



Department
for Education

Consultation Response Form

Consultation closing date: 1 September 2015

Your comments must reach us by that date

**Knowledge and skills: practice leaders
and practice supervisors**

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

In November 2014 the Department for Education published the statement of knowledge and skills for Approved Child and Family Practitioners written by the Chief Social Worker for children and families.

This consultation is on two additional new draft statements of knowledge and skills on child and family social work, one for practice supervisors and one for practice leaders.

These statements will be part of a new national, practice focused, career pathway. Practice supervisors and practice leaders will be assessed against them to provide clarity about the quality of practice that can be expected from those who hold these accreditations.

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 you have provided is received, your explanation about why you consider it 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.

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.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reason for confidentiality:	

Name: Chloë Cockett	
Please tick if you are responding on behalf of your organisation.	✓
Name of Organisation (if applicable): The Who Cares? Trust	
Address: 15-18 White Lion Street, London, N1 9PG	

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

Please specify the category which best describes you as a respondent. If other, please specify.

<input type="checkbox"/> Social Worker	<input type="checkbox"/> Local authority or representative body	<input type="checkbox"/> Higher education or further education institution
<input type="checkbox"/> University/FE Provider	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Voluntary and Community Sector Organisation	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent
<input type="checkbox"/> Carer	<input type="checkbox"/> Family Member	<input type="checkbox"/> Child or Young Person
<input type="checkbox"/> Other employer of social workers (private, voluntary and independent)	<input type="checkbox"/> Child and family social worker	<input type="checkbox"/> Social worker in adult setting
<input type="checkbox"/> Supervising social worker	<input type="checkbox"/> Other	

Please Specify:

1 Is there anything else that should be included in the statement which sets out what a practice leader needs to know and be able to do?

Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

Practice Leaders need to be able to lead practice in all areas of social work, not just child protection. The focus appears to be more on the safety of children and family wellbeing and more needs to be done to ensure that this statement equally applies to working with children in care. Of course, the safety of children is paramount, however social workers have a particular role in caring for children in local authority care. As a general comment to help, we suggest that where there are references to 'the safety of children and the welfare of families' the sentence is extended to include 'the welfare, wellbeing and needs of children in care'.

While we welcome the ambition of providing a 'world-class' service and 'excellent practice' we would stress that it is important to listen to children and young people in order to assess what is 'excellent practice'.

Lead and govern excellent practice

Social workers are corporate parents. Social workers, in particular practice leaders must have knowledge of the role of a corporate parent and an understanding of what it means to be a corporate parent. We would suggest that there is something included in this section about the Practice Leader as corporate parent.

We welcome the final sentence of the third paragraph in this section. However, we would like to see 'can' removed from the sentence 'Show commitment to children in public care by ensuring they grow up in homes in which **they thrive...**' as children should be in homes where they do thrive, rather than only having the potential to do so. Practice Leaders should also know how to deliver the support to which care leavers are entitled, and so we suggest that the sentence ends '...receive all the support to which they are entitled, ensuring that it is delivered in a person-centred and appropriate way.'

Practice Leaders should not only have a wide and current knowledge of social work practice and systems, but also the legal framework that underpins children's social care, as well as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the responsibilities of the local authority to uphold them.

Creating a context for excellent practice

The reference to safe and stable childhoods for children in care is not sufficient. The current wording does not reflect the level of ambition for their childhood that should be held by social workers, particularly practice leaders. We suggest that 'happy' and 'ambitious' are used in addition to safe and stable.

Designing a system to support effective practice

We welcome the reference to providing a safe, calm and well-ordered environment.

Practice Leaders should not only 'create sufficient capacity for practitioners to build relationships [...] and undertake effective direct work, which successfully reduces risks and enhances family wellbeing' but also that enables children and young people to build trust with their social worker and enable them to meet their needs.

Constant reflective thinking should also be about the wellbeing of children in care.

Practice Leaders should secure emotional support services for the organisation and ensure that social workers have access to good quality supervision.

