



Department  
for Education

# **Consultation on knowledge and skills for practice leaders and practice supervisors**

**Government response**

**November 2015**

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## Foreword from the Chief Social Worker

I am delighted with the interest shown in this consultation and am grateful to those that have provided thoughtful and constructive feedback. The level of interest is confirmation of the passion of those in the profession and of the importance of social work in people's lives.

I would like to thank those children, young people, parents and carers, organisations and represented groups who have contributed to this consultation through submitting formal feedback and attending the workshops held across the country.

The Department for Education launched a public consultation on the knowledge and skills statements for child and family social work Practice Supervisors and Practice Leaders. Many in the sector, including young people and families, have contributed to the development of the statements. These statements will form a trio of definitive standards for a practice-based career pathway in child and family social work, from practitioner to senior leader, and will be the basis for the new national accreditation system.

Child and family social work is complex. We need it to be undertaken by talented people whose expertise supports families, helps keep children safe and enables them both to thrive. It is only right that practitioners are supported by Practice Supervisors and Practice Leaders who are equally talented and able to provide the supervision and leadership needed for social work to flourish.

As a profession we have long argued for professional autonomy: for society to trust our judgment and let us get on with the job. Before we can expect to be given the professional freedoms we crave we have to earn the public's trust. Whether you are a practitioner knocking on a family's door, a Practice Supervisor, or a Practice Leader, holding an accreditation will say to the public "you can have confidence in me". The standards set out in this document will form the bedrock of child and family social work accreditation and steer social workers through a practice focused career, as well as signal to educators and employers the skills and knowledge that they need to help social workers develop through post qualification continuous professional development.

I look forward to the statements' publication and to beginning an open and collaborative conversation about the implementation of the accreditation system, to be carried out to the enhancement of our practice and public reputation. Building confidence in child and family social work practice will be a key priority for the next five years and beyond.

## Executive Summary

From 28 July – 1 September 2015, the Department for Education ran a five week consultation on the knowledge and skills statements for child and family social work Practice Supervisors and Practice Leaders. Many in the sector, including young people and families, contributed to their development.

Respondents provided suggestions for additions and changes to the statements, and the Chief Social Worker has reflected on all the responses and has now drafted the final versions.

The statements will be used together with the previously-published knowledge and skills statement for Approved Child and Family Practitioners, to provide clarity about the expectations of child and family social workers at three key levels. We are developing an assessment method based on these knowledge and skills statements which we will begin trialling with a number of local authority pilot sites in December using a representative sample of the social worker population.

The suite of standards for child and family social work published by the Chief Social Worker is part of a radical shift towards a practice-focused system. The statements will serve to increase the professional status and confidence of practitioners and to provide, for the first time, the foundation for a national practice-based career pathway for child and family social workers.

The government will continue to 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 statements are successfully embedded into training and practice.

## Main consultation findings and summary of responses received

Wide consultation with the sector has been a priority for the Chief Social Worker throughout the development stages of the knowledge and skills statements for Practice Supervisors and Practice Leaders, and the feedback received during this process has played an important role in their drafting. Prior to the government consultation the statements were shared for comment to every child and family Principal Social Worker (PSW) through the PSW network, and to the heads of Childrens Services through the ADCS network. Focus groups and individual consultations were held with children and families, employers, staff and their representative organisations, and regulatory bodies. These include British Association of Social Workers (BASW), Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS), National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE), Who Cares? Trust, Family Rights Group and Skills for Care.

A total of 85 responses, many of which collated the views of groups of people, were subsequently received as part of the formal consultation.

Respondents were asked to identify themselves as from the following set categories. The table below shows the distribution of responses according to category:

**Table 1 - formal consultation responses**

Respondent type	Total	Percent
Local authority or representative body <sup>1</sup>	27	32%
Other <sup>2</sup>	25	29%
Social Worker	12	14%
Voluntary and Community Sector Organisation <sup>3</sup>	7	8%
Parent	4	5%
Supervising social worker	3	4%
Child and family social worker	3	4%

<sup>1</sup> A number of local authorities, including Redbridge, Rochdale, Harrow and Kent, have collated feedback from groups of front line staff and team managers.

<sup>2</sup> Includes those who identified themselves as 'other' and those who did not provide their respondent type. This includes Ofsted, schools, workforce learning and development officers, educators and assessors, ASYE coordinators, health visitors and organisations representing children, young people and social workers.

<sup>3</sup> Includes BASW, CAFCASS, UNISON, NSPCC, SCIE, the Who Cares? Trust, Family Rights Group, Skills for Care and the ADCS network.

