



Department
for Education

Post-qualifying standards and induction for child and family social workers

Government consultation

Launch date 20 March 2025

Respond by 28 May 2025

Contents

Introduction – Ministerial foreword	3
Who this is for	5
Issue date	5
Enquiries	5
Additional copies	5
The response	5
About this consultation	6
Respond online	6
Other ways to respond	6
Deadline	6
Child & family social workers induction - Years 1-2	7
Background	7
Proposal and rationale	7
The new post-qualifying standards	9
Post-qualifying standards: questions	11
A new induction programme	12
Training for new child and family social workers	12
Assessment	13
Eligibility	14
Social work induction programme: Questions	15
List of all questions	16
About you	16
Policy questions	16
Confidentiality	18
Privacy notice	18

Introduction – Ministerial foreword

Every child, no matter their background, deserves the opportunity to succeed. I want a system that supports families when they need it, intervenes decisively when children need protection, and provides care for children who cannot live with their families, so they can thrive in their childhood and adult lives.

To improve outcomes for children we need to put the voices of children, young people and families at the heart of practice. The children's social care [national framework](#) brings together the purpose of local authority children's social care, the principles by which children, young people and families should be supported, the enablers that should be in place so the system is effective, and the outcomes that should be achieved so that children and young people can grow up to excel.

Achieving the outcomes of the national framework will require the determination of the whole workforce to continually improve practice. As regulated professionals, social workers are looked to for professional expertise and leadership by others from a range of disciplines working with families, as well as directly working with the most vulnerable families and the most complex cases.

High-quality social work is, therefore, central to the ambition to reform the children's social care system. Social workers should be respected for their professional skills and the incredible difference they make to the lives of children and families. As a former social worker, I know that social work can be a complex and challenging career. It requires an immense amount of care, compassion, and resilience. Social workers should feel confident that they have the skills and knowledge to keep children safe, and have access to ongoing, structured and high-quality professional development.

The early experiences of social workers set the groundwork of professional confidence and can support them to stay in practice for longer. I have seen great social work practice already, and I want to improve the support social workers receive to make the transition from initial education into the early part of their career. Too often we see people choosing to leave the profession early, yet retaining social workers for longer, and helping them to build experience and expertise, will be vitally important as we reform the system so that our children and young people have the opportunity to succeed.

I want to ensure that support for new social workers provides them with the best possible start to their careers. I am, therefore, proposing to replace the current set of post-qualifying standards (PQS) for practitioners with new ones which provide greater clarity and depth, enabling more detailed and consistent induction support, aligned to delivering the outcomes set out in the national framework. The new standards describe what a social worker should know and be able to do to be highly effective by the end of their second year in the role. They draw on the key theories which underpin the most

effective social work practice and have been shaped by the best evidence of the most effective whole-system approaches to working with children and families: systemic practice, restorative practice and strengths-based practice. The new standards and associated induction will support social workers through the steep learning curve at the beginning of their career and hence improve retention.

Social workers play an important role in addressing inequality and discrimination experienced by the families they work with and have a unique opportunity to promote social justice. The new standards will reflect the importance of anti-discriminatory practice knowledge and skills which are fundamental to all areas of social work practice. I am serious about tackling the barriers to opportunity faced by too many in our society. Reforming social care is critical for supporting the most vulnerable in our communities.

Alongside our other workforce reforms, such as the introduction of new national rules on the use of agency social workers and new resources to support retention and the work of the national workload action group, the introduction of the new post-qualifying standards and the social work induction programme will help increase the number of experienced social workers in the system and help produce a more stable workforce. Safeguarding children and strengthening families is a moral duty of any government and it is central to breaking down barriers to opportunity so that every child, regardless of their background, can succeed.

Janet Daby MP

Minister for Children and Families

Who this is for

This consultation is open to the public and in particular invites responses from:

- local authorities
- social workers
- other practitioners in children's social care, including youth justice workers and family support and early help workers
- relevant public, private and charitable sector organisations, including voluntary, community and charity workers
- parents and carers, including foster carers, kinship carers and special guardians
- social work students
- social work training providers
- higher education institutions

Issue date

The consultation was issued on 20 March 2025.

