
Standards of proficiency

Social workers in England

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Foreword

We are pleased to present the Health and Care Professions Council's standards of proficiency for social workers in England.

The standards of proficiency set out what a social worker should know, understand and be able to do when they complete their training so that they can register with us.

We set up a Professional Liaison Group (PLG) to help us to prepare the standards. The PLG brought together a number of key stakeholders from the social work field in England, including employers, social work educators and organisations representing the profession. Following this, we held a formal consultation on the draft proposed standards and met with a group of service users and carers to discuss the standards.

We are very grateful to members of the PLG and to those individuals and organisations who worked with us and responded to our consultation. We made a number of changes to the standards following the consultation, to ensure that the standards reflected the values and practice of social work.

Our work to set the standards of proficiency for social workers in England has developed alongside the work of the Social Work Reform Board. We were members of the Board and we are committed to working with the social work community to raise standards and achieve the Reform Board's vision of a safe, confident future for social work.

One outcome of the Reform Board, the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF), is now managed by the College of Social Work. The PCF and the standards of proficiency have different roles. The standards of proficiency are the threshold standards for social workers in England, whereas the PCF describes the capabilities required of social workers at all stages of their career. However, both the PCF and the standards set out what is expected of social workers when they finish their training and start practising. We have worked with the College to identify how the two documents work together and produced a mapping of the documents. You can find more information about this on our website alongside these standards.

We are confident that the standards of proficiency are fit for purpose and reflect the values and practice of social work.

The standards apply from 1 August 2012.

Introduction

This document sets out the standards of proficiency. These standards set out safe and effective practice in the professions we regulate. They are the threshold standards we consider necessary to protect members of the public. They set out what a student must know, understand and be able to do by the time they have completed their training, so that they are able to apply to register with us. Once on our register you must meet those standards of proficiency which relate to the areas in which you work.

We also expect you to keep to our standards of conduct, performance and ethics and standards for continuing professional development. We publish these in separate documents, which you can find on our website.

The standards of proficiency in this document include both generic elements, which apply to all our registrants, and profession-specific elements which are relevant to registrants belonging to one of the professions we currently regulate. The generic standards are written in **bold**, and the profession-specific standards are written in plain text.

We have numbered the standards so that you can refer to them more easily. The standards are not hierarchical and are all equally important for practice.

A note about our expectations of you

You must meet all the standards of proficiency to register with us and meet the standards relevant to your scope of practice to stay registered with us.

It is important that you read and understand this document. If your practice is called into question we will consider these standards (and our standards of conduct, performance and ethics) in deciding what action, if any, we need to take.

The standards set out in this document complement information and guidance issued by other organisations, such as your professional body or your employer. We recognise the valuable role played by professional bodies in providing guidance and advice about good practice which can help you to meet the standards in this document.

Your scope of practice

Your scope of practice is the area or areas of your profession in which you have the knowledge, skills and experience to practise lawfully, safely and effectively, in a way that meets our standards and does not pose any danger to the public or to yourself.

We recognise that a registrant's scope of practice will change over time and that the practice of experienced registrants often becomes more focused and specialised than that of newly registered colleagues. This might be because of specialisation in a certain area or with a particular client group, or a movement into roles in management, education or research.

Every time you renew your registration, you will be asked to make a declaration that you continue to meet the standards of proficiency that apply to your scope of practice.

Your particular scope of practice may mean that you are unable to continue to demonstrate that you meet all of the standards that apply for the whole of your profession.

As long as you make sure that you are practising safely and effectively within your given scope of practice and do not practise in the areas where you are not proficient to do so, this will not be a problem. If you want to move outside of your scope of practice, you should be certain that you are capable of working lawfully, safely and effectively. This means that you need to exercise personal judgement by undertaking any necessary training and experience, before moving into a new area of practice.

