



Department
for Education

Consultation on improvement standards for child and family social workers

Government consultation response

March 2018

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Ministerial Forward



In January, on day three of my first ministerial post, I went out to meet child and family social workers on the frontline to talk about their work. It is hard to convey what a tremendous privilege it was to hear directly from the people who are out there day after day supporting our most vulnerable children and families. And it is a privilege that I am delighted to say I have since repeated in locations across the country.

In my early days as minister for children and families I asked Isabelle Trowler, the Chief Social Worker, to tell me about the most important things I needed to know. She was very clear - there are great social workers doing great social work in every part of England. She spoke with the passion with which many of you will be familiar about our shared ambition: even in high-performing services, outcomes for children and families can be even better. And she instilled in me her energetic commitment to the concept of a national, specialist post-qualification accreditation for child and family social workers throughout their career pathway.

I am well aware of the challenges which social workers face. As an MP, I have come face to face with social workers and those who use their services on a regular basis in my weekly surgeries and in my correspondence. It is clear to me that we must do all we can to continue to build a children's social care system which is humane, effective and responsive to what local children and families want and need. Building a confident social work profession, from students to senior leaders, ensuring that everyone has the right support to develop their knowledge and skills, is an essential part of the journey.

This document sets out the Government response to the consultation for formally determining the Knowledge and Skills Statements for frontline practitioners and practice supervisors as the post-qualifying improvement standards. I wanted to add that I know from the consultation team that the roundtables were testimony to the commitment and enthusiasm of social workers.

And finally, I want to say that to do my job I want and need to hear your views – formal consultation or not. I am looking forward to my meetings with social workers and representative bodies and others. And I am even more looking forward to working with you all over the coming years.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read 'N. Zahawi'. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Nadhim Zahawi
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families

Message from the Chief Social Worker for Children and Families



Firstly, I wanted to say a very warm thanks to all of you who have taken time out of extremely busy schedules to help us with this consultation on the Knowledge and Skills Statements (KSS) as post-qualifying standards. I want to thank you too for helping us to develop the National Assessment and Accreditation System (NAAS). This contribution has been invaluable in so many different ways. Introducing NAAS is a major undertaking and much has changed as a result of those collective endeavours.

In December, we published the response to the consultation on NAAS¹. This took great account of the possible unintended consequences that were raised, and as a result, NAAS will now be rolled out differently and with a much closer relationship to the development needs of local workforces. Working with social workers, employers and the people who use our services, this new approach is designed to develop a system that works for everyone. This is a journey we are all taking together and we will continue to reflect and adjust direction as we learn along the way.

What is now very clearly emerging, especially since we published the NAAS consultation response in December, is that practitioners at all levels are increasingly enthusiastic about the concept of a post-qualifying specialism for child and family social workers; one which will set out an expectation for social workers to reach advanced levels of practice knowledge and skill and which will be formally accredited.

I am delighted to see such a positive response to this consultation, which corroborates the work we did together on the KSS for frontline practitioners and practice supervisors in 2014 and 2015. It shows too the importance of our continuing to work together.

This is an exciting time for all child and family social workers at all levels of seniority. We already have significant Government investment in newly qualified social workers, more recently for aspirant practice leaders, and very soon new funding will begin to invest in national arrangements to support newly appointed practice supervisors.

I know too it can be challenging. Demand is escalating. Pressures on public services are very significant; and this is exactly why high quality social work practice, supervision and leadership is so critical. We need to define clearly our specific contribution to public service so that employers, Government and the public know what to expect from social workers, and can rely on our contribution with confidence and pride.

¹ <https://consult.education.gov.uk/social-work-reform-unit/naas-consultation/>

The KSS for child and family social work enable every social worker coming into this specialist area of practice to see a whole career pathway in front of them. The KSS will provide the statutory basis for NAAS which, in turn, will strengthen existing good practice; increase consistency in child and family social workers' skills and knowledge and public confidence in our contribution; and, critically, trigger continuous professional development support for social workers in pursuing their future careers.

I know that some of you were concerned that the KSS had not yet been embedded by employers, including across recruitment and performance appraisal. In any period of change, there will always be new situations to respond to. That is why we will work with employers across the profession as we roll out NAAS to support them to align their systems.

I know too that many of you asked about how the KSS will work with the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF). I have been working with the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) to look at how best to align the two. And in February Lyn Romeo, the Chief Social Worker for Adults, BASW and I issued a joint statement.