Enquiries

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

- email: PQS.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

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 Summer 2025.

About this consultation

Through this consultation we are seeking views on replacing the current post-qualifying standards (PQS) at practitioner level with new ones which are clearer in the professional outcomes expected of new social workers and include descriptors of what they should understand and be able to do after two years. We are also seeking views on how we can support employers of social workers to provide a new two-year induction for their new social workers based on the new PQS.

Respond online

To help us analyse the responses, please use the online system wherever possible. Visit [DfE consultations on GOV.UK](#) 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 request an alternative format of the form.

By email

PQS.consultation@education.gov.uk

By post

PQS.CONULTATION (Level 3), Department for Education, 2 St Paul's Place, 125 Norfolk Street, Sheffield, S1 2FJ

Deadline

The consultation closes on 28 May 2025.

Child & family social workers induction - Years 1-2

Background

Social workers have a vital role within children's social care, building relationships with children and families to drive change and improve outcomes. [The children's social care national framework](#) provides statutory guidance from the Department for Education (DfE) and sets the direction for practice, specifying that the system should achieve the following outcomes:

1. children, young people and families stay together and get the help they need
2. children and young people are supported by their family network
3. children and young people are safe in and outside of their homes
4. children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes

The whole children's social care workforce will be instrumental to achieving these outcomes. As regulated professionals, social workers will be looked to for professional expertise and leadership by others from a range of disciplines working with families, as well as directly working with the most vulnerable families and the most complex cases.

The proposed new post-qualifying standards (PQS) for practitioners describe the professional outcomes expected of new social workers and include descriptors of what they should know and be able to do, to help realise the system outcomes described in the national framework. They will play an important role in the first two years of a social worker's career, better supporting them to progress from initial training to more autonomous work with families and managing increasing levels of complexity with greater responsibility.

In the future, we will build on these new PQS for practitioners by considering the knowledge and skills required to practice at higher levels within the children's social care (CSC) system, with a particular focus on developing the highest level of knowledge and skills in child protection work, and we will look at opportunities to support social workers to develop in areas of specialism such as this. This will provide a route for more experienced social workers to develop the skills needed to work in new multi-agency child protection teams as described in [keeping children safe, helping families thrive](#).

Proposal and rationale

Social work is a complex and challenging profession, requiring a high level of knowledge and skill, as well as personal resilience. Most initial training for social work is generic (across adult and child and family roles) and the transition from learning to practice can be difficult. National reports show that social workers would benefit from

more training, time and resources to enable them to obtain the necessary skills and confidence to refine their practice, particularly when it comes to child protection work.

Providing support at the start of the career is key to ensuring that social workers are confident practitioners. We see high numbers of social workers leaving in the early years of their career, particularly so between years 2 to 5. Social workers have told us that the level of challenge is one of the main drivers for leaving. The new PQS aims to further support social workers in their early years of practice by providing an improved support offer as they transition from initial education to practice.

For frontline practitioners and practice supervisors, the current PQS were designed as the improvement standards as set out under [Section 42 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017](#), which defines them as a “professional standard, the attainment of which demonstrates particular expertise or specialisation”. The current PQS were developed more than 10 years ago, and while providing an effective description of the roles social workers undertake, they need to be clearer and more detailed to properly inform curriculum and training design, and they need to be updated in line with the national framework. We, therefore, intend to replace the current set of PQS for practitioners with the ones accompanying this consultation, defining the standards that child and family social workers should meet in the first two years in employment.

