



Department
for Education

Knowledge and skills: practice leaders and practice supervisors

Government consultation

Launch date 28 July 2015

Respond by 1 September 2015

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Introduction

Following a government consultation, in November 2014 the Department for Education (DfE) published the statement of knowledge and skills for Approved Child and Family Practitioners written by the Chief Social Worker (children and families). The Chief Social Worker outlined the intention of that statement to act as a catalyst for bigger changes and has now commissioned two new statements for practice supervisors and practice leaders. We are consulting on those statements.

Who this is for

- Social workers
- Local authorities and representative bodies
- Higher education and further education institutions and their representative bodies
- Voluntary and Community Sector organisations
- Parents and carers
- Family members
- Children and young people
- Other employers of child and family social workers (private, voluntary and independent)
- Others

Issue date

This consultation document was issued on 28 July 2015.

Enquiries

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can contact the team on:

- 0207 7838 755 for Knowledge and skills: Practice leaders and practice supervisors and ask for Bekah Little; or email:

KnowledgeandSkills2015.CONSULTATION@education.gsi.gov.uk

If your enquiry is related to the DfE e-consultation website or the consultation process in general, you can contact the DfE Ministerial and Public Communications Division by email: consultation.unit@education.gsi.gov.uk or by telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the [DfE Contact us page](#).

Additional copies

Additional copies are available electronically and can be downloaded from [GOV.UK DfE consultations](#).

The response

The results of the consultation and the Department's response will be [published on GOV.UK](#) in autumn 2015.

About this consultation

The Department is seeking views on two new draft statements of knowledge and skills:

- for practice supervisors of child and family social workers
- for practice leaders of child and family social work

The statements will be used together with the previously-published knowledge and skills for Approved Child and Family Practitioners, to develop a national assessment and accreditation system for child and family social workers. The system will apply to three levels of practice: Approved Child and Family Practitioner (ACFP); Practice Supervisor (PS); and Practice Leader (PL).

The knowledge and skills for Approved Child and Family Practitioners is available here <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/knowledge-and-skills-for-child-and-family-social-work>

The Department has developed the statements through discussions with focus groups, user groups and individual practitioners, supervisors and leaders. During this period of public consultation and beyond, the Department will continue to consult people and organisations who have a vested interest in improving social work practice in a range of ways.

DfE has set out a list of questions but would particularly welcome your views if there is anything else which should be included in the statements.

Background to the consultation

The two new statements are part of a radical shift toward a practice-focussed system. A national assessment and accreditation system will ensure frontline practitioners, supervisors and leaders are equipped to deliver excellent social work which has a strong positive impact on children's and families' lives; it will also have a focus on excellent practice, wherever the individual practitioner sits within the system. In time, the accreditation system may be further expanded to include particular areas of practice such as permanency planning.

The focus on practice is not solely channelled through assessment and accreditation:

- the government is investing over £181m a year on social work initial training, as well as the Frontline and Step Up training programmes which are attracting high-calibre people into social work, using the knowledge and skills statements as the cornerstone for what is taught;

- employers are being given a greater say in what is taught on social work training courses through Teaching Partnerships which will not only focus on frontline practitioners but also prepare for the integration of arrangements for Approved Child and Family Practitioners, supervisors and practice leaders;
- the government is funding employers to support newly-qualified social workers in their first year of practice through the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment, using the knowledge and skills statements to help assess their development; and
- the Innovation Programme is working with 53 projects across the country to explore, evaluate and disseminate new ideas about how social workers and others around them can best make a difference in the lives of our most vulnerable children, including through new training and practice tools, or by ensuring structures and processes support effective practice and empower social workers.

DfE is committed to developing an assessment and accreditation system which is reliable and valid. This is likely to include a process of employer endorsement where practice is developed and directly observed, followed by an assessment of critical analysis and decision making with the possibility of further practice observation through a simulated practice assessment.

In order to develop the confidence in the accreditation method, alongside this formal consultation DfE is working with a number of employers to test these methods with their staff. Ultimately, the aim is to create a status amongst child and family social workers which will be recognised widely not only as evidence of the skills and knowledge they have to do the job well, but also as a passport towards career progression. Once the results of the consultation are analysed, DfE will work with employers and others on implementation, including whether the system should be rolled out on a voluntary or a compulsory basis, which social workers it should apply to, the speed of the roll-out and other issues.

Respond online

To help us analyse the responses, please use the online system wherever possible. Visit www.education.gov.uk/consultations to submit your response.

