



Department
for Education

Confidence in practice: child and family social work assessment and accreditation system

Government consultation

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Respond by 14 March 2017

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Foreword from Edward Timpson MP

It is on the shoulders of strong, highly effective and well-supported child and family social workers that the children's social care system rests. That is why supporting and developing children's social work is at the centre of our overarching plan for transforming the quality and impact of children's social care as set out in 'Putting Children First'.¹

Social work is a demanding job. Expectations are high and every day social workers, right across the country, make a real difference to children's lives – helping to keep them safe, and supporting them to grow and flourish. They work in diverse settings, perform a range of roles, and face many different pressures. And, as social workers, they need to be able to display the necessary knowledge and skills to perform well. To that end, they deserve the best possible training, support and leadership so that they can put children first.

This government has committed to roll out a new national assessment and accreditation system by 2020. The introduction of the National Assessment and Accreditation System – NAAS – will provide, for the first time, a consistent way of providing assurance that child and family social workers, supervisors and leaders have the knowledge and skills for effective practice. It will help individuals and their managers gain a better understanding of their practice and provide a clear benchmark of expertise and quality of practice.

I am hugely grateful to those who took part in the proof of concept phase. This has helped us enormously in understanding how an assessment can be designed that effectively assesses social workers' knowledge and skills. The analysis of this phase showed differences in performance between some groups of social workers and this is something that I take very seriously. As the assessment is developed further we will pay close attention to ensure that particular groups of social workers are not disadvantaged by its design or delivery.

Assessment and accreditation alone will not be enough to make the changes in practice and outcomes we need to see. That is why we are already taking action to strengthen social work training, including through the Frontline and Step Up programmes, and through our programme of teaching partnerships. And we are taking this further, with the introduction of a new Assessed and Supported Year for new practice supervisors, and a talent development programme for aspiring practice leaders. We are also

¹

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/554573/Putting_children_fir_st_delivering_vision_excellent_childrens_social_care.pdf

reforming the regulation of the social work profession by creating a bespoke approach to social work regulation with a clear focus on quality.

Our ambition is for all child and family social workers carrying out statutory functions to be assessed and accredited.² Getting this right for social workers should mean that we get it right for more of our children, more often. That is what social workers want, and our children deserve.

Edward Timpson MP, Minister of State for Children and Families

² Where we refer to social workers carrying out statutory functions, we mean that they are doing so on behalf of those that have the statutory functions, e.g. local authorities – as described in consultation question two.

Introduction from the Chief Social Worker

National rollout of assessment and accreditation for child and family social workers will have major implications for our profession, future practice and individual social workers. Following an extensive proof of concept phase, involving close to a thousand social workers and many employers, we are confident that we have developed a methodology which will be able to assess the knowledge and skills of social workers. There are many questions that we need to consult on and I hope that you find time to be able to help us answer some of the issues we need to resolve. There are big questions about how we can achieve our vision, who should be accredited, who should endorse the practice of agency workers and how we strike a balance between introducing a system of post qualification specialism without restricting movement of social workers between sectors and jurisdictions.

In any period of change there is always the search for certainty. Whilst we can predict many of the consequences and mitigate against those we think unwelcome, we also know that we will learn a lot through the first phase of implementation. 31 local authorities have already signed up to be part of this initial rollout and will work closely with us so we can adjust the system to take account of any unforeseen consequences. We need to continue our ongoing dialogue with the sector as a whole as we move forward with this major programme of change.

I want to take this opportunity to emphasise that social work is one profession and will continue to be so and we are working closely with the Department of Health and the Chief Social Worker for Adults. Social workers in adult mental health services have a long standing history of post qualification accreditation. Now the attention has turned to child and family social work and, in future, extending the concept of post qualification accreditation to other areas of practice may very well be explored.

Accreditation is not a stand-alone initiative and is a central part of the government's reform agenda set out in 'Putting Children First'. We know that pressures of workload, high turnover of staff and outcomes for children and their families are top of many people's priorities. Accreditation is part of the government's long term strategy to ensure that child and family social work is part of a national infrastructure of learning and development. It is only through this sustained and systemic approach that those current day to day challenges will be properly and permanently addressed.

Whilst I will meet many of you through my ongoing visits, the Principal Social Worker Network continues to play a big part in feeding through your views into national policy making. I do hope you are able to respond to this very important consultation and I look forward, very much, to continue to engage with you all throughout implementation.

Isabelle Trowler, Chief Social Worker

About this consultation

Who this is for

- Child and family social workers
- Employers of child and family social workers including local authorities, those in the voluntary and community sector and the courts
- Representatives of child and family social workers
- Children and families, and their representatives.

Enquiries

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can contact the team at NAAS.consultation@education.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: Consultations.Coordinator@education.gov.uk or by telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the [DfE Contact us page](#).

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

How to respond

To help us analyse the responses please use the online system wherever possible. Visit <https://consult.education.gov.uk/social-work-reform-unit/naas-consultation/> to submit your response by **14 March 2017**.

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.

Email: NAAS.consultation@education.gov.uk

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Great Smith Street
London
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The results of the consultation and the Department's response will be published on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) in spring or summer 2017.

Executive summary

In this document we set out how we intend to deliver a National Assessment and Accreditation System (NAAS) for child and family social workers as part of our reforms of children's social care.

Specifically, we:

- describe a future career pathway for child and family social workers and the place of assessment and accreditation on that pathway;
- set out that we expect practitioners, practice supervisors and practice leaders carrying out statutory functions to be assessed and accredited as a priority - see Annex A for a description of each status;
- set out our expectations of the timeframe during which assessment should take place;
- explain the key elements of the assessment:
 - practice endorsement;
 - general and applied social care knowledge;
 - a simulated observation; and
 - a written exercise;
- describe how we intend to roll out the National Assessment and Accreditation System in the first instance by working with practitioners and practice supervisors in 31 local authorities, all practice leaders and all those who have started their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) from November 2014 onwards.

We also ask a series of questions related to the delivery of the National Assessment and Accreditation System, arising from pre-consultation events with more than 185 social workers and leaders in the sector which will be used to inform rollout and future policy decisions. These include:

- how employers can use the information from the assessment of their workforce to create an expectation of accreditation, while managing the outcome so as not to create shortages of social workers in the short term;
- the type of child and family social work assessment and accreditation should apply to;
- the period of time a child and family social worker should have after taking up a post before being put forward for assessment; and
- re-accreditation.

