



Department
for Education

Consultation on knowledge and skills for child and family social work

Government response

November 2014

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Foreword from the Chief Social Worker

I am delighted with how much interest and constructive response there has been to this consultation and from so many people. It is testament to the importance of social work in so many people's lives.

I would particularly like to thank the young people and families who have contributed, and the organisations that represent these groups. These contributions reflected so well what people need and expect from social workers. I would also like to thank the enormous contribution made by so many busy practitioners, who are already doing the job of child and family social work. This group *know better than anyone else*, what they need to be able to do, to help families and protect children.

Any government response to the consultation on the statement of knowledge and skills for child and family social work has to be set within the government's wider ambition for social work.

The statement is intended to act as a catalyst for bigger changes focused on Practice Supervision and Practice Leadership, as well as the Approved Child and Family Practitioner, as set out in the Secretary of State's recent speech in October 2014. These changes provide for the first time a foundation for a national, practice-based career pathway for social workers. This response sets out how the statement aligns with these reforms. There are key messages for social workers, employers and education providers, and the knowledge and skills statement speaks to each in different but connected ways.

Child and family social work is complex. We need it to be undertaken by talented people, proven to be so, whose expertise supports families, helps keep children safe and enables them both to thrive.

These are challenging times to be a social worker, much is expected and the focus on effectiveness is rightly sharp. There is life-saving, life enhancing social work going on all the time in the most difficult of circumstances. The statement affirms just how skilled and wise we expect our social workers to be to meet these challenges. It also clarifies what others should expect of us. It should give us, our employers and the children and families with whom we work confidence in us as professionals, in our practice, the risks we manage and the decisions we make.

I would like to thank everyone who has helped shape and test the statement through their contributions to this consultation process. I look forward to the statement's publication providing momentum for further important changes which we should embrace.

Isabelle Trowler, Chief Social Worker, England (Children and Families).

Executive Summary

From 31 July – 9 October 2014, the Department for Education ran a 10 week consultation setting out proposals to publish a knowledge and skills statement of what a child and family social worker needs to be able to do at the end of a first year of practice.

Respondents provided suggestions for additions to the statement, and the majority confirmed that the statement was set at the right level and had the right approach to the use of theories and methodologies in social work. The Chief Social Worker has reflected on all the responses and now drafted a final version.

The statement is intended to act as a catalyst for major systemic change to the training, recruitment and retention of social workers. It will inform the initial education of those studying and training to become social workers. It will also serve as the cornerstone for the development of the national assessment and accreditation system for the three levels of professional practice for child and family social workers in England, announced by the Secretary of State on 30 October.

These reforms will serve to increase the professional status and confidence of practitioners, and provide for the first time, the foundation for a national practice based career pathway for child and family social workers.

The government will now work with all key stakeholders in the social work sector (employers, HEIs, regulatory bodies, social work representative bodies, and most importantly social workers themselves), to ensure that the principles contained in the statement are successfully embedded into training and practice, alongside design and development of the assessment and accreditation processes.

Main consultation findings and summary of responses received

In July 2014 (prior to the formal consultation period) the Chief Social Worker sought the views of social workers (through collective discussions within a number of local authorities) about the scope and context of the draft statement of knowledge and skills. The views of approximately 950 child and family social workers were received by the Department.¹

A total of 104² responses were subsequently received as part of the formal consultation.

Respondents were asked to identify themselves as from the following set categories. The tables below show the distribution of responses according to category, including and excluding the pre-consultation responses:

Table 1: formal consultation responses

Respondant type	Total	Percent
Social worker	21	20%
Local authority	26	25%
University/ FE provider	10	10%
Voluntary and Community Sector*	10	10%
LA representative bodies*	3	3%
Other employers of social workers (private, voluntary and independent)	2	2%
Young person	2	2%
Other**	30	29%
TOTAL	104	100%

* Includes collective responses from charities such as NSPCC, Family Rights Group etc.

** Includes collective responses from social work practitioner groups including British Assoc. of Social Workers and The College of Social Work on behalf of their members.

¹ 45 collective responses were received from a sample of LAs, Principal Child and Family Social Work networks and the British Assoc. of Social Workers, alongside personal contributions from independent and retired social workers. Responses were considered throughout July 2014, ahead of the formal consultation launch on 31 July.

² Received during the formal consultation window (31 July – 9 October 2014).