Other employer of social workers (private, voluntary and independent)	2	2%
Higher education or further education institution	1	1%
University/FE Provider	1	1%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>100%</b>

Across the formal consultation responses received, eighteen per cent of those contributing can be identified as social workers, four per cent as Practice Supervisors and 32 per cent as local authorities or representative bodies – either through collective or individual contributions.

The consultation asked two questions:

1. Is there anything else that should be included in the statement which sets out what a Practice Leader needs to know and be able to do?
2. Is there anything else that should be included in the statement which sets out what a Practice Supervisor needs to know and be able to do?

## Summary of narrative responses

In addition to answering the consultation questions from the set list of options, respondents were invited to offer commentary and 73 (85 per cent of respondents) chose to do so.

Respondents generally welcomed the desire to develop a social work system with a clear focus on excellent practice. They welcomed the positive, ambitious and aspirational quality of the statements and thought they would encourage a culture where social work can flourish and where it can offer high quality help to our most vulnerable children and families. Many recognised the content of the statements as representing best practice and providing a quality framework for practice development throughout a social worker's career, from front line practitioner to senior leader. It was widely recognised that they covered the broad range and scale of challenges facing supervisors and leaders working with social workers, children, young people and families.

Similar themes emerged in the narrative responses across both question 1 and question 2:

- Implementation – respondents wanted further clarity on how Practice Leaders and Practice Supervisors will be tested against the knowledge and skills statements and on the assessment process, including roll out, professional development and financial support.
- Relationship with other frameworks – respondents wanted clarity on how the statements relate to the Professional Capabilities Framework and other frameworks including the Health and Care Professions Council Standards of Proficiency.
- Relationship with existing roles – respondents asked for clarity on whom the statements are targeted at and how they relate to other roles including Principal Social Workers, Independent Reviewing Officers and Directors of Children's Services.
- Systemic/environmental factors – respondents wanted clarity on the expectations put on Practice Leaders and Practice Supervisors to be directly responsible for factors that might be outside their control, including political, social, structural and economic factors.
- Degree of specific detail in the knowledge and skills statements – respondents requested to have specific knowledge and skill areas included in the statements (e.g. SEN knowledge, research skills, diversity awareness, etc) and for them to include references to the other statements, in a hierarchical approach.

## Question 1: Practice Leaders

Question 1 asked respondents whether there is anything else that should be included in the statement which sets out what a Practice Leader needs to know and be able to do.

The headline responses to this question are broken down as follows:

**Table 2 - responses to question 1**

Options	Total	Percent	Percentage across whole consultation <sup>4</sup>
Yes:	40	67%	47%
No:	15	25%	18%
Not Sure:	5	8%	6%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>71%</b>
Did not answer	25		29%

When asked if additional areas should be included in the statement, 47 per cent of respondents answered yes to the question.

**Table 3 - responses to question 1 by type of respondent**

Respondent type	Yes	No	Not sure
Local authority or representative body	15	4	2
Social Worker	2	2	1
Child and family social worker	1	2	0
Supervising social worker	0	2	0
Voluntary and Community Sector Organisation	4	1	0
Parent	4	0	0
Other employer of social workers (private, voluntary and independent)	1	1	0
University/FE Provider	1	0	0
Higher education or further education institution	1	0	0

<sup>4</sup> Based on 85 responses received during the consultation period



Other	11	3	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>5</b>

Of these, fifteen local authorities/representative bodies, four parents, three social workers and eleven others thought there should be more included in the knowledge and skills statement for Practice Leaders.

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 draft statement, some were requesting additional detail and others were knowledge and skills which were not part of the draft statement. As well as the themes set out in the summary, suggested changes to the statement included comments under the following areas:

- clarity and accessibility of terms and language;
- empowering children and families;
- knowledge of specific conditions and issues, legislation, financial management and experience of front line practice;
- evidence based practice and research skills;
- people and communication skills with staff, families, agencies, local and national government;
- promoting the social work profession;
- ensuring effective delivery systems and guidance;
- staff wellbeing;
- clear lines of accountability and performance management, including managing upwards;
- promoting learning and development; and
- leadership styles and strong understanding of social justice.

## Question 2: Practice Supervisors

Question two asked respondents whether there is anything else that should be included in the statement which sets out what a Practice Supervisor needs to know and be able to do.

The headline responses to this question are broken down as follows:

**Table 4 - responses to question 2**

Options	Total	Percent	Percentage across whole consultation
Yes:	37	61%	44%
No:	20	33%	24%
Not Sure:	4	7%	5%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>72%</b>
Did not answer	24		28%

When asked if additional areas should be included in the statement, 44 per cent of respondents answered yes to the question.