Our vision for achieving confidence in practice

A single profession with specialisms

1. The social work profession is an integral part of the public sector landscape. It is a profession that is centred on people, their rights as citizens and their relationship with their communities. Social workers build relationships with individuals and families and through those relationships support people to identify ways in which their lives might be enhanced. This may be helping to protect vulnerable people from harm or abuse, supporting individuals and families to connect to other public services who can offer support and advice, or helping people to live independently.
2. Social workers undertake a graduate level, generic programme of education and practice based training which allows them to register as social workers. There are more than 90,000 registered social workers in England alone, who work in a wide variety of roles and contexts, often within multi-agency settings. The post qualification focus on the development of advanced professional knowledge and skills will be determined to a great extent by the variety of roles and organisations within which social workers are employed.
3. Whilst social work is a single profession and will remain so, its history is one of recognising and working through specialist disciplines within that profession. In 1948 specialist children's departments were introduced in each local authority. These arrangements lasted until 1970, when more generic social services departments were introduced. Over time, more specialist divisions were created within social services departments, typically organised respectively around children and adults. The Children Act 2004 saw the introduction of Directors of Children's Services, Children's Trust Boards and Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCB). Whilst structural change signalled a shift towards a children's specialism, the initial training of social workers has remained generic.
4. A series of public inquiries, high profile serious case reviews and government commissioned reports have continued over many years to raise the need to support and develop the specialist knowledge and skills of child and family social workers. Whilst there is a consensus that initial qualification programmes should remain generic, with varying opportunities to develop some level of specialism, most recently Laming (2003); Gibb (2009); Munro (2011) and Narey (2014) all specifically identify a pressing need to support social workers to develop specialist knowledge and skills in child and family social work.
5. Many social workers are employed by organisations who work specifically with children and their families who have a wide range of social needs. This includes

more than 28,000 social workers employed in England (mainly in local authorities) by organisations who carry out statutory functions in relation to children and families with the highest level of social need. This includes children who have highly complex and combined social, educational and health needs. It also includes children who are victims of child abuse and neglect or are at high risk of being so. It includes children who have had to be removed from their families through court proceedings and are growing up within alternative care arrangements as well as those who are moving into independence and adulthood.

The National Assessment and Accreditation System (NAAS)

6. The National Assessment and Accreditation System - NAAS - introduces a nationally recognised post qualification specialism in child and family social work for three levels of seniority. The specialist knowledge and skills needed to undertake this area of social work successfully are set out in three statements reflecting three key social work roles: the child and family practitioner; the practice supervisor and the practice leader.³
7. Assessment and accreditation enables any social worker to demonstrate they have the knowledge and skills set out in the relevant statements. Government expects all child and family social workers holding certain responsibilities to become accredited over time, and wishes to work with employers to achieve this. It is for this reason the government is going to prioritise the National Assessment and Accreditation System rollout across organisations where those responsibilities are most prominent. In the first phase this will be with 31 volunteer local authorities, and following that, to social workers carrying out statutory functions across the country.
8. As a regulated profession, social workers become registered after successful completion of a course approved by the regulator (currently the Health and Care Professions Council - HCPC). Their registration would not be affected if they do not achieve accreditation for child and family social work (carrying out statutory functions).

³For child and family practitioners:

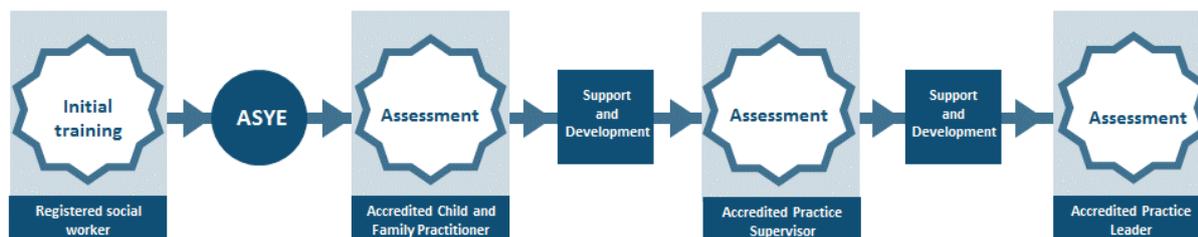
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/524743/Knowledge_and_skills_statement_for_approved_child_and_family_practitioners.pdf ; and for practice leaders and practice supervisors:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/478111/Knowledge_and_skills_statements_for_practice_leaders_and_practice_supervisors.pdf

More than 950 child and family social workers gave input to the development of the knowledge and skills statements; descriptors for practitioner, practice supervisor and practice leader status are at Annex A.

9. The National Assessment and Accreditation System will trigger a more focused investment in continuous professional development. Individuals and employers will be motivated to invest in activities that will develop social work practice so that accreditation standards are met. Government is playing its part by extending post qualification support for newly qualified social workers, to newly appointed practice supervisors and those aspiring to be our future practice leaders.
10. The National Assessment and Accreditation System will trigger a much needed focus on quality of practice. As practice observation becomes a key tool to assess against accreditation standards, it will incentivise the practice system to pay much more attention to how social workers practice, in context, and what support they need to develop their knowledge and skills. For practitioners the focus will be on their direct work with families, what they do, for what purpose, and how they do it. For supervisors, it will draw much needed attention to the quality of supervision and how senior social workers effectively develop the thinking, decision making and practice skill of others.
11. The National Assessment and Accreditation System will help ensure that practice leaders, our most senior social work professionals in the country, those who have overall professional responsibility for local practice systems, know how to manage that system well, so that social workers and supervisors can get on and practice effectively with children and families.
12. The National Assessment and Accreditation System is a fundamental part of a national reform programme that seeks to drive sustained progress in children’s social care, for children and families. Our reforms over the next few years put practice excellence at their heart, to achieve more for the children we serve. In ‘Putting Children First’ the government set out its vision for ambitious reform of children’s social care. Through the National Assessment and Accreditation System we will see the building of a practice focused, professionally based career pathway. It provides a framework for people to enter the social work profession, develop their knowledge and skills and stay for a whole career either as excellent practitioners or as leaders within a professional and practice based context. It recognises increasing levels of advanced practice even into the most senior leadership roles in the country.