We think that 'orthodoxies' is not a particularly accessible term.

Developing excellent practitioners

Practice leaders should be skilled in listening to children and young people and supporting social workers to do that well across all their work, as well as in the development of staff and services (as referenced already). We think that there should be a further reference to supporting active listening in the practice of social workers. In addition, looked after children and professionals understand the act of listening differently. For children and young people, listening is more than just hearing what is being said, they need action to follow afterwards in order for them to feel listened to. In contrast, many professionals believe that the act of respectful listening without action is enough.¹

Support effective decision making

Effective decision making is important, however the section misses out the importance of ensuring that children and young people are involved in the process. Therefore, we think that the following should be added: 'Ensure that the child's voice is at the centre of all decision-making. Challenge where this is not happening, and ensure all children and young people have access to advocacy.'

¹ Mcleod, A., 2006, 'Respect or empowerment? Alternative understandings of 'listening' in childcare social work, *Adoption & Fostering* 30 (4) p. 47

Quality assurance and improvement

While we welcome the inclusion of the involvement of children, young people, families and communities in assessing quality, we are concerned that the reference to local would mean that an important group of children will miss out on giving their views on quality. Children in care who live out of the local authority have a unique experience due to the distance from their home authority, and in some cases, the time it takes to travel to meet with a child. Therefore, the practice leader should ensure that they are included in assessing services, not just those living locally.

2 Is there anything else that should be included in the statement which sets out what a practice supervisor needs to know and be able to do?

Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

As with the Practice Leader statement, the focus appears to be more on the safety of children and family wellbeing and misses references to children in care whose experiences and relationships with social workers will be different. More must be done to ensure that Practice Supervisors' roles apply to children in care, as well as those in need of protection. As before, we suggest that where there are references to 'the safety of children and the welfare of families' the sentence is extended to include 'the welfare, wellbeing and needs of children in care'.

Again, as with the previous statement of knowledge and skills, while we welcome the ambition of 'excellent practice' we would stress that it is important to listen to children and young people in order to assess what is 'excellent practice'.

Promote and govern excellent practice

We agree with the things that Practice Supervisors should do, however there is no reference to the excellent practice that is specific to children in care. Practice Supervisors should promote healing for children in the care system and ensure that children are able to enjoy childhoods, not care experiences.

Similarly, in the second paragraph, children in care have care plans, and specific mention should be made to this, in addition to family social work plans. With regard to these plans, Practice Supervisors should not only ensure the safety of

children in care, but also put the child at the centre of the plan and ensure that their voice is listened to, heard and acted upon.

Although it says that practice supervisors should be visible and accessible to children and families, this is different to actively seeking out their views. There is no reference to requiring practice supervisors to actively seek children's views throughout the statement. Actively seeking views is vital for managers to ensure that children's needs are being met. We think that there should be a separate skill included that requires practice supervisors to do this in addition to being visible, for example: 'Actively seek children and young people's views, about their lives, their care and staff and services. Encourage and promote a culture in which children's views and voices are actively sought, value and acted on.'

We are unclear about the term 'intelligent measures' and think that this term should be clarified.

Developing excellent practitioners

Practice Supervisors also need to use the best evidence to devise effective interventions that are most likely to promote healing and positive outcomes for children in care. It may be that 'effective interventions' is not the best term, perhaps it should be that practitioners ensure a way of working with children in care that promotes healing and positive outcomes for children in care. We would like to see this added.

Shaping and influencing the practice system

Not only should staff be supported to be ambitious on behalf of children and families, but they should be supported to spend time with them, particularly children in care. We welcome the reference in the Practice Leader statement to creating capacity for practitioners to spend time with children, but feel that there should be a similar reference in this statement. For example, 'Monitor capacity of practitioners to build relationships with children and undertake effective direct work. Work with Practice Leaders to identify and solve problems in the system to enable this to happen.'

