



Department
for Education

Consultation Response Form

Consultation closing date: 9 October 2014
Your comments must reach us by that date

Knowledge and Skills for Child and Family Social Work – Response Form

If you would prefer to respond online to this consultation please use the following link: <https://www.education.gov.uk/consultations>

Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal information, may be subject to publication or disclosure in accordance with the access to information regimes, primarily the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Data Protection Act 1998.

If you want all, or any part, of your response to be treated as confidential, please explain why you consider it to be confidential.

If a request for disclosure of the information is received, your explanation about why you consider your response to be confidential will be taken into account, but no assurance can be given that confidentiality can be maintained. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Department for Education ('the Department').

The Department will process your personal data (name and address and any other identifying material) in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998, and in the majority of circumstances, this will mean that your personal data will not be disclosed to third parties.

Please tick if you want us to keep your response confidential.	
Reason for confidentiality:	

Name: Cathy Ashley	
Please tick if you are responding on behalf of your organisation.	X
Name of Organisation (if applicable): Family Rights Group (FRG).	

Address: The Print House, 18 Ashwin Street, London E8 3DL	

Which answer best describes you as a respondent?

<input type="checkbox"/> Local authority	<input type="checkbox"/> Social Worker	<input type="checkbox"/> LA representative bodies
<input type="checkbox"/> Young person	<input type="checkbox"/> University/FE Provider	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Voluntary and Community Sector x
<input type="checkbox"/> Other employers of social workers (private, voluntary and independent)	<input type="checkbox"/> Other	

<p>Please Specify:</p> <p>Cathy Ashley is the chief executive of Family Rights Group, the charity in England which specialises in advising and supporting parents and families whose children are in need, at risk, or in the care system. We advise more than 8,000 parents and relatives per year about their rights and options when they are involved with, or require, local authority children's services. We promote policies and practices that help children to be raised safely and thrive within their families and communities and give families a voice when decisions are being made about their children's lives. We campaign for effective support to help struggling parents and family and friend carers who are raising children who cannot live at home.</p>
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1. Is there anything else that should be included in the statement which sets out what a child and family social worker needs to know and be able to do?

Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

FRG welcome the desire to develop a concise statement which aims to set out clearly what a newly qualified child and family social worker should know, and should be able to do. We note that the statement also aims to clarify the expectations of what social work qualifying programmes need to offer to students to ensure that they have the ability to practise effectively. This is a very broad remit. However, whilst we welcome the discussion and attempt at a succinct document that will be meaningful to child and family social workers we are aware that there are other initiatives such as the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF), developed by the College of Social Work which also addresses these issues. It is important that there is further clarity about how this document fits with the PCF.

Additionally, we understand that a similar knowledge and skills statement for social workers working with adults is being developed but we do not yet know what that encompasses or how it fits with this document. There is a tension here. Both statements need to be compatible - the current social work qualification is generic and join up between the adults and the children and families sector is vital. Therefore, we see this consultation document as very much part of the spectrum of debates and developments about how to practise social work effectively and helpfully with children and their families.

We acknowledge that this is a concise document which aims to summarise a very complex and distinctive role and we welcome the opportunity to contribute to this important debate. However, we have concerns that the draft document does not sufficiently address or focus upon some of the key elements which our professional experience and feedback from parents and families tells us are essential to ethical, proportionate and effective social work with children, young people and their families.

We are disappointed that the perspectives of parents, carers and children and young people who are not in care, have not been explicitly sought as part of this consultation process. The importance of involving and learning from service users' experiences has been emphasised in a range of research such as the Children's Commissioner report

(2010), Family perspectives on safeguarding and on relationships with children's services and Professor Munro's (June 2014) Review of the first eleven Ofsted inspections of children's services and LSCBs. We have consulted with **Your Family, Your Voice: an alliance of families and practitioners working to transform the system** (which has been instigated and is serviced by FRG) and they would be willing to work with the Chief Social Worker for Children and Families and the Department for Education to facilitate this feedback.