The national framework highlights an equipped and effective CSC workforce as a key enabler for delivering good outcomes for children and young people. The guidance sets expectations for how senior leaders, practice supervisors and practitioners can support this enabler, specifically that practitioners should:

- be clear about how their role in children’s social care can help to achieve the outcomes set out in the national framework, and meet the long-term ambition for children, young people, and families to thrive
- prioritise family visits and direct work to build strong, respectful relationships with children, young people, and families. Practitioners are confident and capable to identify children and young people’s needs and make decisions about what needs to happen to meet their needs, in circumstances that can involve risk, complexity and uncertainty
- use supervision to reflect on their practice and to prioritise their learning and development, so they have the knowledge, skills and experience needed for their roles. Practitioners continue to learn throughout their career and develop their skills based on the latest evidence from the sector
- be committed to managing their practice with children, young people and families so it is impactful. They are goal-oriented in their work and use research and evidence to support children, young people and families in a way that is purposeful and effective
- recognise the rights of children, young people and families, and work with them in a way that upholds those rights and considers how different experiences may

affect how individuals engage with children's social care. They address discrimination and promote equality

The new post-qualifying standards expand on these statements and set out the skills and knowledge required by social workers to meet the expectations of the national framework. This will help social workers to better understand what the national framework is asking of them and support employers as they in turn support their new social workers.

Social workers come into the profession with a body of knowledge acquired through initial education, meeting the Social Work England professional standards, defining the threshold standards for safe and effective practice. The new post-qualifying standards will complement the Social Work England professional standards. They set out the outcomes social workers should achieve and capabilities they should develop in practice and be able to demonstrate by the end of their second year, post-qualification, combining skills and knowledge and focusing on their application.

In developing the new PQS, we have also taken into account the British association of social work professional capabilities framework, relevant children's social care guidance, multi-agency practice principles for responding to child exploitation and reports from the child safeguarding practice review panel.

We have recently set out our proposals to create a new legal duty for local authorities to establish multi-agency child protection teams, with commencement of the duty to align with the findings from the families first for children pathfinder. Teams will be formed of multi-agency child protection practitioners from the local authority, police, health, education and other relevant agencies working together in a much more integrated way, with overall responsibility for protecting children from harm, alongside highly skilled social workers.

We will continue to engage on our strategy for ensuring there is a sufficient and capable supply of social workers to work in multi-agency child protection teams. This will build on the foundations set out in the new PQS and support social workers to develop the highest levels of knowledge and skills in child protection work. We also recognise and will address the importance of having a range of progression options for social workers to achieve our ambitions for children's social care. These opportunities will be available for social workers to take at the time that best suits their personal development, as opposed to restricted to those who complete the new induction programme.

The new post-qualifying standards

The proposed new PQS describe the professional outcomes that child and family social workers should demonstrate in their first two years in practice after they have been supported to transition from initial education and training into employment. The

outcomes are supplemented by 'knows' and 'does' statements (detailed in the post-qualifying standards document), which provide the detail necessary for managers and new social workers to understand what the outcome means and how it may be evidenced. The statements are not an exhaustive list but build on the current PQS by providing significantly more detail for knowledge and expected outcomes, and a clearer structure to support social workers through the first two years.

The standards set out in the new PQS have been developed by an expert writing group which included experts in child and family social work practice, workforce development, pedagogy, an expert by experience and representatives from Social Work England. This group was commissioned by the Department for Education, with oversight from the Chief Social Worker. The standards have been developed in consultation with:

- the national practice group
- experts by experience
- local authorities currently offering extended assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE)
- chairs of the principal children and families social worker network
- chair of the association of directors of children's services (ADCS) workforce policy committee
- third sector organisations representing children and young people, parents, foster carers, kinship carers and adoptive parents
- representatives of safeguarding partners

The PQSs are divided into six domains (detailed in the post-qualifying standards document). These reflect key aspects of social work with children and families and cover:

1. anti-discriminatory practice
2. relationships and communication
3. assessment and planning
4. intervention
5. reflection and learning
6. leadership and management

Below the outcome statements, the 'knows' statements set out key things that a social worker would need to understand to achieve the outcomes, while the 'does' statements provide example illustrations of what achieving a particular outcome might look like in practice. As above, these 'knows' and 'does' statements are designed to be comprehensive, but not exhaustive.

We have published the draft PQS alongside this consultation document and would welcome views from the sector to further refine them.

Post-qualifying standards: questions

To note: Questions 1-8 are on the e-consultation website and are about you as a responder.

