Consultation on changes to the standards of proficiency for social workers in England

1. Introduction

1.1   This document seeks the views of stakeholders on proposed changes to the profession-specific standards of proficiency for social workers in England.

1.2   This consultation will be of particular interest to education providers, employers, professional bodies and social workers.

1.3   The consultation will run from **1 April 2016 to 24 June 2016**.

2. About us

2.1   We are a regulator and were set up to protect the public. To do this, we keep a register of professionals who meet our standards for their professional skills and behaviour. Individuals on our Register are called 'registrants'.

2.2   We regulate 16 professions:

- arts therapists
- biomedical scientists
- chiropodists/podiatrists
- clinical scientists
- dietitians
- hearing aid dispensers
- occupational therapists
- operating department practitioners
- orthoptists
- paramedics
- physiotherapists
- practitioner psychologists
- prosthetists/orthotists
- radiographers
- social workers in England
- speech and language therapists.

2.3   Please note, we only regulate social workers in England. The regulation of social workers is carried out by separate organisations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

3. About the standards of proficiency

3.1   The standards of proficiency are the standards that we consider necessary for the safe and effective practice of each of the professions we regulate. They describe what professionals must know, understand and be able to do at the time they apply to join our Register.

3.2   They are 'threshold standards'. This means that they must be absolutely necessary or the 'minimum' that we consider are required for safe and effective practice.

Structure of the standards

3.3   The standards of proficiency are divided into generic standards (which apply to all the professions) and standards specific to each of the professions we regulate.

3.4   The generic standards are shown in bold type and are not the subject of this consultation.

Language used in the standards

3.5   As the threshold standards for entry to the Register, the standards have to be relevant and applicable to prospective registrants applying to come on to the Register for the first time, as well as existing registrants and their practice.

3.6   The language used in the standards plays an important role in ensuring that they meet the above requirements. We intentionally use verbs such as 'understand', 'know' and 'be able to' rather than 'must'.

3.7   For example: *be able to practise within the legal and ethical boundaries of their profession.* By using 'be able to' we can ensure that:

- the standard is applicable to prospective registrants - i.e. those who have not yet started practising and are applying to be registered for the first time; and

- the standard is relevant and applicable to existing registrants. It could also be used in a fitness to practise case where a registrant's conduct or competence was called in to question.

3.8   We write the standards in a way that means they are relevant to all registrants in a profession, regardless of their area of practice. We also use language that can take into account changes in the law or working practices which might take place over time.

4. How we use the standards of proficiency

Approval of education programmes

4.1   The primary role of the standards of proficiency is in articulating the skills, knowledge and abilities necessary to become registered for the first time.

4.2   We conduct approval visits to education providers to ensure that programmes meet the standards. Our standards of education and training cover areas such as admissions, assessment and practice placements and we approve programmes using these standards. A programme which meets the standards of education and training will also allow a student who successfully completes that programme to meet the standards of proficiency. A student completing a programme is then eligible to apply for registration with us.

International registration

4.3   Applications from individuals who have qualified outside of the UK are assessed against the standards of proficiency. Each application is considered by assessors from the relevant profession to determine whether the applicant's education, training and experience mean that they meet the standards.

Registration renewal

4.4   Every time a registrant renews their registration, we ask them to sign a declaration to confirm that they continue to meet the standards of proficiency which apply to their scope of practice (see below).

Fitness to practise

4.5   If a registrant's competence is called into question we look at the standards of proficiency in deciding whether we need to take any action.

Scope of practice

4.6   As outlined above, when registrants renew their registration they must sign a declaration to state that they meet the standards which apply to their scope of practice.

4.7   Once someone becomes registered, we recognise that their scope of practice may change. We define scope of practice as the area or areas of a registrant's profession in which they have the knowledge, skills and experience to practise safely and effectively in a way that meets our standards and does not pose any danger to the public or to them.

4.8   A registrant's scope of practice may change over time and we recognise that the practice of experienced registrants often becomes more focussed and

specialised than that of newly registered colleagues. This might be because of specialisation in a particular area of practice or with a particular group, or a movement into roles in management, education or research.

