



Department
of Health

Knowledge and Skills for Social Workers in Adult Services

Government response to the Consultation on the Knowledge and Skills Statement for
Social Workers in Adult Services

March 2015

Title: Government response to the consultation on the knowledge and skills statement for social workers in adult services

Author: The office of the Chief Social Worker for Adults, Social Care, Local Government and Care Partnerships Directorate, Department of Health

Document Purpose:

Consultation response

Publication date:

March 2015

Target audience:

Social workers, local authorities (LAs) and LA representative bodies, other employers of social workers (private, voluntary and independent), users of social work services and their carers, higher education and further education institutions (HEIs) and their representative bodies.

Contact details:

Office of the Chief Social Worker for Adults, Department of Health, Room 208, Richmond House, 79 Whitehall, London SW1A 2NS

You may re-use the text of this document (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/

© Crown copyright

Published to gov.uk, in PDF format only.

www.gov.uk/dh

KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS FOR SOCIAL WORKERS IN ADULT SERVICES

Government response to the consultation on the Knowledge and Skills
Statement for Social Workers in Adult Services

Contents

Foreword from the Chief Social Worker for Adults	5
1.0 Introduction	6
2.0 Involvement and participation	7
3.0 Overarching message	9
4.0 Summary of responses	10
5.0 Question 1	11
6.0 Question 2	14
7.0 Question 3	16
8.0 Next steps	18

Foreword from the Chief Social Worker

I am delighted to introduce this response to the consultation on the knowledge and skills required for social work in adult social care. Social workers touch the lives of so many people with diverse needs and aspirations throughout their lives and with increasingly high expectations of us as professionals – and rightly so. It is encouraging that so many of you chose to respond to this consultation, whether individually or through the organisations and groups you are involved with, and I would like to thank all of you for your thoughtful and informative contributions.

The knowledge and skills statement, published with this response, sets out for the first time, what we expect a social worker with adults to know and be able to do after their first year in employment. It also places a strong emphasis on the role of employers and the training and support they must provide to deliver quality social workers. The statement will inform a more rigorous approach to how the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) is being applied and assessed.

This statement sits firmly within the Government’s wider ambition for social work with adults, to create a highly skilled, flexible workforce, able to contribute to improved outcomes with people in all settings. That is why a comprehensive framework for continuous professional development and supporting curriculum guidance is also being developed, initially focussing on the skills and knowledge required for social work with people with autism, dementia and those who lack mental capacity. Together, these will provide a clear progression route for both newly qualified and experienced social workers to enrich and deepen their knowledge, skills and practice as well as a structure for practitioners and employers to ensure these are kept up to date.

Social work is complex and requires working with high levels of risk and uncertainty using the best approaches and interventions to balance enabling and protection. Social workers help people through times of crisis in their lives, working alongside and supporting people through change in the context of the lives they want to lead, with their families and within their communities. It is this unique contribution that makes the work of the social work profession crucial to the success of social care legislation and policy.

I want to thank everyone who has contributed to developing this statement, especially social work practitioners and, most importantly, the people who use their services.



Lyn Romeo, Chief Social Worker for Adults

1.0 Introduction

1.1. From 10 October – 12 December 2014, the Department of Health ran a consultation on proposals for a statement of the knowledge and skills a social worker in adult services should have at the end of the first year in practice. The statement has two aims: to set out clearly, in one place, what newly qualified social workers working with adults should know and be able to do; and to clarify the organisational arrangements and support employers need to provide to get them to this standard.

1.2. Our proposal is that the Knowledge and Skills Statement ('the statement') should inform the basis for the consistent assessment of all newly qualified social workers in adult services, with the recommendation that employment in statutory adult social work be dependent upon their successful completion of the Assessed Supported Year in Employment (ASYE). This recommendation, while not mandatory, consolidates good practice and should be supported through the normal arrangements for ASYE.

1.3. The consultation asked respondents to consider whether:

- the right knowledge and skills have been identified (and at the right level);
- if there is anything that should be added to the statement; and
- the proposed national requirements for the assessment of social workers at the end of their ASYE are appropriately designed.

1.4. The draft statement was developed by the Chief Social Worker for England (Adults), in partnership with key stakeholders, including The College of Social Work, the British Association of Social Workers, the Social Care Institute of Excellence, Skills for Care and Principal Social Workers. Prior to the formal consultation period, the Chief Social Worker also sought the views of social workers (through individual discussions with local authorities and correspondence received via the Department) about the scope and context of the statement, and their views have helped shape the draft statement.