Meeting the standards

It is important that you meet our standards and are able to practise lawfully, safely and effectively. However, we do not dictate how you should meet our standards. There is normally more than one way in which each standard can be met and the way in which you meet our standards might change over time because of improvements in technology or changes in your practice.

We often receive questions from registrants who are concerned that something they have been asked to do, a policy, or the way in which they work might mean they cannot meet our standards. They are often worried that this might have an effect on their registration.

As an autonomous professional, you need to make informed, reasoned decisions about your practice to ensure that you meet the standards that apply to you. This includes seeking advice and support from education providers, employers, colleagues, professional bodies, unions and others to ensure that the wellbeing of service users is safeguarded at all times. So long as you do this and can justify your decisions if asked to, it is very unlikely that you will not meet our standards.

Language

We recognise that our registrants work in a range of different settings, including direct practice, management, education, research and roles in industry. We also recognise that the use of terminology can be an emotive issue.

Our registrants work with very different people and use different terms to describe the groups that use, or are affected by, their services. Some of our registrants work with patients, others with clients and others with service users. The terms that you use will depend on how and where you work. We have used terms in these standards which we believe best reflect the groups that you work with.

In the standards of proficiency, we use phrases such as 'understand', 'know', and 'be able to'. This is so the standards remain applicable to current registrants in maintaining their fitness to practise, as well as prospective registrants who have not yet started practising and are applying for registration for the first time.

These standards may change in the future

We have produced these standards after speaking to our stakeholders and holding a formal public consultation.

We will continue to listen to our stakeholders and will keep our standards under continual review. Therefore, we may make further changes in the future to take into account changes in practice.

We will always publicise any changes to the standards that we make by, for instance, publishing notices on our website and informing professional bodies.

Standards of proficiency

Registrant social workers must:

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 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

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
- 2.2 understand the need to promote the best interests of service users and carers at all times
- 2.3 understand the need to protect, safeguard and promote the wellbeing of children, young people and vulnerable adults
- 2.4 understand the need to address practices which present a risk to or from service users and carers, or others
- 2.5 be able to manage competing or conflicting interests
- 2.6 be able to exercise authority as a social worker within the appropriate legal and ethical frameworks
- 2.7 understand the need to respect and uphold the rights, dignity, values and autonomy of every service user and carer
- 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 carers 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

4 be able to practise as an autonomous professional, exercising their own professional judgement

- 4.1 be able to assess a situation, determine its nature and severity and call upon the required knowledge and experience to deal with it
- 4.2 be able to initiate resolution of issues 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 make and receive referrals appropriately

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 respond 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 the impact of different cultures and communities and how this affects the role of the social worker in supporting service users and carers

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, disadvantage and oppression

7 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

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, carers 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 age, culture, disability, ethnicity, gender, religious beliefs and socio-economic status
- 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 6.5¹
- 8.9 be able to engage in inter-professional and inter-agency communication
- 8.10 be able to listen actively to service users and carers and others
- 8.11 be able to prepare and present formal reports in line with applicable protocols and guidelines

¹ The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) tests competence in the English language. Applicants who have qualified outside of the UK, whose first language is not English and who are not nationals of a country within the European Economic Area (EEA) or Switzerland, must provide evidence that they have reached the necessary standard. Please visit our website for more information.

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 and carers 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' and carers' 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
- 9.6 be able to work in partnership with others, including 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 work with resistance 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 knowledge base relevant to their profession

- 13.1 recognise the roles of other professions, practitioners and organisations
- 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 and application 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 and empowerment; and
- the relevance of sociological perspectives to understanding societal and structural influences on human behaviour

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, revise and conclude plans to meet needs and circumstances in conjunction with service users and carers
- 14.4 be able to use social work methods, theories and models 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 demonstrate a level of skill in the use of information technology appropriate to their practice
- 14.8 be able to change their practice as needed to take account of new developments or changing contexts

15 be able to establish and maintain a safe practice environment

- 15.1 understand the need to maintain the safety of 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

Notes

Notes

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