Table 2: collated returns including pre-consultation responses

Respondant type	Total	Percent
Social worker	971	88%
Local authority	71	6%
University/ FE provider	10	1%
Voluntary and Community Sector*	10	1%
LA representative bodies**	3	0.4%
Other employers of social workers (private, voluntary and independent)	2	0.3%
Young person	2	0.3%
Other***	33	3%
TOTAL	1102	100%

*Includes collective responses from charities such as NSPCC, Family Rights Group etc.

**Includes collective response from Assoc. of Directors of Children's Services on behalf of its members

*** Includes collective responses from social work practitioner groups including British Assoc. of Social Workers and The College of Social Work on behalf of their members.

Across both the pre-consultation and formal consultation responses received, 88% of those contributing can be identified as social workers – either through collective or individual contributions.

The consultation asked three questions:

1. Is there anything else that should be included in the statement which sets out what a child and family social worker needs to know and be able to do?
2. Are there any parts of the statement which are not set at the right level for a child and family social worker to be able to know or do at the end of their first year? If so, what are they?; and
3. Whether consultees agreed that the statement shouldn't prescribe particular social work theories or methodologies.

The headline responses to those questions are broken down as follows:

Table 3: responses to question 1

Options	Total	Percent	Percentage across whole consultation ³
Yes	65	71%	63%
No	17	18%	16%
Not sure	10	11%	10%
TOTAL	92	100%	89%
Did not answer	12		11%

When asked if additional areas should be included in the statement, 63% of respondents answered yes to the question.

Table 4: responses to question 2

Options	Total	Percent	Percentage across whole consultation
Yes	35	41%	34%
No	33	39%	32%
Not sure	17	20%	16%
TOTAL	85	100%	82%
Did not answer	19		18%

³ Based on 104 responses received during formal consultation period

When asked if parts of the statement were not set at the right level to expect a child and family social worker to do after their first year, 34% answered yes to the question.

Table 5: responses to question 3

Options	Total	Percent	Percentage across whole consultation
Yes	60	70%	58%
No	14	16%	13%
Not sure	12	14%	12%
TOTAL	86	100%	82%
Did not answer	18		18%

When asked whether the statement shouldn't prescribe particular social work theories / methodologies, 58% agreed that it shouldn't.

Summary of narrative responses

In addition to answering the consultation questions from the set list of options, respondents were invited to offer commentary and 98 (94% of respondents) chose to do so.

Across question one and question two, 33% of respondents mentioned the relationship between the knowledge and skills statement and the Professional Capabilities Framework. The majority of these respondents asked for the two documents to be linked, mapped or consolidated, while some questioned the need for both documents. The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) Standards of Proficiency were also cited by some respondents as needing to be linked to the statement, as was the knowledge and skills statement for social workers in adult services.

Another theme which reoccurred in question one and two was the scope of the statement. Of those that provided narrative, 12.5 % of respondents in question one and 10.5 % of respondents to question two drew attention to the fact that the statement was mainly focussed on specific roles within statutory child and family social work, which could lead to other child and family social workers not being able to gain sufficient experience of the knowledge and skills included in the statement.

Narrative responses across all three questions included issues such as the implementation plans for the approved child and family practitioner status, student placement content and initial training content.

Question 1: themes in responses

Question one asked respondents whether there was anything else which needed to be included in the statement. Respondents who answered yes to the question mainly offered suggestions of knowledge and skills to be included in the statement. Some of the suggestions were already included in the statement (c.11%). Some of the suggestions amounted to additional detail which respondents considered ought to be included (c.60%), and some of the suggestions were knowledge and skills which were not part of the draft statement (c.28%). Changes to the statement were around the following themes:

- relationships
- participation and partnership
- entitlements
- communication
- social workers as lead professionals
- advocacy and challenge
- lead investigation role in abuse and neglect
- worker resilience and emotional impact of work
- concurrent planning
- youth justice

Question 2: level of knowledge and skill

Question two asked respondents whether the statement was set at the right level for a child and family social worker at the end of their first year in employment and to identify any areas which needed some adjustment. There was a fairly even spread between those who answered yes and those who answered no (though the narrative indicates some may have been confused as to whether they meant yes or no), and of those who said no, more considered that the statement was set at a level too high than too low. Other themes included concerns that the content of the statement should be included in initial education and that the level of knowledge and skill required should be clarified. Each section received at least one, but no more than six suggestions regarding what was considered to be an appropriate level for the content of that section.