1.5. This Response takes in to consideration the 102 responses received as part of the formal consultation up to the closing date of 12 December 2014. The Response aims to provide: firstly, a summary of overarching messages and key themes identified from the consultation; and secondly, an overview of general issues and trends identified in each of the three consultation questions.

1.6. The majority of the responses received made additional comments on the scope, content and level of the statement. This Response does not attempt to analyse these comments in great depth or respond to each suggestion made. Rather, this response is a synopsis of consultation feedback and information received for each of the questions under separate chapter headings, with each chapter reviewed under "what we heard," "what we've done" and if appropriate, "what we've not done" and our reasons for this, including alternative approaches, where relevant.

1.7. Where changes have been suggested which are already covered in other professional standards or frameworks, these are highlighted in the Response.

2.0 Involvement and participation

2.1 Between 10 October and 12 December 2014, the Department of Health ran a public consultation, seeking views on three questions relating to a draft knowledge and skills statement for social workers in adult services. The consultation document was available electronically, by pdf/email or by printed copy and respondents could also submit responses via our online site.

2.2 We sought responses from a wide audience, including social workers, users of social work services and their carers, professional bodies, academics, healthcare professionals and commissioners. The Chief Social Worker publicised the consultation at meetings, events and conferences and details were included in her first annual report, published in October 2014.

2.3 Respondents were asked to identify themselves as from the following set categories. Of the 102 respondents, 56 responded on behalf of an organisation and 26 responded in an individual capacity (the remainder – 20 – did not state their position). The table below shows the distribution of responses according to category.

Table 1: Which answer best describe you as a respondent?

Background		
Options	Number	Percentage
Local Authority	34	33%
Social Worker	28	27%
Other*	12	12%
Voluntary & Community sector**	8	8%
University/FE provider	7	7%
Social Work consultant	6	6%
Professional Association***	4	4%
Not stated	2	2%
Carer	1	1%
TOTAL	102	100%

** Those categorised as other include: Non-departmental public body, student and general public with experience (e.g. nurse, carer)*

*** Includes collective responses from charities such as the National Autistic Society, Leonard Cheshire Disability, etc.*

****Includes collective responses from social work practitioner and other professional bodies groups, including British Association of Social Workers (BASW), The College of Social Work (TCSW) and Association of Directors of Adult Services (ADASS) on behalf of their members.*

2.4 We consider that, in terms of the duration of the consultation, the key individuals and groups who responded and the momentum generated by the Chief Social Worker, her office and key stakeholders, this consultation was inclusive, accessible to and received responses from, a broadly representative audience

Processing responses

2.5 In addition to the review of each question by the Chief Social Worker and government officials, Skills for Care¹ collated and analysed responses to the consultation, drawing together key themes and issues to underpin the review. Each response was read and comments extracted about each of the three consultation questions. Additional comments were also extracted and analysed. Key themes were identified, by examining key points raised by a number of organisations or individuals. Where specific comments and suggestions for redrafting the statement were made, these were considered and where applicable, reflected in this Response and the final knowledge and skills statement.

2.6 A summary of key findings are summarised in the next section of this response (“Key Messages”). Overall, responses were positive, both to the content of the statement and its role to inform the national assessment criteria for social workers in adult services at the end of their first year in practice.

¹ Staff from Skills for Care’s Evidence and Impact team undertook the analysis of the consultation data on behalf of, and in conjunction with, the Department of Health. Skills for Care staff adhere to the Market Research Society’s code of conduct and have retained an impartial position in relation to this project.

3.0 Overarching messages

1. Respondents welcomed the knowledge and skills statement and national assessment criteria.

Consultation responses contained many suggestions for things that should be added to the statement, but overall the statement was welcomed. Respondents felt that the statement was clear, detailed and concise; covered all the key elements and tasks; was clearly linked to the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) and Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) standards; and gave an overall picture of what social workers can offer and should be supported to do.

2. Key areas of agreement

There was broad agreement that the statement provides a clear and comprehensive account of the social work role and the knowledge and skills a social worker should be expected to have after 12 months in frontline practice; that it sees social work as a single profession and facilitates a whole family approach to service provision; and that it encourages social workers to think more broadly and creatively about their role.