Drawing upon our experience and expertise, we believe the following either need to be added to the statement or have a stronger emphasis than in the current draft:

- **The role of child and family social work**

- a) Whilst it is important that the social worker is able to "identify the full range of risks to children and help to manage those risks" we suggest that this very strong emphasis on the context of risk is not sufficiently reflective of the wider remit of social workers working with children, vulnerable adults and their families. We recommend that the phrase be amended to ensure that the social worker also holistically identifies the full range of strengths within the family and the community so that any assessment and intervention also recognises families' protective factors and promotes resilience.
- b) It is positive that the role of the social worker in helping to build family relationships is clearly stated. However the importance of the social worker doing relationship-based social work and "genuine engagement in people's lives" (TCSW roles and functions of social workers in England) is not. Research regularly reminds us that adults and children alike highly value social workers who are informative, provide or signpost to advice and advocacy, offer a holistic approach, and who listen and communicate well, in a warm and respectful manner (*quoted in TCSW as above*).
- c) This section also sets out the need for the social worker to be able to access and support alternative care for children, and to continue to provide care and support as young people leave care and enter adulthood. However, it is vital to add to this the importance of the social worker understanding and being committed to helping children and young people to maintain multiple relationships over time, a need which the Care Inquiry illustrated powerfully as "the golden thread" (The Care Inquiry, April 2013, Making not Breaking – building relationships for our most vulnerable children) .
- d) It is helpful that the second paragraph in this descriptor acknowledges that some parents may be vulnerable adults. However, again it should be acknowledged that whilst not all parents may be vulnerable many will be adults with individual needs in their own right who may benefit from support and help to access community and statutory services. The child and family social worker may be the best person to recognise their needs and to assist the parent to access the help that may bring positive change both for the parent, their child and family – and highlights the fact that children exist not in isolation but as part of a wider family, community and society. The child and family social worker also needs to be able to practise in way which promotes human rights and equalities

whilst also managing competing needs, rights and alternative perspective.

e) It is positive that the social worker is required to be aware of and understand the context in which social work with children and families takes place and to make sense of the impact of factors such as poverty, inequality and diversity on social and economic opportunities and how this is connected to child welfare, family functioning and child protection. This statement unfortunately is not explicit about the impact of discrimination and oppression on the lives of children and their families nor does it recognise that there is a responsibility on social workers to work with others to address or challenge their impact on children and their families. Enabling social workers to develop community development skills would assist them in this work.

- **Child development**

In addition to the factors mentioned an understanding of the child's developmental needs also needs to take account of observations of the child and family, an attempt to make sense of the individual culture and relationships within the family in which the child lives and to support and promote positive attachments.

- **Adult mental ill health, substance misuse, domestic violence, physical ill health and disability**

- a) Parental imprisonment is another significant factor which research has shown negatively affects children's health and well-being. This is an area which is not widely addressed within children's social work but can lead to children having to cope with major adversities including, relationship breakdown, changes to their care and education arrangements, etc. It would be helpful if social workers were reminded of this in the statement and encouraged to consider the needs of all family members involved including kinship carers who often are the only source of stability for the children of prisoners, but who may not be offered support to care for the children.
- b) We welcome the emphasis on social workers being knowledgeable about the responsibilities other professionals hold and the support they can provide to adults in need or at risk, and agree that social workers need to be able to integrate multi-disciplinary judgements into children's social work assessments. It would be helpful to add to this a focus on social workers developing skills in collaborative working.
- c) When working with parents or carers with specific needs such as a disability, those who can't read or don't speak English, social workers should also have an understanding of the need to consider providing advocacy. Social workers also need to have knowledge of information-sharing guidance and data protection legislation in the context of working with parents and carers as well as children and be able to apply this knowledge appropriately and explain this openly to parents and carers.

- **Abuse and neglect of children**

- a) In recognising indicators of possible harm to children it is important that potential protective factors are also considered. Likewise, whilst recognising the potential for children to abuse other children the abusive child needs also to be worked with as a child with all their own vulnerabilities and developmental needs. It is not

mentioned here but appropriate and timely support for the protective parent or carer (including kinship and adoptive parents) needs to be thought about at an early stage of intervention in order to promote the child's welfare and help their carer keep them safe.

- b) It is positive that reference is made to the relationship between poverty and social deprivation and the impact of stress on family functioning. However, this does not fully acknowledge the structural disadvantages and discrimination which some groups in society face. Whilst the social worker needs to maintain a compassionate position, as described, they also have a responsibility to challenge inequalities or unjust policies and practices where necessary. Provision of early support and child in need services is not explicitly referenced in the document but is one of the spectrum of duties and responsibilities set out in Working Together 2013 and the Children Act 1989.