Moving forward, there are five local authorities in Phase One of NAAS rollout and 16 sites in Phase Two and we are already learning from them. The outcomes from Phases One and Two will inform how we proceed to full national rollout as we move forward in realising the ambition to have a fully accredited workforce in the future.

To end, NAAS does not stand alone. NAAS will sit alongside Social Work England (the new social work regulator), National Teaching Partnerships (between universities and employers), the What Works Centre for Children's Social Care (bringing existing and new knowledge into practice), the national Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (reviewing serious child safeguarding cases that are complex or of national importance), and Partners in Practice. NAAS is an integral part of the emerging new national infrastructure for Children's Social Care in England as set out in *Putting children first*.² It is great so many people have seized the opportunity to be part of these pioneering developments. And I am delighted to be working with all of you on this exciting journey.



Isabelle Trowler
Chief Social Worker for Children and Families

²<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/putting-children-first-our-vision-for-childrens-social-care>

The Knowledge and Skills Statements for Child and Family Social Work

1. There are excellent child and family social workers but we know that they can find it difficult to prioritise learning and development to improve the quality of practice. We want to ensure all vulnerable children, wherever they are in England, receive support and protection of the highest quality. That is why we developed the KSS, which are essential to the introduction of a post-qualification specialist career pathway for child and family social workers. They form the basis for our work on social work education, recruitment, career development and training. And crucially, they were developed in partnership with social workers.
2. The role of child and family social workers is incredibly important and requires a distinct set of skills. That is why we took the important step of developing specialist knowledge and skills for those working with children and families. They are part of our vision to bring child and family social work on a par with similar professions where a culture of continual learning helps individuals to remain at the forefront of best practice, always prepared for an ever-changing job.
3. Our aim is for a system that works for every child. To deliver our aim, we are developing a stronger national, practice-focused career pathway because child and family social workers deserve the levels of training and professional recognition that others enjoy. That is why our vision supports stronger initial training and clarity about the knowledge and skills child and family social workers need to do their jobs. In embedding the KSS successfully and improving supervision and reflection, this should benefit those who wish to deepen their practice and to become even more proficient.
4. The consultation responses highlighted a desire for the KSS to be better embedded in social work practice and employers' processes for workforce development. Respondents also asked about aligning the KSS to the Professional Capabilities Framework. As set out in Isabelle Trowler's message, Lyn Romeo, the Chief Social Worker for Adults, BASW and the Chief Social Worker for Children and Families issued a joint statement about aligning the two in February.
5. We will track very closely the impact of embedding the KSS over the coming years.

Consultation on determining the improvement standards

6. The Department for Education's policy document, *Putting children first, delivering our vision for excellent children's social care* (July 2016) set out Government's vision for excellent children's social care. The Department consulted on the

delivery of the National Assessment and Accreditation System (NAAS) for child and family social workers at the beginning of 2017. The response *Confidence in practice: child and family social work assessment and accreditation system* was published in December 2017. The response described the journey towards a system that works for every child and the significant changes to rollout because of feedback from the sector. Very specifically, NAAS will now roll out in two phases (Phase One and Phase Two) beginning with five local authorities later this year.

7. The knowledge and skills statements (KSS) are the linchpin for the introduction of a post-qualification specialist career pathway for child and family social workers. They form the basis for the Government's drive to reform social work education, career development and training. Developed in partnership with social workers, employers, and user groups, we formally consulted individuals and representative bodies on their content.³ They set out what is expected of child and family social workers at three statuses: frontline practitioner (first published 2014) and practice leaders and practice supervisors (first published 2015).
8. Section 42 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017⁴ allows the Secretary of State for Education to determine and publish post-qualifying improvement standards for social workers in England and to assess social workers against these. The Act requires the Secretary of State to consult such persons as they consider appropriate before determining these standards, which will form the statutory basis for NAAS. We therefore held a series of consultation roundtables across the country to ask for views before determining the KSS as improvement standards against which child and family social workers will be assessed. To clarify, as set out in Section 42, this means a professional standard the attainment of which demonstrates particular expertise or specialisation.
9. We wanted to have in-depth conversations with stakeholders and concluded that a targeted formal consultation through a series of roundtables seemed – and proved to be – an excellent way to do that; and in addition, the roundtables provided a great opportunity to hear wider views from the sector.
10. In August, we sent out an open invitation to the sector to attend a series of roundtable discussions in Coventry, Darlington, London, Manchester, Sheffield and Taunton. In addition, further discussions were held with parents and children through events facilitated by NSPCC, Become and the Family Rights Group.