3. Key areas for suggested change

Respondents made many suggestions for how the statement could be further enhanced. Common themes were:

- Further strengthening the relationship between the statement and other professional standards frameworks, notably the PCF, HCPC standards, the Child and Family Knowledge and Skills Statement and the Standards for Employers;
- Considering broadening the scope of the statement from statutory social work to incorporate all social work with adults, including in voluntary and community settings;
- Emphasising the specific requirements expected of social workers in the context of the Care Act, with particular reference to financial and legal literacy;
- Strengthening the skills and knowledge in relation to the Mental Capacity Act (MCA), Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) and adult safeguarding;
- Reducing the number of direct observations and written pieces required for assessment; and
- Clarifying the arrangements and support to employers and assessors to meet requirements for standardised assessment and moderation.

4.0 Summary of responses

What we asked you to consider

The consultation invited responses to these three questions:

Question 1: Is there anything else that should be included in the statement which sets out what a social worker with adults needs to know and be able to do?

Question 2: Are there any parts of the statement which are not set at the right level for a social worker with adults to know and be able to do at the end of their first year? If so, what are they?

Question 3: Do you agree with the minimum criteria to be used nationally for social workers at the end of their assessed year in employment? If not, what other criteria should be used?

The following sections 5, 6 and 7 will address each of these in turn.

5.0 Question 1

5.1 *Is there anything else that should be included in the statement which sets out what a social worker with adults needs to know and be able to do?*

Table 2: Summary of responses to Question 1

Options	Number	Percentage	Percentage across whole consultation
Yes	75	75%	74%
No	23	23%	23%
Not sure	2	2%	2%
TOTAL	100	100%	98%
Did not answer	2		2%

When asked if additional areas should be included in the statement, 74 percent of respondents answered 'yes' to the question.

*Based on 102 responses received during formal consultation period

What we heard

5.2 Three quarters of respondents felt that there were things missing from the statement, a quarter (23 percent) said there were not and 2 percent were unsure. Three quarters (73 percent) of respondents gave detailed responses in the free commentary section to explain their position. The relationship between the knowledge and skills statement, the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) and the Health and Social Care Professions Council (HCPC) Standards of Proficiency, was mentioned by a fifth of respondents. Across the three questions, there were calls from respondents for the three documents to be linked, mapped or consolidated, while some questioned the need for the statement.

5.3 Concern about the complexity of the continuous professional development landscape for social work was a recurring theme in the narrative responses given to all three questions. While the statement was broadly welcomed, respondents felt further clarity was needed on how the statement will further enhance the PCF and provide a clear framework for the assessment of practice.

5.4 A smaller number of respondents who answered yes to this question, mentioned links to the corresponding Knowledge and Skills Statement for Child and Family Social Work (3 percent) and other frameworks and guidance, including the Local Government Association (LGA) Standards for Employers (3%), NICE guidance (1 percent) and Continuing Health Care (3 percent).

5.5 Working with others is important – 16 percent of respondents emphasised the importance of social workers being able to work confidently with other professionals and 5 percent talked about social workers being able understand the importance of key partnerships with organisations and agencies across the statutory, voluntary and community sectors.

5.6 Another key theme respondents cited was the scope of the statement. Of the respondents who made a comment, 15 percent were concerned that the statement's focus on statutory social work would undermine the valuable role many newly qualified social workers are undertaking in the voluntary or private sector, which could lead to other social workers in adult settings not being able to gain sufficient experience of the knowledge and skills included in the statement. Respondents also questioned whether the statement was over-ambitious in the capabilities expected of all newly qualified social workers after one year in practice, particularly for those in narrow or specialist setting.

5.7 Concern that a lack of resources in local authorities to provide the additional support required during newly qualified social workers' first year of practice, leading to a potential decline in take up for the ASYE programme, was also cited by 5 percent of respondents to question one and 22 percent of question three. The Department of Health was asked to consider how organisations will facilitate this process.

5.8 Other suggestions for additional detail which ought to be included in the statement, or which should be given further emphasis were also made.

What we've done

5.9 We have revised the statement to cover social work which delivers **statutory health and wellbeing outcomes**, regardless of the setting. This will provide social workers in the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sectors with the opportunity to develop the skills and knowledge they will need to work in adult services, such as contributing to undertaking assessments, helping facilitate personal budgets, etc.

5.10 We have strengthened the reference in section 9 to the need for social workers to demonstrate good **financial and legal literacy**, specifically in the context of the statutory guidance underpinning the Care Act.