Future career pathway for child and family social care specialists



The system in transition

13. Introducing the National Assessment and Accreditation System at scale is a significant logistical challenge, and it is vital that it is done in a measured way which moves at pace while minimising unnecessary disruption to local workforces. That is why we plan to take a two phased approach to rollout. Government intends to fund the rollout of the National Assessment and Accreditation System to 2020 at least.
14. The first phase of rollout - phase one - will take place between early 2017 and the end of 2018. Groups we aim to assess during phase one are:
 - practice leaders in all local authorities;
 - those who have started their ASYE from November 2014 onwards and are carrying out statutory functions;
 - practice supervisors in 31 volunteer local authorities overseeing those carrying out statutory functions; and
 - child and family practitioners in 31 volunteer local authorities carrying out statutory functions.
15. These groups will include a small number of agency workers and independent social workers. We explain how these groups were chosen in the section 'Rolling out assessment and accreditation across the country'.
16. We acknowledge that the system will have implications for Cafcass, adoption agencies, fostering agencies and voluntary and community organisations. During phase one we plan to work with these organisations to understand how the system would affect them and how phase two should be designed to ensure all social workers carrying out statutory functions have access to the National Assessment and Accreditation System, regardless of the type of employer they work for.
17. The delivery of phase two is expected to take place between 2019 and the end of 2020. We expect it to include:
 - practice supervisors in local authorities in the rest of the country, and in other employers, overseeing those carrying out statutory functions; and
 - practitioners in local authorities in the rest of the country, and in other employers, carrying out statutory functions.
18. For employers, the transition to the National Assessment and Accreditation System can be eased by sensible preparation. All employers are encouraged to embed the knowledge and skills statements within their existing staff development, support and supervision arrangements. Leeds City Council has already embedded the practitioner knowledge and skills statement as part of the ASYE programme. By April 2017 Leeds will ensure it is embedded within the Leeds University and Leeds

Beckett University curriculum and practice education standards as part of a teaching partnership. They will ensure their supervision and appraisal processes are aligned with the knowledge and skills statements and that the statements will inform individual social workers continuous professional development. By April 2018 Cafcass will have ensured its quality assurance and impact framework is aligned with the knowledge and skills statement for practice supervisors, in preparation to take part in phase two of rollout.

Designing and developing a rigorous and consistent assessment

The proof of concept phase

Introduction

19. Over the past year, DfE has been working closely with a number of employers to design and test an approach to assessing child and family social workers which appropriately and accurately measures social work knowledge and skills. This proof of concept involved the creation and testing of an assessment. A detailed report on the proof of concept phase is published alongside this document on GOV.UK.

Proof of concept

20. The purpose of our proof of concept work was to determine whether an assessment could be developed that could be delivered at scale and would provide a valid way of identifying social workers with the knowledge and skills needed to do the job well, and those who need further development. The assessment also needs to command the confidence of social workers, their employers and representative organisations as a credible method of assessing and accrediting social workers' knowledge and skills.

21. Similar systems of post qualification accreditation exist in other professions, for example in medical practice where the General Medical Council has introduced a system of credentials for specialist areas.⁴ For example, if you are a doctor and you wish to enter general practice you must take and pass an assessment to show that you have the specialist knowledge and skills to satisfactorily practice independently and without further supervision. The Nursing and Midwifery Council has also introduced post qualification standards and the Health and Care Professions Council has powers to approve and monitor programmes for mental health professionals.⁵

Who was involved

22. In March 2015 we appointed a KPMG-led consortium involving LEO Learning, Morning Lane Associates and the University of Leeds to develop and test an assessment process. Further support to the process was provided by the Family

⁴ See: <http://www.rcgp.org.uk/training-exams/mrcgp-exams-overview.aspx>

⁵ See: <https://www.nmc.org.uk/registration/joining-the-register/trained-outside-the-eueea/> and <http://tinyurl.com/AMHPprogrammes>

Rights Group, Research in Practice (RiP) in association with the University of Sussex, Michael Brown Associates (a company supplying professional actors) and the Who Cares? Trust. Service users from the Family Rights Group and Who Cares? Trust were recruited to be part of service user panels.

23. We also received important advice from members of the Principal Social Worker network throughout the process. This network provided a prominent contribution to the development of questions and to the score moderation process for simulated observation.

24. Social workers across 22 employers – 21 local authorities and one children’s social care trust - took part in this proof of concept phase along with a group of social workers from Cafcass. Additionally a small group of participants from the NSPCC, Barnardos, Action for Children and Coram took the knowledge assessments after the proof of concept phase had been completed. A list of the employers that participated in the proof of concept phase is at Annex B. In selecting employers, we aimed to ensure that they were broadly representative of local authority type, size, standard of performance as measured by Ofsted rating, and to provide a broad geographical spread across the country.

What the assessment looked like

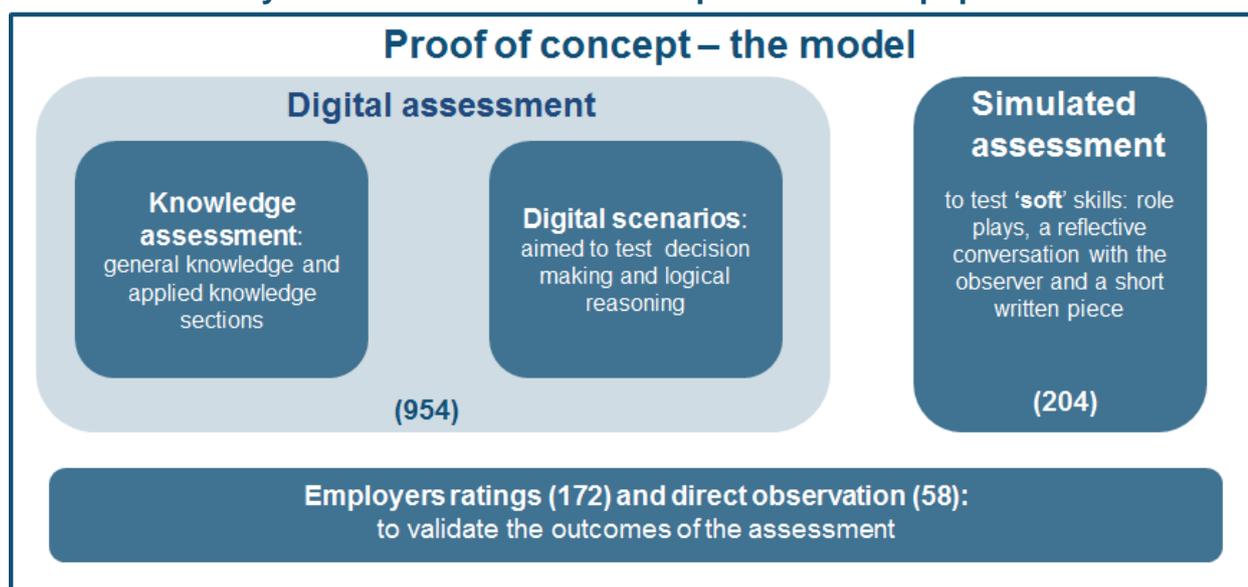
25. As part of the proof of concept phase a review of evidence relating to practice observation methods, in social work and in other relevant professions, was commissioned from Research in Practice.⁶ Our interpretation of their work is that it found that only a multi-part assessment could establish whether a social worker possessed the knowledge and skills necessary to provide a quality service to children and families and that observation of practice was vital.