Other ways to respond

If for exceptional reasons, you are unable to use the online system, for example because you use specialist accessibility software that is not compatible with the system, you may download a word document version of the form and email it or post it.

By email

- KnowledgeandSkills2015.CONULTATION@education.gsi.gov.uk

By post

Jan Nayeem
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT

Deadline

The consultation closes on 1 September 2015.

Knowledge and Skills for Practice Supervisors

This statement of knowledge and skills provides the basis for accrediting Practice Supervisors in child and family social work.

Practice supervisors are qualified social workers whose primary function is to supervise the practice and decision making of Approved Child and Family Practitioners, and to develop the skills of individuals and teams within statutory child and family social work services. This requires experience of working with a high level of social complexity and risk of harm, and experience of working within the statutory system.

The practice supervisor will be able to do the following:

1) Promote and govern excellent practice

Establish and maintain a highly valued position of influence within the organisation, and be recognised for extensive knowledge and skill in the profession of child and family social work. Create an environment which enables excellent practice by setting high standards and motivating others to do the same. Demonstrate optimistic behaviour, and build positive relationships with children and families and other professionals. Lead by example, showing integrity, creativity, resilience and clarity of purpose. Be visible and accessible to all staff, children and families.

Be accountable for ensuring the highest professional standards and professional conduct. Design and implement intelligent measures to assure the quality of practice and the effective throughput of work. 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 work plan, whilst ensuring that the safety of children remains the highest priority.

2) Developing excellent practitioners

Provide a practice framework, underpinned by theory and the best evidence, within which practitioners can work effectively. Explain and champion the framework to practitioners, other professionals, children and families and set an expectation that this framework will be applied to practice. Facilitate use of the best evidence to devise effective interventions, which are most likely to support family welfare and reduce risk to children. Secure excellent practice through an analytical understanding of different patterns of family functioning matched with service responses which are most likely to effect change for families, as well as support children in public care and young people leaving care.

Recognise the strengths and development needs of practitioners, using practice observation, reflection and feedback mechanisms, including the views of children and

families. Develop a culture of learning and improvement, where staff are sufficiently stretched and mentored to meet their aspirations. Gauge different learning styles and recognise when the role of the Practice Supervisor is to teach and when it would be more effective to draw on practitioners' own knowledge. Identify the knowledge and skill gaps of staff and take action to address this. Invest available resource into staff and service development, drawing on the expertise of children and families.

3) Shaping and influencing the practice system

Provide a safe, calm and well-ordered environment for all staff, ensuring that processes are fit for purpose and efficient. Create an ethos within which staff are motivated and supported to be ambitious on behalf of children and families. Use resources to the best effect and ensure mechanisms are in place to facilitate constant reflective thinking about the welfare of families and the safety of children. Build and develop influential and respectful partnerships between practitioners and partner agencies. Pay attention to different structures, pressures, priorities and levers for influencing and shaping the thinking of others.

Share practice knowledge and expertise and influence the wider organisation and national system to function to the best effect. Offer constructive advice and creative, strengths-based solutions to difficulties.

4) Effective use of power and authority

Apply a proportionate and ethical approach to the exercise of authority, which develops and maintains relationships with families and professionals and ensures the protection of children. Maximise opportunities for children and families to make informed choices. Secure an up to date, working knowledge of relevant law. Exercise statutory powers where social work assessment shows that families require help and support and children are at risk of significant harm, ensuring that actions are proportionate to risk. Support practitioners to communicate clearly, honestly and respectfully the purpose and content of the social work plan, even when this is likely to generate a hostile, angry or frightened response.

Recognise the patterns of relationships between professionals, identifying where these are likely to compromise the welfare of families and the safety of children, taking immediate and corrective action. Invite challenge and debate and be accessible to children, families and, professionals. Ensure the professional network identifies the logic by which children and families are functioning and use this as a basis for effective engagement. Take into account difference, the experience of discrimination and the impact of poverty.

5) Confident analysis and decision making

Create a culture of focussed thinking which consistently explores a wide range of contexts (including family and professional stories, the chronology of critical events, social and economic circumstances). Generate multiple hypotheses which make sense of the complexity in which children and families are living. Help practitioners to make decisions based on these hypotheses, observations and analyses, taking account of the wishes and feelings of children and families. Ensure that practitioners are ambitious for children and families and that the long-term and life-long consequences of decisions are fully considered at all stages of planning and review. Build relevant relationships with children and families and professionals to test current hypotheses and dominant perspectives. Ensure that children and young people's expectations are met where possible and any disappointment sensitively acknowledged and sufficiently addressed.