5.11 We have separated the sections on Safeguarding and Mental Capacity to make the two areas of practice more distinctive, whilst acknowledging their interrelatedness. We have also made additions to the statement which will further embed mental capacity throughout.

5.12 We have strengthened reference to the importance of **professional resilience** in section 9 and 11.

5.13 In response to suggestions for additional knowledge and skills that were missing from the statement, we have done the following:

- We have added a reference to the **professional use of self** in Section 7;
- We have included references to the **power dynamics** inherent in the social worker's relationship with users of services and their carers; and to the potential for contradiction between professional power and individual choice and control;
- We considered requests to refer to **diversity and anti-discriminatory practice** in the statement. These are covered in the PCF - however, we have included a reference to the importance of social work practice with different groups, such as older people and people with learning disabilities, which will further enhance social work practice with specific groups. Working alongside diverse individuals and groups is integral to social work and the knowledge and skills statement will inform Continuous Professional Development (CPD) guidance covering specific groups being developed by the College of Social Work (TCSW), further enhancing the quality of practice, for both newly qualified and experienced social workers.

What we've not done

5.14 Respondents made a number of suggestions for additional skills and knowledge which were not included in the statement, such as critical thinking, analysis and reflection; ethical practice; balance of theory and practice; the Code of Ethics and principles of social justice and human rights. The introduction to the statement makes clear that the knowledge and skills are designed to build upon and enhance the PCF, which remains the overarching standards framework applicable to all social workers in whatever role or setting. It is not the Government's intention that the statement should either duplicate or replace the PCF.

5.15 TCSW are undertaking a review of the PCF during the first half of 2015 which will further embed the statement within the PCF.

6.0 Question 2

What we asked you to consider

6.1 Are there any parts of the statement which are not set at the right level for a social worker with adults to know and be able to do at the end of their first year? If so, what are they?

Table 3: Summary of responses to Question 2

Options	Number	Percentage	Percentage across whole consultation
Yes	31	32%	30%
No	54	55%	53%
Not sure	13	13%	13%
TOTAL	98	100%	96%
Did not answer	4		4%

When asked if parts of the statement were not set at the right level for a social worker with adults after their first year in employment, 30 percent answered yes to this question.

*Based on 102 responses received during formal consultation period

What we heard

6.2 Over half of respondents (55 percent) to this question said there were not any parts of the statement that were not set at the right level for a social worker at the end of their first year in practice. However, a third (32 percent) said there were, while 13 percent of respondents said they were not sure. More than half of respondents to this question (53 percent) made additional comments.

6.3 Three in ten (28 percent) of those who commented said that while the statement was ambitious, it was at a level which a newly qualified social worker should be expected to reach by the end of their ASYE. However, respondents also cited the responsibility of employers to provide the right support and opportunities during the ASYE programme to enable the social worker to meet the standard required.

Several respondents noted that the statement should be seen as the first step in a social worker's life long career progression and continuing professional development through the PCF levels.

6.4 Two fifths (39 percent) of those who provided comments said the level of the statement was set either too high (17 percent) or too low (22 percent). The main reason provided by those saying it was too high, was that it would be difficult for a social worker to acquire all the skills and knowledge after a year in frontline practice, particularly those working in a specialist or narrow setting. Conversely, those who said the statement was set too low made suggestions for additional knowledge and skills that should be included.

6.5 Of those respondents saying they were unsure if the statement was at the right level, the concerns centred mainly on whether the content of the statement would be included in initial social work education and that the level of knowledge and skills required should be further clarified.

6.6 Others suggestions made included producing knowledge and skills statements for more experienced social workers, which would offer a progression route similar to that being developed for child and family social work.

What we've done

6.7 We note that the majority of respondents agreed that the content of the statement and the level of challenge are appropriate. The statement is designed to set out clearly what we expect of newly qualified social workers working in adult social care and clarifies what support and arrangements employers need to provide to get them up to this standard.

6.8 We acknowledge concerns that having separate statements for social work with adults and children and families could undermine the unity of the profession. The Government remains committed to maintaining social work as one profession, while recognising the need to define specifically what we should expect of social workers working with our most vulnerable children, families and individuals.

6.9 We are working closely with the Department for Education as they develop the three levels of accreditation and assessment of child and family social workers - that of Approved Child and Family Practitioner (ACFP) status, practice supervisor and practice leader - and we will monitor their progress and review lessons and suitability for social work with adults.