Question 3: use of theories and methodologies

Question three asked respondents whether they agreed that specific social work theories or methodologies should not be prescribed. While at least 70% of those who answered this question said yes, only 46 (just over 50%) of those who answered the question

provided any narrative to elaborate on their answer. Reasons for saying yes included that it would allow for: theories and methodologies to change over time; local and situational context and professional judgement. Respondents also considered that there would be too many theories or methodologies than was practical to list. Where respondents answered yes and qualified their answer, they were mainly concerned that social workers needed to know which were the effective and evidence based theories, as well as which theories and methods were best applied to which situations, and how they should use them.

Of those who answered no and therefore indicated that theories and methods should be prescribed (16% of respondents who answered this question) only two identified specific theories and most were concerned that there were some key theories that underpinned practice that should be identified. Some of the respondents who answered yes to question three also suggested theories to be included in response to question one (what else needs including in the statement).

The final statement has been relatively unchanged as respondents mainly concurred with the way that the statement did not prescribe theories and methodologies. The final statement has also been revised so that the language is more active and focusses clearly on what a child and family social worker should be able to do, with knowledge and theory being mainly implicit in the statement.

Government response

Government welcomes the contribution that general social work practice makes to society, recognising the multi-faceted ways in which social work can help people.

At the same time it has become clear to government that it is important to define specifically what we should expect of social workers working with our most vulnerable children, young people and families. This derives not only from recommendations made by Sir Martin Narey in his report on the effectiveness of initial education of social workers but also from advice of the Chief Social Worker for England (Children and Families), Isabelle Trowler.

In recognition of the need to have absolute public confidence in social workers who are working with our most at risk children - children in need (Children Act 1989), children in need of protection and children in public care – we said earlier this year in July that we intend to explore a new accredited status of Approved Child and Family Practitioner (ACFP).

The final knowledge and skills statement revised by the Chief Social Worker for England (Children and Families) following this consultation describes what child and family social workers should be able to do.

Last month the Secretary of State for Education announced the government's intention to introduce assessment and accreditation at three levels. Taken together the accredited levels can be described as follows:

- Approved Child and Family Practitioner for those who are lead professionals for named children and working with them under the local authority's statutory framework (commonly referred to as "case responsibility");
- Practice supervision for those with responsibility for educating, developing and supervising social workers;
- Practice leadership for those with responsibility for social work services for children referred to in i).

This has the potential to be a watershed moment for those in or considering entering child and family social work practice. The final published statement speaks to them, their employers and the wider public. Sitting alongside our plans for a national system of assessment and accreditation, these reforms serve to increase the professional status of practitioners, their practice confidence and that of their employers and the children and families with whom they work. Child and family social work is complex. We need it to be undertaken by talented people, proven to be so, whose expertise supports families, helps keep children safe and enables them both to thrive.

The statement also serves a wider purpose. It should inform what is taught to those studying social work who intend to practise in child and family social work. This will help close the gap between study and practice that we often see as too wide in newly qualified social workers, and will equip them more effectively for the challenging work they will face in their first year and beyond. Government reforms will promote and incentivise teaching partnerships between HEIs and employers to achieve this - strengthening effective arrangements where they exist.

The response to the consultation has been important in shaping this cornerstone statement just as the input from almost 1,000 social workers has been in its formulation.

The government has made some changes to the statement as a result of the consultation. Responses on the major issues raised are as follows:

- **Scope of the statement:** The scope and purpose of the statement is focused on child and family social work.
- **Relationship with the PCF (Professional Capabilities Framework):** As stated above the knowledge and skills set out in the published statement are specific to child and family social work. The PCF is an overarching standards framework intended to be applicable to all social workers in whatever role or setting. It is not government's intention that the statement should replace the PCF.
- **Level of challenge:** Government's view is that the level of challenge is set at an appropriate level and agrees with those respondents who stated that the content of the statement should influence what is taught in qualifying programmes - a deficit highlighted by Sir Martin Narey in his report.
- **Statement content:** Account has been taken of some of the points raised. The statement now reflects a greater focus on building relationships, communication and on social workers as lead professionals. There is now also a specific focus on the practitioner's lead investigatory role in cases of abuse and neglect.
- **Issues out of scope:** Recognising the specific purpose of the statement, some of the issues raised in the consultation (social justice, diversity, disability, social work ethics) already sit in other documents presenting more generic capabilities and standards. The statement is not intended to be a replacement for these.