Establish recording processes which provide the full analysis underpinning decisions, making sure the rationale for why and how decisions have been made is comprehensive and well expressed.

6) Purposeful and effective social work

Ensure practitioners adopt an approach to practice which is proportionate to identified risk and need. Use supervision processes to challenge the balance of authoritative intervention and collaborative engagement to determine how current practice is achieving the best long-term outcomes for children and families. Use focussed questioning with practitioners to clarify the direction of work, and identify whether practitioners need to adopt a more reflective and curious approach, or respond with greater pace and assertion. Ensure that family narratives are sought and listened to, that all relevant family members, including fathers, are engaged in shaping plans and supported to carry these out, and that practice empowers families to make positive changes.

Ensure methods and tools used are based on the best evidence, that progress is frequently reviewed and that the social work plan is adjusted accordingly. Provide a constant check on the safety and wellbeing of children, ensuring that identified risks are managed and new risks identified, assessed and addressed.

Implement effective strategies for ensuring throughput of work. Frequently review the requirement for continued involvement so that cases are closed in a timely manner and that families have an appropriate and long-term support plan, and ensure that no child or family is left unnoticed in the system.

7) Emotionally intelligent practice supervision

Recognise how different relationships evoke different emotional responses, which impact upon the effectiveness of social work practice. Use mechanisms such as peer supervision and group case consultation to help identify bias, shift thinking and the approach to case work in order to generate better outcomes for children and families. Recognise and articulate the dilemmas and challenges faced by practitioners and use this expertise and experience to guide, assist and support the provision of services.

Identify emotional barriers affecting practice and recognise when to step in and proactively support individuals. Promote reflective thinking to drive more effective discussions so that reasoned and timely decision-making can take place. Demonstrate a high level of resilience within pressured environments, be attuned to the effect of high emotion and stress and respond in calm, measured and pragmatic ways.

Read the confidence of practitioners and adapt management and leadership style according to the needs of individuals and the organisation. Protect practitioners from unnecessary bureaucratic or hierarchical pressures and have in place strategies to help manage the root causes of stress and anxiety. Re-energise and reaffirm commitment to support families and protect children.

8) Performance management and improvement

Explain to practitioners the full legal, regulatory, procedural and performance framework within which they operate and be accountable for their work within it. Provide opportunities for staff to give and receive constructive feedback on performance. Recognise and commend hard work and excellent practice and build social workers' confidence in their practice. Meet complacency with a commitment to continued improvement and confidently hold poor practice to account.

Establish available capacity so that work is allocated appropriately across the staff group and ensure best use is made of resource, ability, interests and ambitions. Devise and implement systems which both demonstrate effective practice and trigger immediate corrective action where necessary. Produce and utilise data to understand current demand, historical patterns and likely future trends. Scrutinise system performance and devise and implement effective and timely improvement plans.

Strike a balance between employing a managerial, task-focussed approach and an enabling leadership style to achieve efficient day-to-day functioning. Develop a strategy for future improvements and contribute to similar within the wider organisational system. Draw on and share best practice within local and national contexts. Implement communication channels with children, young people, families and other professionals inviting critical feedback and ideas for improvement. Respond thoughtfully and proactively to complaints and mistakes, creating learning opportunities for self, staff and the organisation.

Knowledge and Skills for Practice Leaders

This statement of knowledge and skills provides the basis for accreditation in child and family social work: Practice Leaders

Practice Leaders are qualified social workers with the day to day operational responsibility across the whole local system for child and family social work practice, and for Approved Child and Family Practitioners and Practice Supervisors. Most usually this is referred to as the Assistant Director of Children's Social Care or Director of Family Services. By exception, it may be that some employers, principally large local authorities, would regard themselves as having more than one Practice Leader because the local authority area for the purpose of child and family social work is sub-divided into discrete geographical units that operate largely autonomously and independently.

The practice leader will be able to do the following:

1) Lead and govern excellent practice

Be a highly visible and highly valued figure, occupying a position of significant influence at a local and national level, and be known for exceptional knowledge and skill in the profession of child and family social work. Hold accountability for child and family social work practice and its impact on the lives of children and families.

Provide clarity of organisational purpose and the values underpinning that, focussing on providing a world-class service for children and families. Demonstrate optimistic behaviour, and positive relationships and attitudes towards children and families, other professionals and partner agencies, politicians and the public. Drive change and constant progress so that children and families get the very best help and support. Show commitment to children in public care by ensuring they grow up in homes in which they can thrive and, having left care, receive all the support to which they are entitled.