26. This is why we developed an assessment with several key elements:

- a digital knowledge assessment, combining general children’s social care knowledge, applied children’s social care knowledge and scenarios; and
- a simulated assessment, including three interactive scenarios with actors, a reflective exercise and a written exercise.

⁶ <https://www.rip.org.uk/resources/publications/evidence-scopes/regarding-the-use-of-practice-observation-methods-as-part-of-the-assessment-of-social-work-practice-evidence-scope-2015>

Key elements of assessment – proof of concept phase



** Numbers indicate the number of social workers that took part in that aspect of the proof of concept*

Digital assessment

27. The digital assessment comprised three parts: general social work knowledge questions, applied social care knowledge questions and scenario-based questions. All required closed responses – answers which were selected from a list of options.
28. The general social work knowledge section comprised 60 multiple choice questions with each question designed to test an element of the knowledge and skills statement. Every social worker received the same set of questions whether they were practitioner or supervisor level. Of the 60 questions, 37 had 'binary' answers, e.g. yes/no or true/false questions – they could be answered wholly correctly or incorrectly. The other 23 questions contained sub-questions and could be answered in a partially correct way. For example, participants were asked to indicate whether statements were true or false (so they could answer some, none or all correctly).
29. The applied knowledge questions were longer than the general knowledge questions, providing more situational context and requiring a more analytical approach to answer them. The questions were case-based assessments which tested the participant's understanding of their role, the statutory framework, including statutory guidance, and how these should be applied in practice. The assessment for each status had a different set of applied knowledge questions.
30. The scenario based questions tested critical thinking ability and decision making. Some were purely text based whilst others used video and sound. Within each scenario there were a series of questions requiring an analytical and practical response from the social worker.

Simulated observation

31. The simulated practice element of the assessment was different for practitioners than for practice supervisors. Each comprised three ten-minute face to face scenarios working with professional actors, a written exercise and a reflective conversation with an independent observer. Simulated observation scenarios were designed to examine the more behavioural elements of the knowledge and skills statements. At practitioner level, all elements were based on one family's case and the scenarios were iterative. At practice supervisor status each scenario was based on a separate case or situation.
32. Participants received a short written briefing on the scenario they were about to experience, including some background to the case and who they would be meeting and they were given time to prepare. After the first two scenarios they completed a written exercise related to their aims and objectives for the third scenario. Immediately following the third scenario the social worker had a reflective conversation with their observer, exploring his/her hypotheses.

Who took part in the assessment

33. Between December 2015 and March 2016, 974 social workers took part in some, or all, of the assessment, with 204 taking both the digital and the simulated observation assessment.
34. Following participation in the assessment, social workers received individual feedback on their scores in the digital assessment whilst those who participated in the simulated observation also received a narrative feedback from the lead observer covering observed strengths and weaknesses. Employers received a summary of performance on the digital knowledge assessment and, where individual social workers agreed, they also received a copy of individual feedback reports.

Key lessons from proof of concept

35. The proof of concept phase provided invaluable information about how to design and run a national assessment and provides the basis for the assessment going forward. The work with local authorities has shown the assessment is deliverable at a national scale and across a large group of social workers: the sample group was made up of diverse populations in a range of roles across children's social care. The assessment was found to provide a sound measure of knowledge and skill. The data collection of scores and results has proven to be robust and secure. It gives a sound basis for proceeding but we must pay careful attention to the development points outlined below.

36. Key issues raised, which we are addressing in the next stage of development, are as follows.

- The analysis of the results on the digital scenarios suggest that they oversimplified the complexities of work with children and families and did not accurately identify poor and good performance of participants. They also added substantially to the requirements of time and IT facilities, making this part of the assessment difficult to implement. Therefore, we intend to remove them.
- Prior to rollout, we need to develop a sufficiently large bank of representative questions and scenarios to allow for randomised selection of questions and scenarios to increase the reliability of the assessment. This will be done through the content development work we will commission. We will pay special attention to the comments received in proof of concept about including specialist questions in the assessment. Child and family social work is diverse by its nature and we do not expect all social workers to master all areas of knowledge required for every possible role. The test will be designed to reflect the wide variety of settings in which child and family social workers operate.
- The proof of concept phase demonstrated the importance of achieving consistency in the recruitment, training and moderation process for those involved in delivering the simulated observation. It also demonstrated the value of recording observations, and of undertaking external validation. This helps to minimise the variability of scores and reduces the scope for factors other than the quality of practice to impact the results, reducing potential for test bias. The recording of the simulated interactions also enables experts to validate the outcomes of the assessment. It will also allow for the re-assessment of performance in case of dispute.
- The analysis of test results showed lower success rates for some groups of social workers, for example there were negative correlations relating to age and ethnicity. We intend to work closely with leading experts to ensure we are designing the test in such a way as to eliminate any test bias. We will be undertaking further rigorous testing and equalities analysis of new content, and of delivery processes, as we develop it. This is set out in further detail in the equalities impact assessment which is published on GOV.UK.
- It was clear from the proof of concept phase that local authorities have varied facilities available to deliver the assessment. In delivering the assessment in phase one we will explore a mixed model, making the best of the available local infrastructure but also exploring alternative delivery mechanisms such as universities and other training centres. We will also explore how neighbouring authorities can support each other in the delivery.

The test for rollout – child and family practitioners and practice supervisors

37. Based on the lessons learned from the proof of concept phase, we expect the assessment process for child and family practitioners and practice supervisors to include the following elements.

