assessment and written assessment

56. As part of the knowledge assessment we have taken a decision to remove the digital scenarios, which will help reduce the amount of time required for the assessment. We will consider the time to be allowed for the assessment as it is rolled out, in light of equalities considerations for those with all nine protected characteristics and particularly older social workers and those who are BAME.
57. In respect of question development for the knowledge, simulated and written elements of the assessment we expect this to include:
 - representative groups on the question drafting panel, with a particular focus on the age of people on this group and their ethnic background;
 - representative groups in the sample of people with whom the questions are tested, again with particular attention to the age of people in this group and their ethnic background; and,
 - asking psychometricians involved in the question development to pay particular attention to reducing bias for older social workers and those from BAME backgrounds, using industry standard techniques and focussing on both the language used in these questions and the subject matter.

Assessment delivery

Overview

58. Equalities considerations are also a key aspect of the procurement of the delivery partner. They will need to demonstrate how they will address the issues identified during the proof of concept phase in respect of ethnicity and age in particular and demonstrate how equality - across the nine protected characteristics - will be promoted during delivery.
59. For example, we will work with the delivery partner to improve data collection: we will encourage candidates to provide us with protected characteristic information about themselves when taking the assessment so we have quantitative performance data that can be regularly reviewed and used to eliminate bias, as far as possible. We will also collect qualitative information about how participants experience the assessment process to identify any additional adjustments needed.
60. During implementation, we intend to monitor performance carefully against each of the protected characteristics.
61. For example, in the proof of concept phase we asked if social workers required any reasonable adjustments to the assessment and catered for those conditions, principally dyslexia, or sensory impairments. We have no evidence that the assessment discriminated against these social workers, although they took longer to complete the digital assessment. We are now removing the digital scenarios which will reduce the length of the knowledge assessment. We will ensure that for implementation the minimum specification for assessment venues and facilities must include all reasonable adjustments to cater for social workers with special requirements without reducing the integrity of the assessment.
62. We will also ask the provider to ensure that assessors are trained and receive guidance on any bespoke marking or mark scheme requirements for modified assessments.

Knowledge assessment, simulated assessment and written assessment

63. The knowledge part of the assessment is carried out digitally, with multiple choice responses and with right or wrong answers. This allows the marking of this part of the assessment to be completely neutral with no reference to the social worker's protected characteristics at all.
64. For the simulated observation, the proof of concept phase demonstrated the importance of achieving consistency in the recruitment, training and moderation process for those involved. For the simulated observation we will:

- recruit a diverse cadre of observers who reflect the underlying population;
- provide bespoke initial training for observers, including training on unconscious bias; and,
- take a video recording of each observation to validate the outcomes of the assessment and to moderate in respect of bias.

65. For the written assessment, we expect this to be marked by the same observer who carried out and marked the simulated observation. For that reason, we would also expect the above to apply.

Independent evaluation

66. The results of social workers' performance will be made available to an independent evaluator who will look at the outcomes of the rollout of the assessment and accreditation system. The evaluator will be asked to report on how well the assessment is meeting the needs of those with protected characteristics.



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Reference: DFE-00357-2016



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