



Department
for Education

Knowledge and skills statement: achieving permanence

Government consultation

Launch date 04 July 2016

Respond by 09 September 2016

Contents

Introduction	3
Who this is for	3
Issue date	3
Enquiries	3
Additional copies	4
The response	4
About this consultation	5
Background	6
Respond online	8
Other ways to respond	8
Deadline	8
Consultation questions	8
Knowledge and Skills Statement – Achieving Permanence	10

Introduction

Following government consultations, the Department published knowledge and skills statements for Approved Child and Family Practitioners, Practice Supervisors and Practice Leaders. The Department has drafted a further statement for child and family social workers involved in permanence planning for children who are looked-after or on the edge of care, to promote depth of practice in this key area of social work. This consultation seeks views on the content of the proposed knowledge and skills statement.

Who this is for

- Social workers
- Local authorities and representative bodies
- Higher education and further education institutions and their representative bodies
- Voluntary and Community Sector organisations
- Parents and carers
- Family members
- Children and young people
- Other employers of child and family social workers (private, voluntary and independent)
- Others

Issue date

The consultation was issued on 4 July 2016.

Enquiries

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can contact the team on:

- 020 7783 8458 and ask for Louise Reilly; or
- 0114 274 2420 and ask for Helene Stewart.

or email: kss-ap.consultation@education.gsi.gov.uk

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

Additional copies

Additional copies are available electronically and can be downloaded from [GOV.UK DfE consultations](#).

The response

The results of the consultation and the Department's response will be [published on GOV.UK](#) in Autumn 2016.

About this consultation

In the policy paper, *Adoption: A vision for change* (March 2016), the Government set out its plans to publish a specialist knowledge and skills statement for child and family social workers involved in the permanence process (from making permanence decisions to providing placement support), and to develop a continuous professional development programme to enable social workers to develop the knowledge and skills identified in the statement.

This consultation is seeking views on our draft knowledge and skills statement for achieving permanence. We are consulting on this as:

- a statement of what social workers need to know and be able to do in order to successfully undertake the assessment, analysis and permanence decision making we require of them, and progress permanence plans with urgency and skill; and
- a statement to inform the content of a continuous professional development programme.

The statement is relevant for a broad range of social workers involved in identifying and securing permanence arrangements for children, including case holding child and family social workers and those who support placement arrangements. It follows the publication of knowledge and skills statements for Approved Child and Family Practitioners, Practice Supervisors and Practice Leaders, which provide a practice-based career pathway in child and family social work. We are now keen to promote depth of practice in key areas of child and family social work, starting with permanence.

Alongside the publication of the knowledge and skills statement for achieving permanence, we will look at how best to develop a robust continuous professional development programme to support social workers to develop and gain recognition for the knowledge and skills that they need to make sound permanence decisions, as set out in the statement. Whilst the statement is not a curriculum document, the programmes we commission will use this statement to shape the content of courses. We have set up an Expert Working Group to help us develop the content and delivery method of the continuous professional development programme.

We are seeking your views on whether there is anything else that social workers involved in permanence planning need to know or be able to do.

Background

Over the last five years, we have begun to lay solid foundations for the improvements required across children's social care services. We have made significant progress towards reforming the child protection system, stripping back bureaucracy and reforming adoption, as well as securing crucial additional support for children in care and those leaving care. We have also started the process of creating a culture which prioritises excellent practice, based around the principles of innovation and excellence, supported by our £100m Innovation Programme. This is starting to have an impact: we have seen the first 'outstanding' judgements under Ofsted's Single Inspection Framework; we are seeing the recruitment of a new generation of social workers into the children's social care workforce via programmes like Frontline and Step Up; and examples of exceptional leadership are being celebrated by Ofsted and others.