- **Effective direct work with children and families**

- a) It is heartening that the importance of building purposeful, effective, authoritative (*where necessary*) and compassionate relationships with children and families is noted here and that a child and family social worker should be able to use evidence-based, effective social work approaches to helping children and families which support change. It would be helpful if the term working in partnership with children and their families was also added to illustrate the legislative basis for this work and how change can successfully be achieved when families and professionals work respectfully together to address concerns, including harnessing support.
- b) The support needs of children (and their carers and parents) in kinship care placements is not specifically referenced here and should be in recognition of the large number of children cared for by family members (the 2001 census analysis found that 140,000 children in England lived with relatives rather than with parents – more than are adopted or living in unrelated foster or residential care).
- c) The significance of social workers actively forming and promoting relationships between children, their family, their carers, and the professionals involved with them, cannot be underestimated. It was a consistent feature of the Care Inquiry which found that "relationships should be the lens through which all work with individual children, family members and carers should be viewed". Fathers need to be specifically mentioned here as research continues to show that fathers (especially those in prison) and paternal relatives are not consistently engaged by statutory services in plans and decisions about their children (Ashley et al 2013 Working with Risky Fathers).
- d) Social workers do play a role in working with families experiencing loss and change and it is right that they should have an understanding of the impact of both. One area where this is particularly important is where mothers (and indeed fathers) have had a child or children removed from their care. These parents need support to help them manage their relationship with their child, with feelings of loss and with addressing the reasons why their child was removed from their care as well as maximising their chances of successfully keeping subsequent children.
- e) Social workers should be actively able to engage with families and be able to use

different approaches to encourage participation and planning such as considering using advocacy and family group conferences.

- **Child and family assessment**

This descriptor sets out the skills and tools needed in child and family assessment, with an emphasis on parental capacity and capability to change. What is missing, however, is recognition of how social workers can support or enhance a parent's willingness and ability to make the changes that social workers recommend and how this help or support should be provided in a timely way. Parents are often expected to make significant changes in difficult circumstances in a short period of time so assessments need to consider how to assess capacity to change realistically over time whilst prioritising the child's welfare.

- **Analysis, decision-making, planning and review**

This section helpfully sets out the key components involved in the above. What is less clear however is how child and family social workers can develop their skills in explaining their reasoning or recommendations to children, parents and carers, in a meaningful and respectful way. Families frequently tell FRG that information in reports, such as social work reports for child protection conferences are often inaccurate, the context for events unclear, reports not shared in advance and even concerns not clearly stated. Similarly, social workers sometimes struggle to be clear with families about the legal basis for their intervention and often do not seek consent, confirm decisions or agreements in writing, in a timely way. It would be very useful if this knowledge and skills statement ensured that social workers encouraged children, parents and kinship carers and parents to access independent advice and advocacy at an early stage in order to promote their engagement in decision-making for their children, which is in line with statutory guidance (Department for Education, Court orders and pre-proceedings 2014).

- **The law and the family justice system**

- a) This descriptor aims to summarise the range of knowledge and understanding child and family social workers should have of legislation and particularly the family justice system in England. Adoption is specifically highlighted as one of the range of permanency options of which social workers need to be aware. We are concerned that singling out one option creates an impression that this is the main or indeed the preferred option - instead all the possibilities need to be referenced e.g. return home to parent(s), child arrangements order, special guardianship order, long-term foster care (including with kinship carers).
- b) Given the needs and circumstances of families with whom they are working, It would also be advisable for social workers to have some awareness (and know how to signpost families for advice) regarding housing, welfare, and asylum and immigration law.

- **Professional ethics**

- a) This is a useful summary but it could also include reference to how social workers can make use of supervision and peer discussions to help them to recognise and address professional and ethical dilemmas.
- b) Also as part of professional ethical practice social workers need to develop skills in practising social work with confidence and as part of this being able to

challenge decision-making where necessary to promote the child's welfare or to support the child's family.

- c) Social workers also need to be able to demonstrate openness and honesty in their interactions with families and professionals and to be fully aware of and implement information-sharing and data protection protocols.