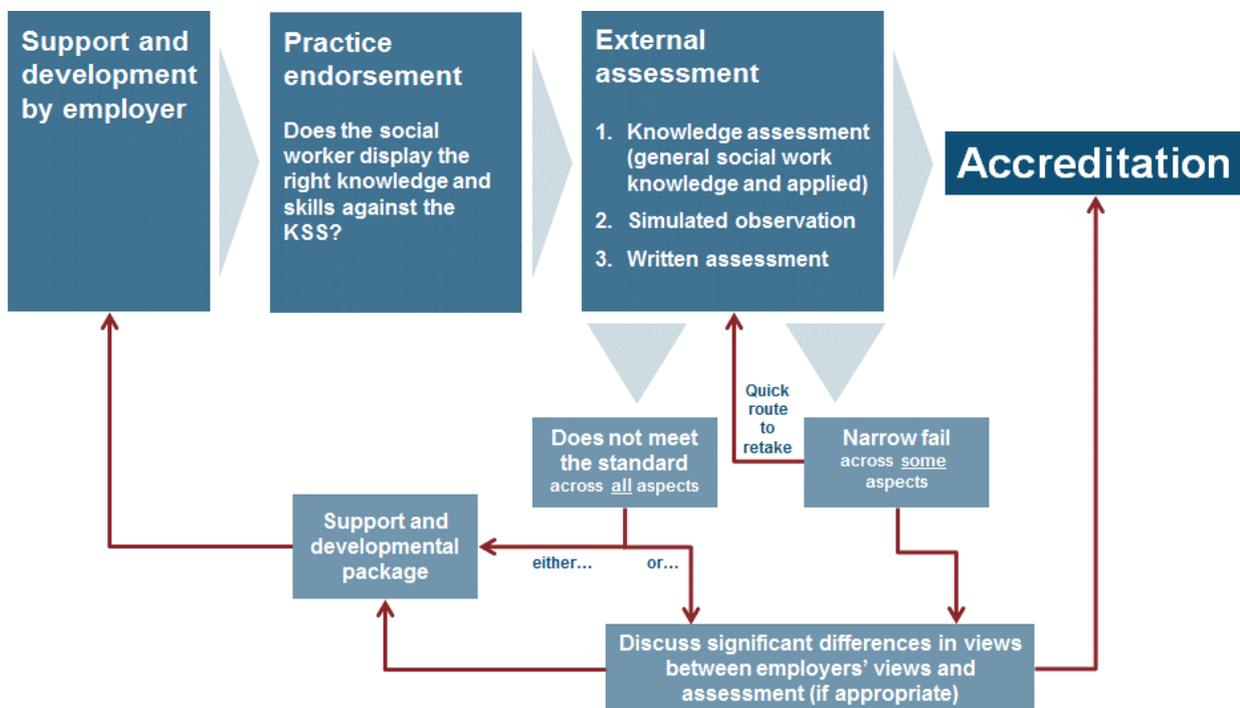
- **Practice endorsement:** before a social worker takes the assessment we will ask employers to make a judgement about whether the social worker has the knowledge and skills needed to meet the expected standard, using their existing arrangements. Employers should have a central role in the process because they have experience of a social worker's practice through direct observation and access to feedback from children and families. We will shortly publish guidance for employers on GOV.UK which explains more about endorsing practice. See also consultation question seven concerning agency workers.
- **Knowledge assessment:** general social work knowledge and applied knowledge questions are an essential part of a robust national assessment process. We expect this part of the assessment to be digital and for the questions to have closed responses and for knowledge tested to be familiar to child and family social workers, regardless of their current role. In developing the content of the knowledge assessment we will work closely with an expert reference panel that will help translate the knowledge statements into relevant questions. As in the proof of concept phase, the assessment for child and family practitioners and practice supervisors will be largely similar although there are likely to be different applied knowledge questions.
- **Simulated observation:** building on the proof of concept phase, this part of the assessment will comprise a number of face-to-face scenarios, played by actors and assessed by trained observers. Simulated observation is the closest to real practice that can be achieved in a controlled environment and provides a way of standardising the assessment. These scenarios will be different according to participant level – practitioners will focus on engagement with young people and families, whilst practice supervisors will carry out supervision as well as engagement with young people and families. This section will also include a conversation with the observer at the end, offering the social worker the opportunity to reflect on the situation and build hypotheses.
- **Written assessment:** the proof of concept demonstrated the value of having a written assessment. We believe this provides an opportunity for social workers to display their analysis and decision-making related to the scenarios in the simulated observation. In particular, we expect this to focus on the ability of social workers to write clear, reflective and analytical case notes and to be able to demonstrate their risk assessment and decision-making based on the information received in the simulated observation scenarios. This was part of the

simulated observation in the proof of concept phase but was not marked separately.

38. The questions on the digital scenarios during the proof of concept phase resulted in social workers responding in very similar ways – because this format tended to simplify the complexities of social work making the answers relatively obvious. They also added substantially to the time and IT requirements of the test. We have therefore decided to remove them from the assessment. The additional development of the written assessment is designed to capture the decision-making and risk assessment aspects of the scenarios that would otherwise be lost.

39. The diagram below describes how the system will work in practice.

Design of the proposed assessment and accreditation system



40. We believe that an assessment which leads to a clear pass mark rather than, for example, a grade is the best way to be clear about whether a social worker has the skills and knowledge expected to carry out statutory children's social work. The pass mark will be set at the level of knowledge and skill expected for the role, against the knowledge and skills statements. To do this we will create a performance standard for each element of the test – knowledge, simulated and written. We then expect to use two independent panels of professionals not connected with the test. Each will work independently of the other to agree the pass mark. This way of setting the pass mark follows standard test design methodologies. This work will be carried out by the content development contractor as part of the work to create a bank of questions, scenarios and written assessments. The bank of questions and scenarios

will be constantly replenished to ensure the content of the assessment is updated, eliminating the potential advantage to those taking the assessment later.

41. Social workers who do not meet the standard, and their employers, will receive a report after the assessment identifying areas for development. This will allow them to work with their employers to address the areas identified before they retake the assessment. See also consultation question eight concerning re-endorsement.
42. Where a social worker and their employer feel an assessment result is at odds with the social worker's abilities in practice, or where there are extenuating circumstances, there will be an independent review process.

Assessment for practice leaders

43. As well as accrediting child and family practitioners and practice supervisors, we plan to accredit those with overall responsibility over the practice in their service: practice leaders. Practice leaders will play an essential part in the rollout of the system, leading and supporting their workforce to gain accreditation. The assessment for practice leaders needs to be objective and rigorous, as it is for child and family practitioners and supervisors. The nature of their role requires a test which can capture the complexities of a leadership role and the depth and breadth of knowledge of the system. It also requires consideration of how observation can be carried out. For practice leaders there are fewer opportunities for peer observation and professional feedback than for practitioners and practice supervisors.
44. To recognise the very specific requirements of assessing practice leaders we have decided to run this as a separate process from the accreditation system for child and family practitioners and practice supervisors. This contract will be run closely alongside that relating to the assessment of practitioners and practice supervisors to ensure consistency in the creation of a coherent system for career progression.
45. Once a delivery contract for assessing and accrediting practice leaders is in place we will work with the contracted partner to develop a robust process to assess practice leaders against the areas in the knowledge and skills statement. We would expect the assessment to include simulated elements (for example through role plays, written exercises and in-depth interviews) assessed at an assessment day and a process to draw on feedback from social workers in the service, peers, managers, elected members and partners.