Finally, following the consultation the statement has a stronger focus on the practice skills required and implies rather than specifies knowledge.

Next steps

The government will work with the sector to develop effective assessment methods for each of the three levels of accreditation announced by the Secretary of State. This work will take account of the views of children and families and involve those from the private, voluntary and independent sector as well as local authorities.

The government is pleased that such a varied range of stakeholder social work organisations and social workers themselves took part in the consultation, and is grateful for the thoughtful contributions that people gave when responding to the proposed statement of knowledge and skills.

The Chief Social Worker has reflected carefully on all responses and has now formally published the definitive statement of knowledge and skills for child and family social work alongside this government response.

Knowledge and Skills Statement

A child and family social worker should be able to do the following:

1) Relationships and effective direct work

Build effective relationships with children, young people and families, which form the bedrock of all support and child protection responses. Be both authoritative and empathic and work in partnership with children, families and professionals, enabling full participation in assessment, planning, review and decision making. Ensure child protection is always privileged.

Provide support based on best evidence, which is tailored to meet individual child and family needs, and which addresses relevant and significant risks. Secure access to services, negotiating and challenging other professionals and organisations to provide the help required. Ensure children and families, including children in public care, receive the support to which they are entitled.

Support children and families in transition, including children and young people moving to and between placements, those returning home, those being adopted or moving through to independence. Help children to separate from, and sustain, multiple relationships recognising the impact of loss and change.

2) Communication

Communicate clearly and sensitively with children of different ages and abilities, their families and in a range of settings and circumstances. Use methods based on best evidence. Create immediate rapport with people not previously known which facilitates engagement and motivation to participate in child protection enquiries, assessments and services.

Act respectfully even when people are angry, hostile and resistant to change. Manage tensions between parents, carers and family members, in ways that show persistence, determination and professional confidence.

Listen to the views, wishes and feelings of children and families and help parents and carers understand the ways in which their children communicate through their behaviour. Help them to understand how they might communicate more effectively with their children.

Promote speech, language and communication support, identifying those children and adults who are experiencing difficulties expressing themselves. Produce written case notes and reports, which are well argued, focused, and jargon free. Present a clear

analysis and a sound rationale for actions as well as any conclusions reached, so that all parties are well informed.

3) Child development

Observe and talk to children in their environment including at home, at school, with parents, carers, friends and peers to help understand the physical and emotional world in which the child lives, including the quality of child and parent/carer interaction and other key relationships. Establish the pattern of development for the child, promote optimal child development and be alert to signs that may indicate that the child is not meeting key developmental milestones, has been harmed or is at risk of harm.

Take account of typical age-related physical, cognitive, social, emotional and behavioural development over time, accepting that normative developmental tasks are different for each child depending on the interaction for that child between health, environmental and genetic factors. Assess the influence of cultural and social factors on child development, the effect of different parenting styles, and the effect of loss, change and uncertainty in the development of resilience.

Explore the extent to which behavioural and emotional development may also be a result of communication difficulties, ill health or disability, adjusting practice to take account of these differences. Seek further advice from relevant professionals to fully understand a child's development and behaviour.

4) Adult mental ill health, substance misuse, domestic abuse, physical ill health and disability

Identify the impact of adult mental ill health, substance misuse, domestic abuse, physical ill health and disability on family functioning and social circumstances and in particular the effect on children, including those who are young carers. Access the help and assistance of other professionals in the identification and prevention of adult social need and risk, including mental health and learning disability assessment.

Coordinate emergency and routine services and synthesise multi-disciplinary judgements as part of ongoing social work assessment. Use a range of strategies to help families facing these difficulties.

Identify concerning adult behaviours that may indicate risk or increasing risk to children. Assess the likely impact on, and inter-relationship between, parenting and child development. Recognise and act upon escalating social needs and risks, helping to ensure that vulnerable adults are safeguarded and that a child is protected and their best interests always prioritised.

5) Abuse and neglect of children

Exchange information with partner agencies about children and adults where there is concern about the safety and welfare of children. Triangulate evidence to ensure robust conclusions are drawn. Recognise harm and the risk indicators of different forms of harm to children relating to sexual, physical, emotional abuse and neglect. Take into account the long-term effects of cumulative harm, particularly in relation to early indicators of neglect.