- **The role of supervision and research.**

This contains very useful guidance but does not suggest how social workers can be given time and encouragement by their supervisors and employers to access relevant research and enhance their professional development.

- **Organisational context**

- a) It is right that the range of organisational settings in which child and family social workers operate is noted. However, there is a very confusing and somewhat worrying sentence here which states:

*“understanding that the **success** or **failure** of the social worker depends on the operation of organisations and also **in spite of it**”.*

Success or failure solely attributed to an individual social worker seems inappropriate and requires clarification or amendment. Outcomes for individual children and their families should not be located entirely in the work of any individual social worker.

- b) It is questionable why social workers should be expected to perform “in spite” of the operation of their organisations. Employers have a duty to support social workers in their learning and development. Many of the skills outlined in the document are achieved through professional development which the organisation should promote. We understand that the British Association of Social Worker recommended that this statement needs to be linked to employers' standards which we endorse.

- c) Children in need of protection have wrongly been omitted from the sentence:

“Be able to manage the specific sets of tasks relating to statutory case responsibility for children in need and children in public care”.

This needs rectifying.

2. Are there any parts of the statement which are not set at the right level for a child and family social worker to be able to know or do, at the end of their first year of practice? If so, what are they?

Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

As raised earlier, we are very concerned that the knowledge and skills statement appears to be primarily focused in the context of child protection social work and is concentrated on assessing risk, statutory intervention and exercising professional authority rather than on the broader remit of child and family social work which includes family support and promotes partnership-working, relationship-building, and providing help. The significance given to working with children at risk means that the document has a narrow focus which detracts from the broader generic skill base which social workers need to have as they engage with a wide range of people.

Newly qualified child and families social workers need to have and be enabled to develop a wide range of skills to support them to work effectively with families. The requirements set out in the document appear to be more suited to more experienced child protection social workers than to those who are newly qualified. This statement sets out very high expectations on social workers beginning to practice and work with families without making clear what opportunities for learning or professional development will be offered by the organisations in which they work. There is no acknowledgement of the pressurised environment and caseload pressures which child and family social workers contend with and which impact on how they practice and develop and how this affects the families they work with.

As noted above the lack of service-user input perspectives means that the statement is not reflective of the social work skills and knowledge that parents, carers and children value.

Additionally it is not clear how the statement fits with work done and progress made by the College of Social Work in developing the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) for social workers.

3. Do you agree that the statement should not prescribe particular social work theories or methodologies?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Not Sure
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Comments:

We agree that the statement should not be overly prescriptive or too narrow in relation to social work theories and methodologies. However, social workers do need to have an understanding of and work within theoretical frameworks and models of practice and keep up to date with any relevant research developments or innovations.

Thank you for taking the time to let us have your views. We do not intend to acknowledge individual responses unless you place an 'X' in the box below.

Please acknowledge this reply.	x
E-mail address for acknowledgement: cashley@frg.org.uk	

Here at the Department for Education we carry out our research on many different topics and consultations. As your views are valuable to us, please confirm below if you would be willing to be contacted again from time to time either for research or to send through consultation documents?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No
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All Department for Education public consultations are required to meet the Cabinet Office [Principles on Consultation](#)

The key consultation principles are:

- government will follow a range of timescales rather than defaulting to a 12-week period, particularly where extensive engagement has occurred before
- government will need to give more thought to how they engage with and use real discussion with affected parties and experts as well as the expertise of civil service learning to make well informed decisions

- government should explain what responses they have received and how these have been used in formulating policy
- consultation should be 'digital by default', but other methods should be used where these are needed to reach the groups affected by a policy
- the principles of the Compact between government and the voluntary and community sector will continue to be respected.

If you have any comments on how Department for Education (DfE) consultations are conducted, please contact Aileen Shaw, DfE Consultation Coordinator, tel: 0370 000 2288 / email: aileen.shaw@education.gsi.gov.uk

Thank you for taking time to respond to this consultation.

Completed responses should be sent to the address shown below by 9 October 2014

Send by post to:

Social Work Team, Department for Education, Sanctuary Buildings, 20 Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BT.

Send by e-mail to: KnowledgeAndSkills.CONULTATION@education.gsi.gov.uk.