Rolling out assessment and accreditation across the country

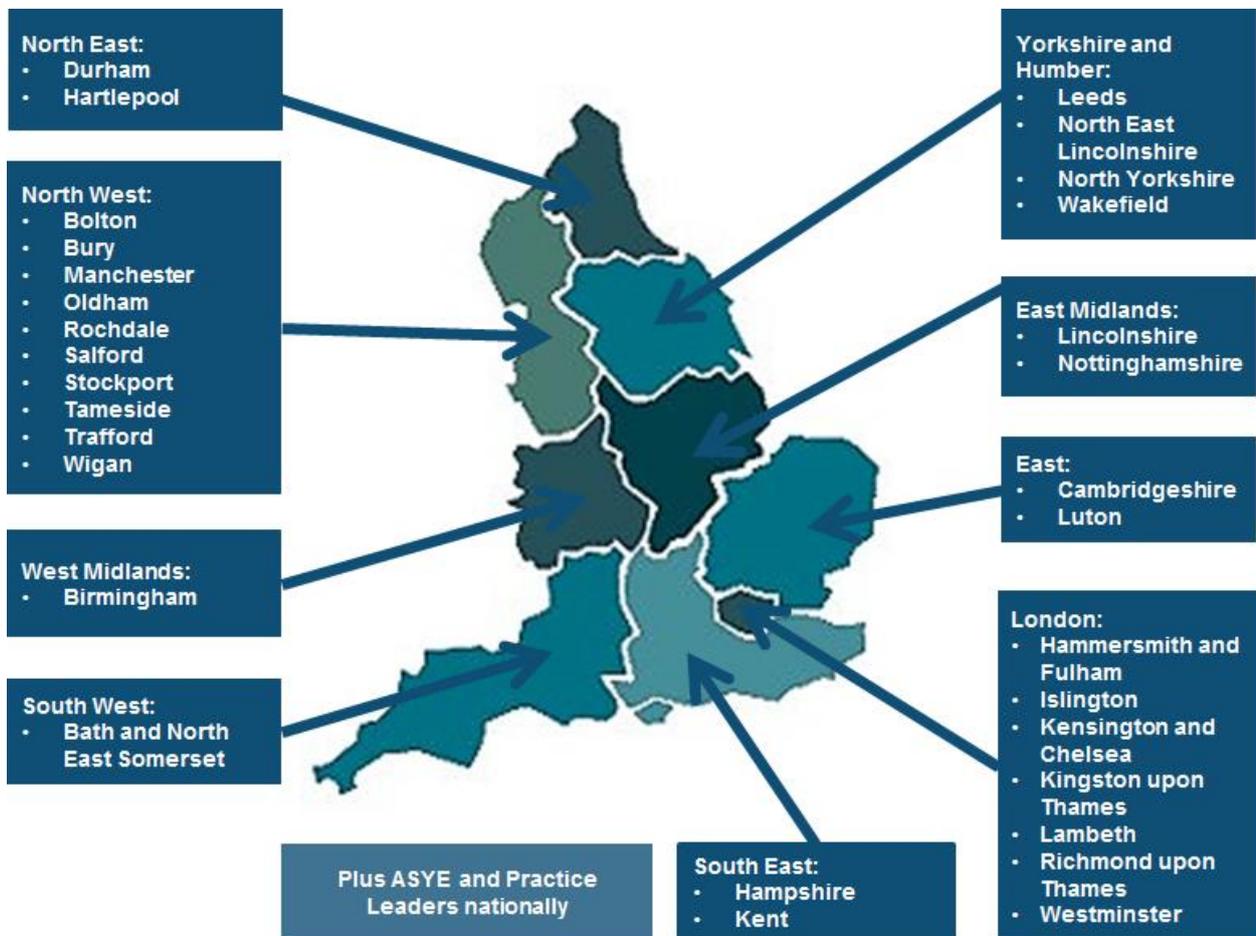
46. The 31 volunteer local authorities in phase one are a combination of the DfE's eight 'partners in practice' authorities, 12 local authorities from the proof of concept phase that asked to be part of phase one, and the ten Greater Manchester authorities, which approached us showing an interest in being part of our whole reform programme.⁷ The 31 includes Tri-borough which is made up of three local authorities including London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham, The Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea, and Westminster City Council. Greater Manchester will implement all of our social work reforms in parallel, including Step Up, Frontline, Teaching Partnerships, and assessment and accreditation, providing us with an opportunity to assess cumulative impact.
47. In addition to the volunteer local authorities, we will carry out assessment and accreditation of all those who have started the ASYE from November 2014 and are carrying out statutory functions. These social workers are recent entrants to the profession who are already working in the context of the knowledge and skills statements and, as such, we should expect them to be ready to gain accreditation quickly.
48. The assessment of all practice leaders during phase one recognises that effective practice leadership at this level is essential and will support the system in their locality for rollout for practitioners and practice supervisors.
49. During phase one we will work with employers to understand how best to roll out the assessment with their workforce to minimise disruption and deliver a consistent testing experience. We will consider, amongst others:
- local authorities' needs according to their particular recruitment and retention considerations and other matters which may affect staffing;
 - how the assessment can be carried out for each region bearing in mind geographical challenges, transport links and local facilities;
 - how we can support local authorities to plan and prepare for rollout including how they support and develop staff in advance of the assessment, their readiness to

⁷ The Partners in Practice represent some of the best performing local authorities in the country, and government is working with them to understand what excellence looks like, share good practice and support sector-led improvement. There are currently: North Yorkshire, Islington, Cambridgeshire, Leeds, Tri-borough (Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea, and Westminster), Richmond and Kingston, Hampshire, and Lincolnshire.

endorse staff, how they will release staff for the assessment, and how they will support them post-assessment; and

- how we can work with local authorities to integrate assessment and accreditation into their existing arrangements more widely, including consideration of local HR processes and employer representatives.

Local authorities participating in phase one



50. Phase one is not about re-opening questions about the design of the assessment, although we will, of course, continue to monitor the effectiveness of the assessment. Phase one is focussed on understanding the impact of rolling out the National Assessment and Accreditation System, and will therefore inform decisions about how we undertake rollout in phase two. During this phase we will assess a small number of agency and independent social workers.