Consider the possibility of child sexual exploitation, grooming (on and offline), female genital mutilation and enforced marriage and the range of adult behaviours which pose a risk to children, recognising too the potential for children to be perpetrators of abuse.

Lead the investigation of allegations of significant harm to children in consultation with other professionals and practice supervisors. Draw one's own conclusions about the likelihood of, for example, sexual abuse or non-accidental injury having occurred and the extent to which any injury is consistent with the explanation offered. Commission a second professional opinion and take legal advice where necessary.

6) Child and family assessment

Carry out in-depth and ongoing family assessment of social need and risk to children, with particular emphasis on parental capacity and capability to change. Use professional curiosity and authority while maintaining a position of partnership, involving all key family members, including fathers. Acknowledge any conflict between parental and children's interests, prioritising the protection of children as set out in legislation.

Use child observation skills, genograms, ecomaps, chronologies and other evidence based tools ensuring active child and family participation in the process. Incorporate the contributions that other professional disciplines make to social work assessments.

Hold an empathic position about difficult social circumstances experienced by children and families, taking account of the relationship between poverty and social deprivation, and the effect of stress on family functioning, providing help and support. Take into account individual child and family history and how this might affect the ability of adults and children to engage with services.

Recognise and address behaviour that may indicate resistance to change, ambivalent or selective cooperation with services, and recognise when there is a need for immediate action, and what other steps can be taken to protect children.

7) Analysis, decision-making, planning and review

Establish the seriousness that different risks present and any harm already suffered by a child, balanced with family strengths and potential solutions. Set out the best options for resolving difficulties facing the family and each child, considering the risk of future harm and its consequences and the likelihood of successful change.

Prioritise children's need for emotional warmth, stability and sense of belonging, particularly those in public care, as well as identity development, health and education, ensuring active participation and positive engagement of the child and family. Test multiple hypotheses about what is happening in families and to children, using evidence and professional judgement to reach timely conclusions. Challenge any prevailing professional conclusions in the light of new evidence or practice reflection.

Make realistic, child centred, plans within a review timeline, which will manage and reduce identified risks and meet the needs of the child. Ensure sufficient multi-disciplinary input into the process at all stages. Apply twin and triple track planning to minimise chances of drift or delay, being alert to the effectiveness or otherwise of current support plans.

8) The law and the family and youth justice systems

Navigate the family and youth justice systems in England using legal powers and duties to support families, to protect children and to look after children in the public care system, including the regulatory frameworks that support the full range of permanence options. Participate in decisions about whether to make an application to the family court, the order to be applied for, and the preparation and presentation of evidence.

Seek advice and second opinion as required in relation to the wide range of legal issues which frequently face children and families involved with statutory services including immigration, housing, welfare benefits, mental health and learning disability assessment, education and support for children with learning difficulties.

Use the law, regulatory and statutory guidance to inform practice decisions. Take into account the complex relationship between professional ethics, the application of the law and the impact of social policy on both.

9) The role of supervision

Recognise one's own professional limitations and how and when to seek advice from a range of sources, including practice supervisors, senior practice leaders and other clinical practitioners from a range of disciplines such as psychiatry, paediatrics and psychology. Discuss, debate, reflect upon and test hypotheses about what is happening within families, and with children.

Explore the potential for bias in decision-making and resolve tensions emerging from, for example, ethical dilemmas, conflicting information or differing professional positions. Identify which methods will be of help for a specific child or family and the limitations of different approaches. Make use of the best evidence from research to inform the complex judgements and decisions needed to support families and protect children.

Reflect on the emotional experience of working relationships with parents, carers and children, and consciously identify where personal triggers are affecting the quality of analysis or help. Identify strategies to build professional resilience and management of self.

10) Organisational context

Operate successfully in a wide range of organisational contexts complying with the checks and balances within local and national systems which are a condition of employment. Maintain personal and professional credibility through effective working relationships with peers, managers and leaders both within the profession, throughout multi-agency partnerships and public bodies, including the family courts.

Act in ways that protect the reputation of the employer organisation and the social work profession, whilst always privileging the best interests of children. Manage the specific set of organisational tasks relating to lead responsibility for children with the support of an appropriately qualified supervisor and use of the multi-agency support network.

Contribute to the organisation's role as corporate parent to children in public care, encouraging and advocating for organisational focus, resource and support so that children and young people can thrive and enjoy their childhood and move into independence with confidence in and ambition for their futures.



Department
for Education

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