4.9 A registrant's particular scope of practice may mean that they are unable to continue to demonstrate that they meet all of the standards of proficiency that apply for the whole of their profession. This will not be problematic, as long as they make sure that they are practising safely and effectively within their given scope of practice and do not practise in the areas where they are not proficient to do so.

5. Reviewing the standards of proficiency for social workers in England

About the review

5.1   The standards of proficiency for social workers in England were first published in 2012 prior to the opening of the Register to this profession on 1 August 2012.

5.2   We keep all the standards we publish under review. For professions that are new to the HCPC register, we normally undertake a formal review of the standards of proficiency after they have been in place for two to three years. For social workers in England, we committed to reviewing the standards of proficiency once we had concluded a three year programme of visits to pre-registration education and training programmes previously approved by the General Social Care Council (GSCC).

The review process

5.3   We undertook a range of activities to gather feedback about the existing standards and how we might improve them. They included the following.

- Surveys of education providers, HCPC visitors and registration assessors, practice placement educators and others.

- Meetings with stakeholders including the Department of Health and Department for Education and frontline social work managers.

- A workshop attended by a broad range of stakeholders including educators, professional bodies, newly qualified social workers, social work managers and practice educators.

- Shaping our Lives, a service user-led organisation, undertook a piece of work for us so we could benefit from the views and experiences of service users and carers. They undertook focus groups with a group of service users and carers and an open discussion with service users and social work students.[1]

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[1] http://www.hcpc-uk.org/assets/documents/10004EEEStandardsofproficiencyforsocialworkersinEngland-serviceuserandcarerinputintothereview.pdf

Entry to the Register as a social worker

5.4   Once they have completed an approved programme and become registered, newly qualified social workers normally move into social work roles which specialise in work with adults; children and families; or with people with mental health conditions.

5.5   There is an ongoing debate in the sector about the relative merits of greater 'specialisation' at entry to the profession. Some argue that in the future it might be more appropriate for students to qualify as a 'children's social worker' or as a social worker working with adults. At the moment, someone qualifies as a so-called 'generic' social worker.

5.6   In our legislation, registration with us means that someone is able to use the protected title 'social worker'. As a result, we have to make sure that the standards of proficiency describe the knowledge and skills needed to practise as a newly qualified social worker at a threshold level in all settings and with all client groups.

How the standards relate to other standards

5.7   Similar standards published by other organisations, whilst complementary, often have a different purpose.

5.8   The Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) is owned by the British Association of Social Workers. Whilst the standards of proficiency are about the threshold required at entry to the profession, the PCF is designed to support social workers throughout their careers. The PCF acts as an overarching framework by describing the capabilities expected of a social worker at key career stages. These include professionalism, values and ethics, knowledge, intervention and skills and professional leadership.

5.9   There is some overlap with the standards of proficiency because the PCF includes a description of the competencies expected by the end of a social work student's last placement.

5.10   The Knowledge and Skills Statements (KSS) are published by the Chief Social Workers for Children and Families and for Adults. In contrast to the standards of proficiency which have to describe the threshold level standards for registration, the KSS describe the knowledge and abilities expected of social workers who work with children and families, and those who work with adults. They describe what is required by the end of a newly qualified social worker's first year in practice - the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE).

5.11   As part of the review, we looked at the PCF and KSS to identify whether there were any gaps in the standards of proficiency or any existing standards that

should be amended. We also compared the standards to those we have recently revised for the other professions we regulate, to check whether there were any changes made which would be equally applicable to the social work standards.

Implementing the revised standards

5.12   In January 2016, the Secretary of State for Education, Nicky Morgan MP, announced the Government's intention to create a new body that would, in time, replace the HCPC as the regulator of social workers in England.[2]

5.13   The timescale for this change is uncertain at this time. Until this change is implemented we continue to be responsible for the regulation of social workers in England.

5.14   Subject to the above and the outcome of this consultation, we plan to publish the revised standards by the end of 2016. The revised standards would be implemented in the education monitoring and approval process from the 2017-18 academic year.