51. Phase two of rollout is expected to run between 2019 and 2020 – see ‘the system in transition’. During phase two we aim to assess all remaining social workers carrying out statutory functions. Early in this phase we expect to start assessing new practice supervisors as part of the work to design a clear career pathway where those progressing to the next level will gain accreditation. As new entrants to this type of

role it is important that, once the employer is satisfied they meet the knowledge and skills statement at practice supervisor status, they are assessed.

Assessment and accreditation: key policy questions

Introduction

52. In this section we set out the key policy issues relating to the National Assessment and Accreditation System will operate during rollout, and once in place across the country. We want to gather your views on these issues.

Achieving our vision

53. Over time, we want all social workers carrying out statutory functions to be accredited and we intend all social workers carrying out statutory functions to be assessed by 2020. In the first instance, we want to work collaboratively with employers to make this vision a reality. We want to see employers using the information from the assessment of their workforce to create an expectation of accreditation, while managing the outcome so as not to create shortages of social workers in the short term. We will consider whether more is needed to achieve the ambition of accreditation for all social workers.

54. We will consider when and how a more formal national requirement to have an accredited workforce might be brought into force as part of phase one of the rollout process.

Question 1

Does this approach balance effectively the clear expectation that social workers carrying out statutory functions will be accredited, with sufficient scope for employers to manage the results for their workforce appropriately?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Do you have any further comments on this proposal?

Carrying out statutory functions

55. In future we would expect social workers carrying out the following services across child protection, children in need, children in care and care leavers, looked after children, young carers, fostering and adoption to be accredited:

- making decisions about accepting a referral into children’s social care;
- leading s.47 enquiries;
- holding case responsibility for children in need and looked after children;
- carrying out statutory assessments of children in need, looked after children and family members, prospective and approved foster carers and adopters or plans related to private court proceedings;
- making, implementing and reviewing statutory plans;
- holding supervisory responsibility for foster carers; and
- approving and reviewing prospective and approved foster carers.

56. We would expect social workers holding the following responsibilities to be accredited practice supervisors:

- supervising child and family social workers carrying out the above actions;
- chairing child protection conferences;
- acting as Independent Reviewing Officer or a Children’s Guardian; and
- carrying out designated officer actions (in respect of allegations of abuse against those who work with children).

57. We would expect all employers to have an accredited practice leader in post with the responsibilities outlined in the practice leader descriptor at Annex A.

Question 2

Do you agree that the above lists provide a good basis of the statutory child and family social work functions for which social workers should be accredited?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Do you have any further comments on the lists (do you consider that any functions have been left out or should not appear on the list)?

Assessment of newly qualified social workers

58. ASYE needs to become the route through which all newly qualified social workers who choose to specialise in child and family work are supported and developed to the point where they can be accredited.

59. Nearly 10,000 social workers have been supported through ASYE in child and family social work, with over £19m invested over the past five years. We know that this

programme is highly valued but we also know that the level of support participants receive is variable and standards vary between local authorities. The introduction of the knowledge and skills statements and the National Assessment and Accreditation System provides an opportunity to strengthen this programme, making it an essential part of the system.

60. Successful completion of the ASYE will remain at the discretion of the employer. But we want to improve incentives for employers to provide a high quality ASYE experience. In future, the completion of the ASYE should act as a key staging point in the assessment and accreditation system.

61. It is our expectation that the newly qualified social worker, carrying out statutory functions, should have a period of 12 months minimum full time continuous employment with the same employer during which time they would be expected to carry out the ASYE, before being put forward for assessment. We would expect the employer to offer appropriate levels of supervision during this time. When, after the completion of the ASYE, social workers are put forward for accreditation will be left to the discretion of the employer providing the endorsement but the expectation is that this would happen within a year of completing the ASYE.

Question 3

Do you agree that a social worker undertaking the ASYE or similar programme, carrying out statutory functions, should not be assessed until after 12 months minimum full time continuous employment with the same employer (including time for completion of ASYE)?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Do you have further comments on this proposal?

Assessment of new practice supervisors and practice leaders

62. Following the same principle as for those undertaking the ASYE programme, it is our expectation that social workers who are new to practice supervisor roles, where they are supervising the delivery of statutory functions, and those who are new to practice leader roles should have a period of 12 months minimum full time continuous employment with the same employer before being put forward for assessment.

63. The transition from frontline practice to supervisory roles can be a big step and it is essential that social workers are supported in this transition to ensure they have the knowledge and skills to supervise and support others well. That is why we will establish a new programme for the development of those making the transition from frontline practice into practice supervision which we will launch during 2017.

Question 4

Do you agree that new practice supervisors, supervising the carrying out of statutory functions, and new practice leaders, should be assessed after 12 months minimum full time continuous employment with the same employer?

For practice supervisors:

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

For practice leaders:

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Do you have further comments on this proposal?

Assessment of existing social workers joining from other social work roles

64. We believe it is essential that the system does not prevent social workers from moving between different parts of the social work profession. But it is also essential that those moving roles into child and family social work, where they are carrying out statutory functions, are able to demonstrate and display the specialist knowledge and skills expected to do their job effectively.

65. Social workers moving into roles where they are carrying out child and family social work statutory functions, perhaps from a voluntary setting or from adult services, may need a period of adaptation, the extent of which will be determined by their employer on the basis of their prior experience as a social worker and their experience working in related settings. As with any transition, we would expect employers to put in place the right support to allow social workers making this

transition to be successful.

66. Social workers making a transition into child and family social work carrying out statutory functions will be expected to gain accreditation after an appropriate period of transition and development. We believe that a period of up to 12 months should be sufficient for their employer to support them to achieve the required level of knowledge and skills and have generated satisfactory evidence that an individual has the knowledge and skills needed to gain accreditation.

Question 5

How long after starting work in a child and family social work role, carrying out statutory functions, should practitioners moving into such roles be put forward for assessment as a maximum?

- Within 6 months
- Within 12 months
- Not sure

For supervisors?

- Within 6 months
- Within 12 months
- Not sure

For leaders?

- Within 6 months
- Within 12 months
- Not sure

Do you have further comments on this proposal?

Assessment of social workers moving from outside England

67. Social workers moving to practise in a child and family role in England from the devolved administrations or from other jurisdictions will not need to be accredited before taking up post. Whether qualifications achieved outside the United Kingdom meet the required standards for social work in England will continue to be considered by the regulator as part of the process of registration.