Effective use of power and authority

In the first sentence we would like to see the addition of the words children and care: '[...], which develops and maintains relationships with **children**, families and professionals and ensures that **care and** protection of children.' For children in care, their social workers are responsible for their care, not just their protection.

There is no reference to supporting practitioners to communicate and work with other professionals to ensure that the child's care plan is up to date, effective, represents the child's views and is in the child's best interests. Independent

Reviewing Officers (IROs) play important roles in this process, but social workers will see children more, and they therefore should be ensuring that the child's plan is right.

We welcome the reference to inviting challenge and debate and being accessible to children.

Confident analysis and decision making

In the first sentence we would like to see the addition of the word children: '[...] (including **children**, family and professional stories)...

We very much welcome the final sentence of the first paragraph in this section, and would stress the importance of meeting expectations, but also addressing any disappointment. Young people regularly tell us that they value honesty from their professionals, and say that when professionals do not tell them when something cannot happen, this makes it so much worse. Therefore, we would like to see an addition to the paragraph or sentence to include ensuring that the results of decisions are always communicated to children and young people, no matter what the outcome or how difficult it may be for the professional or child.

Purposeful and effective social work

We are concerned that unless specifically listed, children's own narratives may be missed. Equally, it is important to ensure that those who are important to children be listened to. We therefore suggest that in addition to seeking family narratives to shape plans, a second sentence is included: 'Ensure that children's narratives are sought and listened to, and that those who are important to children are included in shaping plans.' It may be that a child has a favourite teacher, who is not the school's designated teacher, but who the child wants to be involved in their care or plan.

The second paragraph in this section is too focused on risk and safety. As we've already mentioned, this is important, however for those children who are in care, more needs to be done beyond managing risk. There should be a similar paragraph that reflects this in addition to this paragraph. For example: 'Ensure children's care is based on the best evidence, on their best interests and on their views and wishes for the future and that their care plan is adjusted accordingly. Provide a constant check on the wellbeing and outcomes of children in care, ensuring that where children are struggling, unhappy or not achieving, this is addressed quickly.'

We are concerned that the reference to throughput and cases being closed in a timely manner places the onus on Practice Supervisors to close cases too quickly, or gives the impression to children in care that their case may be closed.

Emotionally intelligent practice supervision

We welcome the focus on supervision. Again, however, we would like to see the focus on protecting children widened to include caring: 'Re-energise and reaffirm commitment to support families and protect **and care for** children.'

Performance management and improvement

Feedback should be sought from children and young people, as well as staff, and there should be regular opportunities for this to happen. We suggest that the sentence is expanded to read: 'Provide opportunities for staff to give and receive constructive feedback on performance, **not only from each other, but from the children, young people and families that they support.**' Currently, the reference to communication channels suggests feedback on services, rather than staff performance.

We also think that the issue of matching is missing from the references to capacity. When allocating workload, Practice Supervisors should take into account who children and young people will get on with, rather than allocating purely in a way driven by resource. Young people tell us about how important it is to have a social worker who they get on with, who they trust, and in some cases who matches their own ethnicity. It is important that when allocating work and caseloads, Practice Supervisors also know what the needs and wishes of the children and young people are, and we would like to see this included here. For example:

'Understand the needs and wishes of children and young people and allocate staff to match those needs.'

Additional comments

As with Practice Leaders, Practice Supervisors should not only have a wide and current knowledge of social work practice and systems, but also the legal framework that underpins children's social care, as well as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the responsibilities of the local authority to uphold them. This should be included in the Practice Supervisor Knowledge and Skills Statement, as well as that of the Practice Leader.

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: chloe.cockett@thewhocarestrust.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 DfE public consultations are required to meet the Cabinet Office [Principles on Consultation](#)

The key Consultation Principles are:

- departments will follow a range of timescales rather than defaulting to a 12-week period, particularly where extensive engagement has occurred before
- departments 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
- departments should explain what responses they have received and how these have been used in formulating policy
- consultation should be 'digital by default', but other forms 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 DfE consultations are conducted, please email: consultation.unit@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 1 September 2015

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