In January 2016, we set out our vision and our reform programme, structured around three key areas:

- People and leadership – bringing the best people into the profession, and giving them the right knowledge and skills for the incredibly challenging but hugely rewarding work we expect them to do, and developing leaders equipped to nurture practice excellence.
- Practice and systems – creating the right environment for excellent practice and innovation to flourish.
- Governance and accountability – making sure that what we are doing is working, using data to show us strengths and weaknesses in the system, and developing innovative new organisational models with the potential to radically improve services.

The overall children's social care system needs to be designed in a way that gets the best out of its practitioners. We are therefore looking at the professional development of social workers throughout a career. A highly skilled and expert workforce is a vital part of delivering truly excellent services to children and families. Building on the Children's Social Care Innovation Programme, and with the launch of the new What Works Centre on children's social care, we will make sure that we learn from the best practice in the country by evaluating different practice systems and sharing their findings. We will work with the high-performing local authorities in England, our Partners in Practice, to develop the practice system further so they can be enabled to be the best they can be. This excellence will be shared across all local authorities who will be supported to be the best they can be too.

Practice-based career pathway

For the first time, knowledge and skills statements for Approved Child and Family Practitioners (ACFPs), Practice Supervisors and Practice Leaders provide a practice-based career pathway in child and family social work. These provide clarity about the expectations of child and family social workers at 3 levels of seniority, will signal to employers and educators the kind of support they need to offer social workers through post qualification continuous professional development and will form the bedrock of a national accreditation system. We will work with key stakeholders to ensure that the principles contained in the statements are successfully embedded into training and practice throughout child and family social workers' careers.

Whatever the entry route into social work, it needs to equip social workers with the knowledge and skills they need to practice effectively. A new body will be established with a focus on establishing consistent high quality social work education in both children's and adult's services.

Assessment and accreditation

To improve confidence in the workforce, the government holds the ambition to have all Approved Child and Family Practitioners, Practice Supervisors and Practice Leaders assessed against the knowledge and skills statements by 2020. A national assessment and accreditation system will offer a mechanism to embed the knowledge and skills statements and to ensure that employers and the public can be assured that social workers meet these expectations. It offers an opportunity for social workers to demonstrate the quality of their practice developing the confidence of the public in the profession. It also offers the opportunity for the profession to develop confidence in the quality of their own practice against clear standards.

A consultation document on the future of the assessment and accreditation system will also be published in the autumn, covering some of the key questions about the future implementation of the system.

Depth of practice

So far the social work reform programme has focused on a child and family social worker's career pathway. We are now keen to promote depth of practice in key areas of child and family social work. The first of these is focussed on achieving permanence.

The statement is relevant for a broad range of social workers involved in identifying and securing permanence arrangements for children, including case holding child and family social workers and those who support placement arrangements. These include supervising social workers, adoption social workers, those who support residential placements and social workers who support families on the edge of care where children are returning home. The statement has read across to, and indeed builds on, the published suite of statements for child and family social work.

To promote post-qualification continuous professional development in this critical area of practice we intend to support a programme of learning for a number of social workers who are ready to develop the knowledge and skills in the statement and apply these to their current work context. Whilst the statement is not a curriculum document, the programmes we commission will use this statement to shape the content of courses.

Respond online

To help us analyse the responses please use the online system wherever possible. Visit www.education.gov.uk/consultations to submit your response.

Other ways to respond

If for exceptional reasons, you are unable to use the online system, for example because you use specialist accessibility software that is not compatible with the system, you may download a word document version of the form and email it or post it.

By email

kss-ap.consultation@education.gsi.gov.uk

By post

Louise Reilly
1st Floor, Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London, SW1P 3BT

Deadline

The consultation closes on 9 September 2016.

Consultation questions

1. Are the five sections in the statement the right ones?
2. Are there any knowledge and skills that a child and family social worker needs to have to decide on the best permanence option for a child that are missing from section 1?
3. Are there any knowledge and skills that a child and family social worker needs to have to negotiate the legal process that are missing from section 2?