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/social-work-knowledge-and-skills-for-supervisors-and-leaders>
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/knowledge-and-skills-for-child-and-family-social-work>

⁴ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/16/section/42>

These consultation events were attended by a wide range of stakeholders including representatives of local authorities, principal social workers, frontline child and family social workers, and representative bodies including the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS), the British Association of Social Workers (BASW), Cafcass and Unison. One roundtable (2 November 2017 in London) was specifically for frontline child and family social workers. A full list of the organisations that participated, as well as dates and locations, is in the annex to this document.

11. The consultation sought views on the practitioner and practice supervisor KSS. While the intention is to roll out NAAS to practice leaders, we recognise the need to do further work on the assessment process at this level and we did not therefore include the practice leader KSS in the discussions. The roundtables also provided a forum to look at how far the KSS have been embedded across recruitment, learning and development, and performance management/appraisal.
12. The response was positive, with the overwhelming majority of attendees agreeing that the KSS for frontline practitioners and practice supervisors should be determined as the post-qualifying improvement standards.

Summary of responses received and the Government's response

Outcome of the KSS roundtables

13. We met around 200 consultees at 15 roundtables and other meetings and received almost unanimous endorsement that the KSS for frontline practitioners and practice supervisors should be determined as the post-qualifying improvement standards. There was a small number of concerns and requests for clarification on certain elements and our responses to these are set out below.

Determining the KSS as the improvement standards

14. The extent to which the KSS are embedded in local authorities' and other employers' systems is a mixed picture: the roundtable attendees from all parts of the sector confirmed that KSS are almost universally embedded in the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) training, development, supervision and assessment, but less so once new social workers have completed this.

15. A number of participants reported that their local authorities had fully embedded the KSS across recruitment, education, training and performance management/appraisal. Attendees from organisations that have fully embedded the KSS spoke warmly about how the KSS have enabled frontline social workers to develop as practitioners. One principal social worker (PSW) described how the KSS are used in their city to support career development. And a teaching partnership representative said that it was important not to see the KSS as some sort of add-on: the KSS are about good practice - if practice is good, it will meet the KSS. One PSW put it very simply: "what's not to like?" Another consultee pointed out that there are excellent child and family social workers in every local authority in England who are meeting the KSS and who would welcome being recognised and celebrated for doing that.

16. Where the KSS were not embedded, consultees spoke about the difficulty in aligning them to the corporate performance management processes many local authorities have in place. However in response, one consultee – a director of children's services (DCS) – said there should be "a golden thread" beginning with the objectives of each child and family social worker right through to the high-level corporate ones; their view was that, where there is difficulty gaining corporate agreement to this, the DCS's role is to intervene.

17. We expect local authorities to take steps to align their systems to the KSS, both in preparation for assessment and accreditation, as well as in recognition of how

fundamental the KSS are to excellent child and family social work practice: regardless of NAAS, the KSS should be integral to objective setting, performance management/appraisal, practice supervision, and learning and development. Because of these roundtable consultations, we know that may prove challenging and we will work closely with Phase One and Phase Two employers to support them in this; and the learning from this stage of the rollout will be shared at a later point.

Clarity around how the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) and the KSS will work together

18. As set out in the Government consultation response, *Confidence in practice: child and family social work assessment and accreditation system*, it is clear that the sector finds the PCF useful and that a number of local authorities have aligned their performance management systems to it. The NAAS consultation response said that we do not necessarily see the KSS as operating in isolation to the PCF, nor that only one of them should be used; rather that they can work together.

19. In response to feedback from the sector, on 27 February 2018, the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) and the two Chief Social Workers for England issued a joint statement setting out that both the PCF and the KSS have been developed by the profession through extensive engagement with social workers at all levels, representative bodies and the public. Together, the PCF and KSS provide the foundation for social work education and practice in England at qualifying and post-qualifying levels and are used to inform recruitment, workforce development, performance appraisal and career progression.

Post-qualifying standards

20. A number of people expressed concern about the phrase “*improvement standards*”. During the roundtables, we explained that this is the language of The Children and Social Work Act 2017; it has been important to set these standards apart from the professional standards for entry onto the social work register that are set by the regulator. This term helps to do that. As set out in the invitation to the roundtables, and in Isabelle Trowler’s message in the NAAS consultation response, the focus and intention is that the KSS will be known as the post-*qualifying* standards for child and family social workers.