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[2] http://www.hcpc-uk.org/mediaandevents/news/index.asp?id=739

6. About the draft revised standards

6.1   Overall, the feedback we collected in the review activities indicated that the existing standards were considered by most stakeholders to be robust (in the context of them needing to describe what was required at entry for a so-called 'generic' social worker). This feedback indicated that only minor refinement was required.

6.2   The draft revised standards for consultation are in section eight. The following provides a brief summary of some of the main changes we have proposed. This is not intended to be exhaustive – we have made other minor changes in response to improve the overall clarity of the standards.

- We have proposed a small number of new standards, including the following.

  o A new standard about social workers being able to identify strategies for professional resilience. The importance of resilience was a theme that came up in a number of activities during the review, including at the workshop we held.

  o A new standard about working effectively whilst holding alternative, competing explanations in mind (4.5). This is based on feedback about the importance of social workers being curious and enquiring of the information they receive and being always willing to reassess their conclusions, particularly in matters which concern the safety and wellbeing of children and vulnerable adults. This is intended to augment the existing standard (4.4) about being able to make informed judgements on complex issues, based on the information available.

  o A new standard on understanding the principles of information governance and the safe use of health and social care information. This standard was added to the standards for all of the other professions during the last review.

  o A new dedicated standard has been created (8.12) about being able to present reports in formal settings (and standard 8.11 amended).

  o A new standard about understanding the concept of leadership and its application to practice (13.5). This standard was added to the standards for all the other professions during the last review.

- We have proposed some minor amendments to the standards, including the following.

o An amendment to standard 1.5 to highlight the importance of social workers recognising when immediate action is required in cases involving harm, abuse and neglect (something emphasised in the Knowledge and Skills Statements).

o We have added 'involvement' and 'co-production' to the concepts that social workers need to understand (13.4). This is a result of feedback from service users and carers at the workshop we held.

7. How to respond to the consultation

7.1   We would welcome your response to our consultation and have listed some questions to help you. The questions are not designed to be exhaustive and we would welcome your comments on any related issue.

7.2   The questions are listed below for your reference:

1. Do you think the standards are at a threshold level necessary for safe and effective practice?
2. Do you think any additional standards are necessary?
3. Do you think there are any standards which should be reworded or removed?
4. Do you have any other comments on the standards?

How to respond to the consultation

7.3   You can respond to this consultation in the following ways.

- By completing our easy-to-use online survey: https://www.research.net/r/Consultationonstandardsforsocialworkers

- By emailing us at: consultation@hcpc-uk.org

- By writing to us at the following address:

  Consultation on standards of proficiency for social workers in England
  Policy and Standards Department
  Health and Care Professions Council
  Park House
  184 Kennington Park Road
  London
  SE11 4BU

7.4   We do not normally accept responses by telephone or in person. We normally ask that consultation responses are made in writing to ensure that we can accurately record what the respondent would like to say. However, if you are unable to respond in writing please contact us on +44 (0)20 7840 9815 to discuss any reasonable adjustments which would help you to respond.

7.5   Please complete the online survey or send us your response by **24 June 2016**. We look forward to receiving your comments.

Please contact us to request a copy of this document in an alternative format, or in Welsh.

7.6   Once the consultation period is completed, we will analyse the responses we have received. We will then publish a document which details the comments received and explains the decisions we have taken as a result. This will be available on our website.

7.7   If you would prefer your response not to be made public, please indicate this when you respond.

8. Draft standards for consultation

Notes:

- New text or standards are shown in **bold text**
- Deletions are shown ~~struck through~~
- The generic standards are not the subject of this consultation

Generic standard	Profession-specific standards
1. be able to practise safely and effectively within their scope of practice	1.1 know the limits of their practice and when to seek advice or refer to another professional
	1.2 recognise the need to manage their own workload and resources effectively and be able to practise accordingly
	1.3 be able to undertake assessments of risk, need and capacity and respond appropriately
	1.4 be able to recognise and respond appropriately to unexpected situations and manage uncertainty
	1.5 be able to recognise signs of harm, abuse and neglect and know how to respond appropriately, **including recognising situations which require immediate action**
2. be able to practise within the legal and ethical boundaries of their profession	2.1 understand current legislation applicable to ~~the work of their profession~~ **social work with adults, children, young people and families**
	2.2 understand the need to promote the best interests of service users at all times
	2.3 understand the need to protect, safeguard**,** ~~and~~ promote **and prioritise** the wellbeing of children, young people and vulnerable adults