4. Are there any knowledge and skills that a child and family social worker needs to have to help a child find permanence quickly that are missing from section 3?
5. Are there any knowledge and skills that a child and family social worker needs to have to support families in transition that are missing from section 4?
6. Are there any knowledge and skills that a child and family social worker needs to have to support the placement, including managing disruption and breakdown, that are missing from section 5?
7. Which child and family social workers should the permanence CPD programme be aimed at? *(For example, newly qualified social workers, social workers newly involved in permanence work, any social worker who wants to gain depth of practice in this area and/or leaders?)*

Knowledge and Skills Statement – Achieving Permanence

A social worker responsible for permanence planning and support should be able to:

1) Deciding on the best permanence option¹

Eliminate drift for children by reaching the right decision as quickly as possible.

Explore all realistic options concurrently to secure a good outcome and change direction if it becomes evident that the proposal being pursued is not in the child's best interests. Confidently defend decisions under scrutiny, effectively deploying evidence to demonstrate why a preferred option is favoured.

Use research to draw evidence-based conclusions about the best permanence option for a child. Consider a range of realistic permanence options and the strengths and risk factors of each. Use research on the outcomes of different options and knowledge of child development to weigh up the pros and cons of the options available. Recognise that some children may require a placement with therapeutic treatment provision before a successful permanent home can be found.

Produce high quality case records about the child's permanence process which are well-argued and sensitively presented. Cite any research which has been influential and draw on the views of the professionals and carers involved in the child's life. Draw on lessons learned locally on placement breakdowns, adoption breakdowns and long-term care outcomes. Assess the child's current and future needs by building effective relationships with children and families, any current or previous carers, professionals and others directly involved in their care. In the case of unborn children, conduct a good quality pre-birth assessment.

Assess the impact of trauma, abuse, neglect, separation and loss on a child's development, and how this affects their capacity to build and maintain relationships. Take account of the child's developmental stage and the likely impact of different transitions as well as support the child may need along the way. Take into account the importance of existing relationships (including the positive and negative impact of these relationships) and the child's preferences in terms of permanence arrangements. Assess the impact of placing siblings together or separately and in various placement types.

¹ The terms 'permanence options' and 'permanent homes' include children: returning home to their families; living with kinship carers, including special guardians; living with adoptive families; living with long-term foster carers; or living in residential care. They also include where an existing short-term placement is being made permanent.

Assess the risks of a return home for a child. Ensure that the parents have received the support they need and, where necessary, have demonstrated the changes required to care for the child throughout their childhood. Assess the parents' capacity for further or sustained change. Be prepared to provide feedback on processes and procedures.

2) Negotiating the legal process

Communicate effectively and confidently in Court and offer a clear rationale for recommendations. Present to the court a balanced picture of the child's needs and evidence of previous support and interventions that are relevant to the permanence decision-making process. Ensure that all court material is evidence based, well-prepared and clearly argued to support any legal orders that are required. Present cases in court with professional gravitas, with a focus on the child and a balanced, fair picture of the parents.

Establish effective working relationships with your agency's lawyers, Independent Reviewing Officers, Cafcass guardians and relevant others, recognising the boundary between each other's respective and collective responsibilities. Consult with the child and their family and facilitate their representation in the court system. Work effectively with the local judiciary to meet legal requirements and prevent delay in achieving permanence arrangements.

Operate within the statutory framework and regulatory process for achieving permanence for individual children, and comply with the legal powers, duties and guidance related to pursuing particular permanence options.

3) Helping children find permanence quickly

Act purposefully to identify a permanent home for the child as quickly as possible, understanding the potential damage to a child as a result of delay. Recognise the effects of unconscious bias and risk aversion on decision making and utilise supervision to reflect on dilemmas about matching, including stretching. Balance the ambition of finding the best home for a child with the need to achieve permanence. Give due consideration to a child's preferences and ensure that where these cannot be acted upon, there is a clear rationale for that.