68. However, once employed as social workers in England, they will be expected to gain accreditation if they work in child and family settings and carry out statutory functions and their employer will need time to be confident that the individual has the relevant knowledge and skills for child and family practitioner, practice supervisor or practice leader status.

69. We expect that timing will be flexible, reflecting the prior experience of social workers and allowing employers to exercise their own judgement on the quality of practice of the individual. We consider that building this confidence should take no more than 12 months after a social worker takes up the role. During this time, we would expect them to be supported by their employers to ensure they achieve the right level of knowledge and skills. This is the same system as described above for those moving into statutory child and family social work from another area of social work.

Question 6

How long after starting child and family social work where the social worker is carrying out statutory functions, should practitioners moving from other jurisdictions be expected to be put forward for assessment as a maximum?

- Within 6 months
- Within 12 months
- Not sure

For practice supervisors?

- Within 6 months
- Within 12 months
- Not sure

For practice leaders?

- Within 6 months
- Within 12 months
- Not sure

Do you have further comments on this proposal?

Agency and self-employed social workers

70. Agency social workers and those who are self-employed play a valuable role: many are high quality practitioners and provide additional flexibility to the social work workforce. However, we are aware that some local authorities can end up relying on these workers to fill permanent positions, with issues of high churn and sometimes variable quality and high cost.⁸
71. We believe that agency staff working in child and family social work, and carrying out statutory functions on behalf of others, should be subject to the same expectations as all other child and family social workers. They should therefore be accredited in order to perform statutory functions on behalf of others.
72. As with any other social workers, agency and self-employed staff will need to have practice endorsement in order to achieve accreditation. For these social workers we believe the organisation with direct experience of the quality of practice – i.e. the local authority, children’s social care trust or other employer responsible for the carrying out of statutory functions would be best placed to carry out endorsement, rather than the agency that holds the contractual relationship with the social worker or the individual independent social worker. We believe that this is likely to provide incentives for agency and independent social workers to seek longer term assignments and/or direct employment, helping to stabilise the workforce.
73. It is clear that the assessment and accreditation of agency and independent social workers is a complex issue. We intend to work with employers in phase one to understand these issues further, and minimise unnecessary disruption to local workforces, ahead of the assessment of the rest of these social workers in phase two.

⁸ For the purpose of this discussion, agency staff are considered as all those that hold a contract with an organisation other than the one on behalf of which the person is delivering the social care services. This includes self-employed social workers but not those working for third sector organisations or adoption agencies directly delivering services on behalf of local authorities or trusts.

Question 7

Do you agree that agency and self-employed social workers, carrying out statutory functions on behalf of others, should be endorsed for assessment by the organisation which has direct experience of their practice? We would expect this to be the local authority, trust or employer that has the statutory functions.

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Do you have further comments on this proposal?

When a social worker does not meet the standard

74. Following the assessment, social workers and employers will receive feedback indicating the areas where the social worker falls below the expected standard. We expect employers and individual social workers to agree next steps, which may include a detailed development plan based on the report, to support the individual to reach the expected standard. The employer will be able to re-endorse the individual for re-assessment once they are satisfied that the individual is able to meet the expected standard.
75. We want to ensure that social workers are given the opportunity to gain accreditation in a way that minimises the period between assessments but gives them appropriate time to reach the required level. For those who fail one element of the assessment narrowly we expect to set up a mechanism for them to retake this element quickly and easily. It will be at the discretion of their employer when they deem their social worker ready to retake the assessment but, in most cases, we expect this to be carried out over a short period, for example within three months.
76. Those who fail two or more elements will need to retake the entire assessment and the period for retake may be longer, perhaps around a year, reflecting the wider need of support and work required. Whether, and when, an individual social worker should retake is a matter for the local authority.

Question 8

Do you agree that it should be left to employer discretion to decide when a social worker is endorsed for reassessment?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Do you have further comments on this proposal?

Maintaining knowledge and skills after accreditation

77. It is important that once accreditation has been achieved, social workers' knowledge and skills are maintained and developed over time. Continuous professional development (CPD) should be a focus in every social worker's career. Alongside the core social work reform programme, we are keen to provide social workers with opportunities for rigorous continuous professional development which promote depth of practice in key areas of child and family social work.

78. There are a number of ways in which light touch, periodic re-validation could be done, for example through an assessment, demonstration of a number of hours of continuous professional development and/or practice endorsement. We seek your views on how this could be done.

Question 9

Should re-accreditation be expected, periodically, once a social worker has gained accreditation, to ensure that their knowledge and skill level is maintained?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Further suggestions

79. If you have any further suggestions which are not otherwise captured, we would be pleased to hear them.

Question 10

Do you have any further comments?

Annex A: status descriptors

Child and family practitioner

Accreditation at this level is primarily aimed at qualified social workers with post qualification experience in child and family social work. Successful accreditation is dependent on having practice experience of successfully working with children and families who have a high level of social complexity and risk of harm. It is in this context that the knowledge and skills required is developed.

Practice supervisor

Accreditation at this level is primarily aimed at qualified social workers with post qualification experience of providing practice supervision and management of accredited child and family practitioners. Successful accreditation is dependent on having supervisory and management experience of social workers who are working with children and families who have a high level of social complexity and risk of harm. It is in this context that the knowledge and skills required is developed.

Practice leader

Accreditation at this level is primarily aimed at qualified social workers who have post qualification experience of being responsible for a local area's statutory children's social care service. Most usually this is typically referred to, for example, as the Assistant Director of Children's Social Care or Director of Family Services. By exception, it may be that some employers, principally large local authorities, would regard themselves as having more than one practice leader because the local authority area for the purpose of children's social care is sub-divided into discrete geographical areas that operate the full range of children's social care services largely autonomously and independently.

Annex B: employers that participated in proof of concept

The below employers participated in the proof of concept. Not all employees took all parts of the assessment:

- Achieving for Children (The Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames, London Borough of Richmond upon Thames)
- Bedford Borough Council
- Birmingham City Council
- Doncaster Children's Services Trust
- Durham Council
- Hartlepool Council
- Kent County Council
- London Borough of Lambeth
- Leeds City Council
- Liverpool City Council
- Luton Council
- North East Lincolnshire Council
- Northamptonshire County Council
- Nottinghamshire County Council
- North East Somerset Council
- Sunderland City Council
- Tri-borough (London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham, The Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea, Westminster City Council)
- Wakefield Council
- Worcestershire County Council
- Cafcass

Additionally, a small group of participants from the below organisations took part in the knowledge assessments after the main proof of concept phase was completed:

- NSPCC
- Barnardos
- Action for Children
- Coram



Department
for Education

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