**Table 5 - responses to question 2 by type of respondent**

Respondent type	Yes	No	Not sure
Local authority or representative body	15	6	2
Social Worker	3	2	0
Child and family social worker	1	2	0
Supervising social worker	1	2	0
Voluntary and Community Sector Organisation	4	1	0
Parent	4	0	0
Other employer of social workers (private, voluntary and independent)	1	0	0
University/FE Provider	1	0	0
Higher education or further education institution	1	0	0
Other	6	7	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>4</b>

Of these, fifteen local authorities/representative bodies, four parents, four Voluntary and Community Sector organisations, four social workers and six others thought there should be more included in the knowledge and skills statement for Practice Supervisors.

Respondents who answered yes to the question mainly offered suggestions of additional knowledge and skills to be included in the statement. Some of the suggestions were already included in the draft statement, some were requesting additional detail and others were knowledge and skills which were not part of the draft statement. As well as the themes set out in the summary, suggested changes to the statement included comments under the following areas:

- clarity and accessibility of terms and language;
- empowering and listening to children and families and understanding their needs and wellbeing;
- knowledge of specific conditions and issues, legislation and financial management;
- experience and communication of front line practice;
- evidence based practice and research skills;
- strong social work values;
- people and communication skills with staff, families and agencies;
- supporting staff wellbeing and resilience including resource allocation, prioritisation, innovation and communicating staff concerns;
- promoting continuous learning and development;
- accountability, performance management and valuing expertise and skills of social workers; and
- reflecting and improving on practice and reflective, supportive, analytical supervision.

## 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.

Following the publication of Sir Martin Narey's review of the education of child and family social workers in February 2014 and advice from Isabelle Trowler, the Chief Social Worker for England (Children and Families), it has become clear to government that it is important to define specifically what we should expect of child and family social workers at three key levels.

The final knowledge and skills statements, revised by the Chief Social Worker for England (Children and Families) following this consultation, describe what Practice Leaders and Practice Supervisors should know and be able to do. They build on the excellent practice already demonstrated by many talented social workers across England.

In October 2014 the Secretary of State for Education announced the three levels of accredited practice: Approved Child and Family Practitioner; Practice Supervisor; and Practice Leader. It is our intention that these statements, together with the previously-published [knowledge and skills for Approved Child and Family Practitioners](#): will be used to provide clarity about the expectations of child and family social workers; will signal to employers and educators the kind of support they need to offer to social workers through post qualification continuous professional development; and will form the bedrock of the national accreditation system.

We are in the process of developing a suitable method to assess social workers against the three statements of skills and knowledge. A national assessment and accreditation system will help ensure Approved Child and Family Practitioner Practice Supervisors and Practice Leaders are equipped to deliver excellent social work which has a strong positive impact on children's and families' lives.

Plans for implementation will be subject to the outcome of the Spending Review and will be subject to public consultation.

Sitting alongside our plans for a national system of assessment and accreditation, the wider social work reform programme serves to increase the professional status of social workers, their practice confidence and that of their employers and the children and families with whom they work.

The response to this consultation has been important in shaping these cornerstone statements that will underpin the government's reforms.

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

## Implementation

The knowledge and skills statements focus on what Practice Leaders and Practice Supervisors should know and be able to do and so have not been amended to include further detail on implementation of the assessment and accreditation system.

Information on implementation will be included in accompanying policy guidance which we will publish and consult on early next year, following the outcome of the Spending Review. This will include consultation on whether accreditation should become mandatory.

We will include the views of employers, social workers and children and families when making any decisions about when and how assessment should be implemented. We will take into account workforce pressures and other workforce implications.

Government is committed to developing an assessment and accreditation system which is reliable and rigorous. It has been developed with extensive involvement of the social work sector and children and families. We will take the relevant responses from this consultation into account when developing our plans.

The Ministerial Taskforce on Child Protection, chaired by the Secretary of State for Education, is working on plans for delivering a first class public service in this highly demanding and highly specialist area of practice.

## Relationship with other frameworks

We intend these to be the definitive statements of the skills and knowledge child and family social workers need. A number of general social work standards and guidance documents do exist; these new statements, in contrast, are dedicated to Practice Supervisors and Practice Leaders in the child and family social work setting, and so have not been amended to include other frameworks.

The Professional Capabilities Framework 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 Professional Capabilities Framework. The statements provide more detail for child and family social workers at each level of the system. The knowledge and skills statements complement the The Health and Care Professions Council's (HCPC's) professional standards for social workers in England and relate to a number of the topics covered by them. The HCPC will consider the statements when reviewing its Standards of Proficiency.

## **Relationship with existing roles**

The statements focus on the knowledge and skills that Practice Supervisors and Practice Leaders will need to have. They are about the specific professional leadership and supervision of child and family social work services. Local areas will have different existing roles and positions that fulfil these requirements.

Guidance on how existing roles can be included under the Practice Leader and Practice Supervisor statuses, which is mindful of the need not to stifle structural innovation in local authorities, will be included in the accompanying policy guidance which we will publish and consult on early next year.