Produce accessible, high quality, well-argued, evidenced and sensitively presented assessments of a carer's/home's strengths, difficulties, experiences and current and likely future needs, their wishes and hopes. Build and maintain effective relationships with parents, prospective carers or residential homes to assess their suitability. Recognise the different qualities, capacity and support carers might need to look after a child who presents behaviours associated with negative early life and childhood experiences.

Provide high quality communications and services. Produce child and carer profiles that present an accurate summary of current and likely future needs, as well as a balanced picture of the child including their likes and dislikes, how they behave and their wishes and feelings. Engage in clear, open and timely communication with carers, which is honest about children's needs whilst being positive and solution-focussed about how these might be met. Provide a professional and high quality service where potential carers are treated with respect.

4) Supporting families in transition

Undertake sufficient direct work to help children, and current and future carers prepare for a successful transition. Communicate clearly, openly and sensitively with children, their families and carers about the planning process for moving into a permanent home or back to their birth home. Support children and carers to set realistic expectations at the different stages of that journey. Prepare children thoroughly for the stages of that journey.

Support carers to promote a child's sense of identity, self-worth and belonging, how best to share their history and the events that led to previous and current care arrangements — for example, through life story work (in digital or other formats appropriate for the child). Support carers to understand how a child's behaviour is dependent on their experience of both past and present parenting. Co-create with carers helpful strategies to meet a child's needs, and in particular where carers may find behaviour challenging.

Demonstrate professional expertise in managing potentially distressing transitions, recognising the complexity of family dynamics and the potential impact of loss and change. Provide support and advocacy to children, parents and/or carers demonstrating sensitivity and empathy. Help current carers and birth families to cope with the transition, remembering that for some this may be a period of great loss and disappointment

Develop high quality plans to support the transition process. Work collaboratively with all parties (including multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary colleagues) to plan and deliver a smooth transition that causes as little distress and disruption to the child as possible.

Plan and support the reduction of contact with birth family. Support children, their siblings, carers and the child's birth family to understand, engage with and contribute to plans for successful contact with each other. Recognise when contact is likely to be problematic and provide appropriate support and review. Recognise the significance of a child's support network to the likely future success of permanence arrangements and take necessary steps to ensure sustained participation of that network in a child's life, appreciating these particular imperatives for those older children in residential care.

Develop high quality support plans that recognise the child's current and likely future needs, the capacity of the carer to meet those needs and the additional support that might be required. Develop plans for delegated authority.

Where a child is returning home to a parent or family member, develop support strategies that are flexible and responsive to changing circumstances and the individual needs of the child and their family. Assess both the effectiveness of the help provided and management of risk, taking action to provide additional support to families and protect children effectively.

5) Supporting the placement, including managing disruption and breakdown

Identify the most effective types of support using the best evidence, and apply this to the provision of flexible, on-going arrangements. Build a professional network of expertise to help families get the short and long-term support they need. Know what therapy options are available and their application. Build helpful relationships with families that empower the parent, carer or child to ask for support when they need it. Review arrangements and change these through consultation as the needs of the family change, addressing any escalating risks.

Identify indicators and early warning signs that a permanent home is under strain. Work collaboratively, with respect and without blame, with all parties to plan and deliver services and interventions that will support the child's network and may prevent family breakdown, including short out of home placements. Understand the different dynamics that each permanence option brings and how this affects a social workers ability to engage and intervene.

Be clear and decisive in situations where children are unable to remain at home, balancing the short and long term impact of moving the child with the likelihood of future and irreparable breakdown of relationships if action is not taken. Where breakdown occurs, work collaboratively with all parties to understand the reasons for breakdown, the options for supporting alternative short or medium term arrangements that enable the child to maintain relationships with carers or parents in periods of crisis. Recognise that a move to a placement that better meets the child's needs is positive. Be alert to attempts by children to 'test' new arrangements and support carers and parents to access support from family, friends and community networks, where appropriate.

Be alert to the potential vulnerabilities of children at the point of disruption and apply strategies to fully support them through this transition.

Identify any lessons learned and feed these into the wider organisation's continuous improvement cycle.



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