Lead by example with integrity, creativity, resilience, and clarity of purpose. Sustain wide, current knowledge and understanding of child and family social work practice and broader child protection and welfare systems, locally, nationally and globally.

2) Creating a context for excellent practice

Engage staff, children and families and the wider partnership in constructive thinking about the future, creating a shared strategic vision which inspires, motivates and encapsulates the organisational commitment to supporting families, protecting children and providing safe and stable childhoods for children in public care. Communicate compellingly this vision and drive strategic leadership throughout the organisation, so that it is applied to everyday practice.

Focus on best outcomes for children and families and ensure that the vision, purpose and plan for the organisation is welcomed and owned by all. Continuously evaluate how

best to keep the vision a reality, and what needs to change to build upon existing strengths.

Create a culture in which excellent practice is expected and celebrated, critical incidents handled with grace and discipline, and public commitment to protecting children and supporting families frequent and authentic.

3) Designing a system to support effective practice

Design with political and financial astuteness, and within a clear set of principles, a practice system which enables excellent child and family social work practice to flourish, ably translating local and national policy into the organisational context, without compromising high quality professional practice. Prioritise budgets in order to meet demand and ensure quality of service provision. Confidently illustrate the relationship between efficiency, child outcome and financial flexibility so that services can respond to changing need and risk.

Provide a safe, calm and well-ordered environment for all staff, ensuring that process is well considered, fit for purpose and efficient. Create sufficient capacity for practitioners to build relationships with children and families and undertake effective direct work, which successfully reduces risks and enhances family wellbeing. Use resources to best effect and have mechanisms in place to ensure constant reflective thinking about the safety of children and the welfare of families. Build influential and productive relationships across the organisation and the wider local partnership, across regions and nationwide, to secure the very best support to families and the protection of children.

Establish communication channels which report on the confidence of the organisation, and be alert to anxiety and pressures within the organisation, even at the earliest stages. Secure high quality legal, financial and human resource services for the organisation and ensure communication technology is fit for purpose. Challenge orthodoxies in the best interests of achieving excellence for children and families, and model entrepreneurial and innovative approaches to practice and leadership.

4) Developing excellent practitioners

Critically appraise theory, best evidence and rationale for different practice approaches, and select robust methodologies to form an overarching practice framework. Identify the skills needed to practise within the complexity of children's and families' lives, and in particular the population being served by the organisation. Secure the resources and support needed to implement the practice framework and shape, in partnership with others, the current and future quality of practice through effective training and sustained professional development for all staff and throughout a practice career. Recognise and utilise the resource that children, families and communities can bring to the development of staff and services.

Recognise the value of excellent social workers remaining in frontline practice. Identify and develop people with emerging leadership talent, and support retention through the provision of challenging, interesting and motivating opportunities. Distribute leadership throughout the organisation and encourage alliances between colleagues so that they hold one another to account for the quality of practice.

5) Support effective decision making

Be able to create a culture where managed risk is accepted and understood as being inherent in every decision that is made. Encourage practitioners to take decisions in this context and make sure they know they have the backing of the organisation to do so. Actively demonstrate trust in the workforce and develop a culture which promotes learning, reflection and the acceptance of accountability.

Publicly acknowledge the enormity of separating a child from their parents. Participate and add rigour to decision-making about children coming into public care, returning home or to extended family, or moving to new permanent families. Ensure that all long-term consequences of current decisions are properly explored and understood.

Make sound and complex decisions under high pressured, fast paced conditions, striking a balance between speed and depth of thought.

6) Quality assurance and improvement

Set ambitious practice standards, instilling a strong sense of accountability in staff for the impact of their work on the lives of children and families. Establish rigorous, fair and transparent processes for managing the performance of staff, including accurate measures of practice through direct observation. Secure an in depth, comprehensive and current understanding of the realities of practice across the organisation and know how to address early signs of difficulties. Recognise and commend hard work and excellent practice to build social workers' confidence in their practice. Meet complacency with a commitment to continued improvement and confidently hold poor practice to account.

Learn from local, national and international review, inspection and research and lead debate about any case for change. Ensure local children, families and communities play an active role in assessing the quality of services received and developing ideas for service and staff development. Pay close attention to the organisation's local and national reputation, taking steps to manage its public profile successfully. Establish the organisation as a credible and respectable public service, proudly promoting the achievements of staff, children and families.



Department
for Education

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