6.10 The Government's aim is to promote and incentivise teaching partnerships between employers and Higher Education Institutions to facilitate the transition from education to employment and further strengthen existing arrangements.

What we've not done

6.11 We have not made any changes to the level at which the statement is set. It is the Government's view that the level of challenge is set at an appropriate level for a social worker at the end of their first year in employment. The statement is also intended to provide greater continuity between what is taught on social work qualifying programmes and what a newly qualified social worker with adults can expect as they move into practice, equipping them for the challenging work they will face in their first year and beyond.

7.0 Question 3

What we asked you to consider

7.1 Question 3: Do you agree with the minimum criteria to be used nationally for social workers at the end of their assessed year in employment? If not, what other criteria should be used?

Table 4: Summary of responses to Question 3

Options	Number	Percentage	Percentage across whole consultation
Yes	67	66%	66%
No	20	20%	20%
Not sure	14	14%	14%
TOTAL	101	100	99%
Did not answer	1		1%

When asked if they agreed with the minimum criteria to be used nationally at the end of the Assessed Supported Year in Employment, 66 percent answered yes to the question.

*Based on 102 responses received during formal consultation period

What we heard

7.2 Two thirds (66 percent) of respondents to this question said they agreed with the minimum criteria to be used nationally, a fifth (20 percent) did not agree and 14 percent were unsure. Three-fifths (59 percent) of respondents gave additional narrative.

7.3 The move to a standardised assessment process was broadly welcomed, with also the challenges in creating and applying a consistent approach to assessment and quality assurance also acknowledged. The setting of minimum criteria was nonetheless seen as a positive step in providing a robust framework for social workers and assessors.

7.4 Some respondents were concerned that, given the challenges in delivering consistency of assessment, a system for appealing decisions would also be needed.

7.5 Respondents raised specific concerns relating to the assessment process, including the number of direct observations and written pieces; the level of capability required for the assessor; and the processes for internal and external assessment. The role of Higher Education Institutions in supporting the assessment and training of assessors was also mentioned by a small number (8 percent) of respondents.

7.6 A fifth (22 percent) of respondents to this question were concerned that aspects of the assessment process would create additional burdens on employers at a time of increasing pressure on resources and workload capacity, particularly for smaller organisations and those with few social work qualified staff at supervisor level. While the broad move to standardisation was welcomed, respondents felt that any further demands on managers and assessors may risk the future sustainability of the ASYE programme.

What we've done

7.7 We have made some changes to the statement in view of the consultation responses. These include reducing the number of direct observations from four to three and the assessment of one piece of written work to demonstrate critical/reflective practice, instead of two.

7.8 The development of standardised assessment criteria, informed by the knowledge and skills statement, was welcomed by the majority of respondents. We want to ensure the success of the ASYE programme is extended to *all* newly qualified social workers, with a more rigorous approach to how it is being applied and assessed, as opposed to the varied approach to employers' participation at present. This derives from initial recommendations made by Professor Croisdale-Appleby in his review on re-visioning social work education, as well as advice from the Chief Social Worker for England (Adults), Lyn Romeo.

7.9 The quality and consistency of these assessments will be monitored through internal moderation of assessment decisions and external moderation, which will develop national consistency through sampling assessment decisions and providing feedback to employers.

7.10 The College of Social Work is leading on a national validation scheme and will be inviting employers to show how the systems and processes which underpin their ASYE programme, including meeting the criteria set out in the knowledge and skills statement, enable newly qualified social workers to reach the appropriate standards. The validation process will also ensure that standards are consistently applied nationally.

7.11 The College of Social Work and Skills for Care are working together to provide guidance, support and materials which will streamline the activity required by employers, whilst at the same time maintaining the independence of validation, to assure quality and consistency of the standards.

What we've not done

7.12 There were suggestions for further things which respondents felt should be added or changed to the minimum criteria, including additional skills and knowledge, which have been addressed elsewhere in the statement.

8.0 Next steps

The Government is pleased that such a varied range of individuals and organisations took part in the consultation, including social workers, those who use social work services and those who employ, represent and work alongside them. The contributions people gave in their responses to the proposed statement were particularly welcomed and have helped shape and inform the content.

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

The Government will work with social workers and employers to apply the knowledge and skills and assessment and validation processes for social workers in all adult settings, including the private, voluntary and independent sector, as well as local authorities.

Published March 2015