	2.4	~~be able to understand the need to~~ **understand, and be able to** address, practices which present a risk to or from service users or others
	2.5	be able to manage **and weigh up** competing or conflicting **values or** interests **to make reasoned professional judgements**
	2.6	be able to exercise authority as a social worker within the appropriate legal and ethical frameworks **and boundaries**
	2.7	understand the need to respect and so far as possible uphold, the rights, dignity, values and autonomy of every service user
	2.8	recognise that relationships with service users and carers should be based on respect and honesty
	2.9	recognise the power dynamics in relationships with service users and be able to manage those dynamics appropriately
	2.10	understand what is required of them by the Health and Care Professions Council
3. be able to maintain fitness to practise	3.1	understand the need to maintain high standards of personal and professional conduct
	3.2	understand the importance of maintaining their own health and wellbeing
	3.3	understand both the need to keep skills and knowledge up-to-date and the importance of career-long learning
	3.4	be able to establish and maintain personal and professional boundaries
	3.5	be able to manage the physical and emotional impact of their practice
	3.6	**be able to identify strategies to build professional resilience**

4.	be able to practise as an autonomous professional, exercising their own professional judgement	4.1	be able to assess a situation, determine the nature and severity of the problem and call upon the required knowledge and experience to deal with it
		4.2	be able to initiate resolution of problems and be able to exercise personal initiative
		4.3	recognise that they are personally responsible for, and must be able to justify, their decisions and recommendations
		4.4	be able to make informed judgements on complex issues using the information available
		4.5	**be able to work effectively whilst holding alternative competing explanations in mind**
		4.6	be able to make and receive referrals appropriately
		4.7	**understand the importance of participation in training and mentoring**
5.	be aware of the impact of culture, equality and diversity on practice	5.1	be able to reflect on and take account of the impact of inequality, disadvantage and discrimination on those who use social work services and their communities
		5.2	understand the need to adapt practice to response appropriately to different groups and individuals
		5.3	be aware of the impact of their own values on practice with different groups of service users and carers
		5.4	understand different cultures and communities and how this affects the role of the social worker in supporting service users, carers and families

6.	be able to practise in a non-discriminatory manner	6.1	be able to work with others to promote social justice, equality and inclusion
		6.2	be able to use practice to challenge and address the impact of discrimination and disadvantage and oppression
7.	understand the importance of and be able to maintain confidentiality	7.1	be able to understand and explain the limits of confidentiality
		7.2	be able to recognise and respond appropriately to situations where it is necessary to share information to safeguard service users and carers or others
		7.3	**understand the principles of information governance and be aware of the safe and effective use of health and social care information**
8.	be able to communicate effectively	8.1	be able to use interpersonal skills and appropriate forms of verbal and non-verbal communication with service users and others
		8.2	be able to demonstrate effective and appropriate skills in communicating advice, instruction, information and professional opinion to colleagues, service users and carers
		8.3	understand the need to provide service users and carers with the information necessary to enable them to make informed decisions or to understand the decisions made
		8.4	understand how communication skills affect the assessment of and engagement with service users and carers
		8.5	understand how the means of communication should be modified to address and take account of a range of factors including age, capacity, learning ability and physical ability
		8.6	be aware of the characteristics and consequences of verbal and non-verbal communication and how this can be affected by a range of factors including ~~disability, culture, age, ethnicity, gender, religious beliefs and socio-economic status~~ **age, disability, culture, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status and spiritual or religious beliefs**