Cafcass, adoption agencies, fostering agencies and voluntary and community organisations

21. The KSS, set out what is expected of child and family social workers, encompassing the breadth of child and family social work. They are therefore relevant to all child and family social workers including, for example, the voluntary and community sector, as well as local authorities. They are crucial to recruitment, career development and performance management and appraisal; they provide clarity about the knowledge and skills child and family social workers need to do their jobs; and successfully embedding the KSS will support those who wish to deepen their practice and become even more proficient.
22. It is therefore the case that employers should be embedding the KSS now, rather than because of NAAS. To clarify, NAAS is the system for assessment and accreditation of child and family social workers against the KSS. Some child and family social workers will not be assessed in the early phases of NAAS rollout but this does not affect the applicability of the KSS to their work as practicing social workers. Child and family social work is a complex system with many parts. It is vital that those who work in all parts of the system have a broad understanding of the key areas.
23. The NAAS consultation response acknowledged that the introduction of NAAS will have implications for Cafcass, adoption agencies, fostering agencies and voluntary and community organisations; even though their workforce would not be assessed during Phase One. We would encourage employers who are not local authorities to bring the KSS into their local contexts and engage with the NAAS practice materials in the future to understand more about how the KSS will be assessed.

Practice endorsement for NAAS

24. As set out above, the KSS are crucial to recruitment, career development and performance management/appraisal, providing clarity about the knowledge and skills child and family social workers need to do their jobs. Therefore, employers should be embedding the KSS now. During the course of the roundtable discussions, consultees consistently asked about practice endorsement for NAAS, which is why we are addressing that issue here.
25. The NAAS consultation response explained that this is where the employer hands the delivery provider details of social workers they believe are ready for assessment. Where employers have already aligned their systems to the KSS, and are confident social workers are performing well against them in their practice and their written work, this will be very straightforward. If not, employers may

choose to have a way of assuring themselves that social workers are able to demonstrate their skill and knowledge in line with the KSS. We will not stipulate what process, if any, employers should use, but we are already seeing NAAS Phase One and Two sites develop their own ways of deciding on whether a social worker is ready to be assessed and we will publish further details of this at a later date.

Practice leader KSS

26. We know from feedback that the practice leader KSS do not always align with that role and, as already mentioned, we need to do more work to develop the assessment process at this level. We hope to publish further information about this in the spring. But whilst the KSS for practice leaders was not the subject of this consultation, some people asked when practice leaders would go through NAAS. As the NAAS consultation response said, we are encouraging all those who consider themselves practice leaders to undertake the assessment at supervisor level to help them understand how it works. And we know that a number of the practice leaders in Phase One intend to do this.

Next steps

27. Given the overwhelmingly positive response to the consultation, the Secretary of State for Education has decided to determine the KSS for child and family social work practitioners and practice supervisors as the post-qualifying improvement standards. The standards are published on www.gov.uk.
28. The introduction of NAAS is subject to live evaluation. At a later date we expect to publish information about how local authorities are adapting their systems to embed the KSS/post-qualifying standards and what methods they are using to determine whether a social worker is ready to be assessed. This information will also be published on www.gov.uk.
29. We suggest that next steps for local authorities and other employers will be to consider how the knowledge and skills statements can become part of your systems across: recruitment; objective setting; supervision; performance management and appraisal; and continuous professional development both at individual and organisation level.

Annex: List of organisations that responded to the consultation

A wide range of people attended the roundtables and the other meetings including social workers at all levels, local authority representatives, charities, unions, teaching partnerships, children and young people, carers and other organisations.

Representatives of the following organisations attended roundtables or met separately with DfE:

- Association of Directors of Children's Services
- Become
- British Association of Social Workers
- Cafcass
- Department of Health and Social Care
- Family Rights Group
- Frontline
- Local Government Association
- NAGALRO
- NSPCC
- Ofsted
- Research in Practice
- UNISON

Consultation events

Date	Location
4 October 2017	Sheffield
5 October 2017	London
19 October 2017	Manchester
24 October 2017	Darlington
24 October 2017	NSPCC, London
31 October 2017	Coventry
2 November 2017	London
9 November 2017	Taunton
14 November 2017	London
5 December 2017	Manchester
11 December 2017	Sheffield
14 December 2017	London
9 January 2018	Sheffield
12 January 2018	Family Rights Group, London
15 January 2018	Family Rights Group, London



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