## **Systemic/environmental factors**

Systemic and environmental factors, including local structures, politics and budgets, may influence the conditions in which Practice Supervisors and Practice Leaders work and the individual responsibilities they hold. The statements, however, are designed to reflect the knowledge and skills that we expect them to have and be able to demonstrate rather than try to reflect the varied accountability structures of different organisations.

Information on implementation of the assessment and accreditation system will be included in the accompanying policy guidance which we will publish and consult on early next year.

## **Degree of specific detail in the knowledge and skills statements**

Many of the suggestions received were already included in the draft statements and we welcome the recognition of the importance of these sections. Other suggestions were either requesting additional detail or new areas of knowledge and skill which were not part of the draft statement. These are set out in more detail in the summary of responses to Question 1 and Question 2 above.

Many of the specific points raised have been taken into account. The Practice Leader statement now:

- reflects clearer language;
- secures an up to date, working knowledge of relevant legislation and case law;
- emphasises the commitment to children in public care so that they can thrive and receive the support to which they are entitled;
- champions the strategic vision;
- uses resources that lie within families and communities to the best effect;

- establishes communication channels which report on the welfare of children and families and the safety of those at risk;
- provides sufficient organisational, professional and personal support to ensure the wellbeing of practitioners so that they can provide excellent social work services to children and families;
- builds a culture and encourages practitioners to make decisions and take subsequent actions knowing they have the backing of the organisation to act reasonably and in a child's best interests;
- draws on the best evidence to help inform thinking and decision-making; and
- upholds high quality practice standards.

The Practice Supervisor statement now:

- reflects clearer language;
- adds emphasis on having experience of working within the statutory system;
- recognises, respects and values the expertise of practitioners;
- ensures the wellbeing of children in public care, so that they are happy and thriving, holding high ambitions for their futures, and continually reflecting upon and reviewing their welfare and support needs, being alert to evidence of actual or likely significant harm;
- uses feedback mechanisms and consultation to include the views of children and families when developing practice and when considering the long-term and life-long consequences of decisions at all stages of planning and review;
- uses resources that lie within families and communities to the best effect;
- secures an up to date, working knowledge of relevant legislation and case law;
- supports clear, honest and respectful communication;
- continually energises and reaffirms the commitment to support families and protect children;
- takes into account diversity, the experience of discrimination and the impact of poverty;
- provides responsive, high quality individual supervision reflecting upon the needs of practitioners;
- challenges complacency with a commitment to continued improvement and confidently holding poor practice to account; and
- encourages a reflective leadership style, which invites feedback and ideas for improvement.

Considering the specific purpose of the statement, it should be recognised that some of the issues raised in the consultation already sit in other documents presenting more generic capabilities and standards.



## Next steps

The government is pleased that such a varied range of organisations and social work professionals took part in the consultation. We are grateful for the thoughtful contributions that people gave when responding.

The Chief Social Worker has reflected carefully on all responses and has now formally published the definitive statements of knowledge and skills for Practice Supervisors and Practice Leaders alongside this government response.

The statements will be used to develop the detail of a rigorous national assessment and accreditation system for child and family social workers at three key levels. For Approved Child and Family Practitioners and Practice Supervisors, this is likely to include a process of employer endorsement where practice is developed and directly observed. Alongside this, it is likely to include successful completion of a rigorous assessment process involving the testing of specialist knowledge, critical reasoning and decision-making, as well as observation of interactive simulated practice. Assessment and accreditation for Practice Leaders is likely to include a more continuous assessment.

In order to ensure a fair and robust assessment process, the Department for Education is working with a number of employers to test the assessment methods with their staff. We have 23 local authorities and other employers signed up to help us test our thinking over the next few months. An expert group, including universities, social work practitioners, leaders in teaching and health and employers, is helping us get this process right, considering the vital role of social work in public service.

In the future we also want to explore the potential for adapting and applying this approach to supervisors and leaders in adult social work and to develop further specialist areas of practice development with specific knowledge and skills statements such as those needed by social workers planning permanent care options when a child cannot return to their birth parents.

Alongside the assessment and accreditation system, we are also investing in social work initial training, including new Teaching Partnerships, funding the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment for newly qualified social workers, Frontline and Step Up. All of these measures are aimed at improving the quality of social work training and the skills of social workers with the intention to improve the recruitment and retention of social workers.

The Government's Children's Social Care Innovation Programme is also working with 53 projects across the country to explore, evaluate and disseminate new ideas about how our social workers and others around them can best make a difference in the lives of our most vulnerable children. Almost half of local authorities in England are now receiving funding from government through the Innovation Programme to help rebuild practice systems so that families are supported and children protected.



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