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	8.7	understand the need to draw upon available resources and services to support service users' and carers' communication wherever possible
	8.8	be able to communicate in English to the standard equivalent to level 7 of the International English Language Testing System, with no element below 6.5[3]
	8.9	be able to engage in inter-professional and inter-agency communication
	8.10	be able to listen actively to **colleagues,** service users**,** ~~and~~ carers and others
	8.11	be able to prepare ~~and present~~ formal reports in line with applicable protocols and guidelines
	8.12	**be able to present reports in formal settings**
9. be able to work appropriately with others	9.1	understand the need to build and sustain professional relationships with service users, carers and colleagues as both an autonomous practitioner and collaboratively with others
	9.2	be able to work with service users and carers to enable them to assess and make informed decisions about their needs, circumstances, risks, preferred options and resources
	9.3	be able to work with service users to promote individual growth, development and independence and to assist them to understand and exercise their rights
	9.4	be able to support service users' rights to control their lives and make informed choices about the services they receive
	9.5	be able to support the development of networks, groups and communities to meet needs and outcomes

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[3] The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) tests competence in spoken and written English. Applicants who have qualified outside the UK, whose first language is not English and who are not nationals of a country with the European Economic Area (EEA) or Switzerland, have to provide evidence that they have reached the necessary standard. Please visit our website for more information.

		9.6	be able to work in partnership with others, including **service users and carers and** those working in other agencies and roles
		9.7	be able to contribute effectively to work undertaken as part of a multi-disciplinary team
		9.8	recognise the contribution that service users and carers' own resources and strengths can bring to social work
		9.9	be able to **identify and** work with resistance **to change** and conflict
		9.10	be able to understand the emotional dynamics of interactions with service users and carers
10.	be able to maintain records appropriately	10.1	be able to keep accurate, comprehensive and comprehensible records in accordance with applicable legislation, protocols and guidelines
		10.2	recognise the need to manage records and all other information in accordance with applicable legislation, protocols and guidelines
11.	be able to reflect on and review practice	11.1	understand the value of critical reflection on practice and the need to record the outcome of such reflection appropriately
		11.2	recognise the value of supervision, case reviews and other methods of reflection and review
12.	be able to assure the quality of their practice	12.1	be able to use supervision to support and enhance the quality of their social work practice
		12.2	be able to contribute to processes designed to evaluate service and individual outcomes
		12.3	be able to engage in evidence-informed practice, evaluate practice systematically and participate in audit procedures
13.	understand the key concepts of the	13.1	~~recognise~~ **understand** the roles of other professions, practitioners and organisations **in health, social care, justice and in other settings where social work is practised**

knowledge base relevant to their profession	13.2	be aware of the different social and organisational contexts and settings within which social work operates
	13.3	be aware of changes in demography and culture and their impact on social work
	13.4	understand in relation to social work practice: • social work theory; • social work models and interventions; • the development and application of relevant law and social policy; • the development of social work and social work values; • human growth and development across the lifespan and the impact of key developmental stages and transitions; • the impact of injustice, social inequalities, policies and other issues which affect the demand for social work services; • the relevance of psychological, environmental, sociological and physiological perspectives to understanding personal and social development and functioning; • concepts of participation, advocacy, **co-production, involvement** and empowerment; and • the relevance of sociological perspectives to understanding societal and structural influences on human behaviour.
	13.5	**understand the concept of leadership and its application to practice**
14. be able to draw on appropriate knowledge and skills to inform practice	14.1	be able to gather, analyse, critically evaluate and use information and knowledge to make recommendations or modify their practice
	14.2	be able to select and use appropriate assessment tools
	14.3	be able to prepare, implement, review, evaluate and revise and conclude plans to meet needs and circumstances and in conjunction with service users and carers
	14.4	be able to use social work methods, theories and models to **identify actions to** achieve change and development and improve life opportunities

	14.5	be aware of a range of research methodologies	
	14.6	recognise the value of research and analysis and be able to evaluate such evidence to inform their own practice	
	14.7	**be able to use research, reasoning and problem solving skills to determine appropriate actions**	
	14.8	be able to demonstrate a level of skill in the use of information technology appropriate to their practice	
	14.9	be able to change their practice as needed to take account of new developments or changing contexts	
15. understand the need to establish and maintain a safe practice environment	15.1	understand the need to maintain the safety of both service users, carers and colleagues	
	15.2	be aware of applicable health and safety legislation and any relevant safety policies and procedures in force at the workplace, such as incident reporting, and be able to act in accordance with these	
	15.3	be able to work safely in challenging environments, including being able to take appropriate actions to manage environmental risk	