Question 9: To what extent do you agree that the proposed domains as set out in the new post-qualifying standards set a reasonable expectation that social workers should meet by the end of their second year? *(domains are detailed in the post-qualifying standards document)*

Question 10: To what extent do you agree that the proposed outcomes as set out in the new post-qualifying standards set a reasonable expectation that social workers should meet by the end of their second year? *(domains are detailed in the post-qualifying standards document)*

Question 11: Do you think there are any areas of practice missing from the proposed new post-qualifying standards?

Question 12: Do you think there are any areas of knowledge and skills missing from the proposed new post-qualifying standards?

Question 13: Are there any 'knows' statements in the proposed new post-qualifying standards that you think should not be included? *(knows and does statements are detailed in the post-qualifying standards document)*

Question 14: Are there any 'does' statements in the proposed new post-qualifying standards that you think should not be included? *(knows and does statements are detailed in the post-qualifying standards document)*

Question 15: Are you aware of any other evidence of effective social work practice, not already reflected in the new post-qualifying standards, that we should consider?

A new induction programme

Training for new child and family social workers

Subject to the outcome of the forthcoming Spending Review, the DfE will work in collaboration with employers of child and family social workers to offer social workers induction support and development for their first two years in practice, helping them to meet the standards set out in the new PQS. This new, two-year, social work induction programme (SWIP) will replace the current assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE) for child and family social workers. The development of the programme will be informed by the work we have been doing with a number of local authorities who already provide extended ASYE programmes.

The aim of the SWIP is to help social workers practice with greater autonomy, as they transition from initial education and training into employment. The induction programme needs to find the right balance between national consistency and flexibility to meet employer and individual needs, including recognising the different initial education and training routes social workers will have qualified through. This means developing a programme that gives employers the space to support their social workers' development in a local context, while providing a supportive framework that can enable consistent experience and outcomes for the programme. The work-based learning must be as close to practice as possible and should be led by employers.

We want to better understand how we can provide support to employers to deliver consistently excellent induction learning programmes. We intend to produce high-quality, standardised curriculum and training materials, based on the PQS, to support employers of child and family social workers, including for example supporting materials for supervisor discussions and case study materials. New social workers will need protected time to engage in the new induction programme. We understand that not all employers have the same capacity to deliver extended programmes and will work with the sector to develop a programme that can be delivered consistently.

For new social workers to get the most out of the programme, they will need support from experienced social workers, including practice supervisors. The quality of practice supervision and the supervisor's ability to understand and use the new PQS will be critical to the success of the induction, and therefore we are considering how we can most effectively provide national supervisor support – this might include additional training resources or facilitating discussions between supervisors in different authorities.

Assessment

In common with other professions, as part of the induction into the workforce, the new social worker induction programme will have an assessment component, which will aim to achieve the following:

- support social workers to understand how they are developing in their first two years of practice
- allow employers to manage the development of their workforce (as a whole and individually) by tracking areas of strength and opportunities for development

This assessment component of the programme will not result in any nationally prescribed or regulatory outcomes for individual social workers; rather, it will be for employers to consider what appropriate action should be taken as a result of the assessment outcome, including for example actions linked to pay and progression. The DfE could provide non-statutory guidance to employers in these areas to gain greater national consistency and we would welcome views on how useful such an approach would be.

We propose that the assessment approach for the new induction programme builds on current activity within ASYE but seeks to gain greater national consistency and reduce the burden on individuals. This assessment approach will support social workers to reflect and build their evidence base from practice over their first two years. We propose that DfE should provide templates and guidance for employers to implement assessment activities that evidences social workers meet the standards of the PQS. 'Assessment activities' could include an observation of direct practice, examples of high-quality case notes, feedback from families and peers and reflective activities. This feedback may be quantitative, qualitative or both. Each individual 'assessment activity' would be used by the learner to analyse their own performance, formulate concrete learning goals and achieve outcomes.

Individual 'assessment activities' would be recorded and then analysed by an assessor as a rich picture of the new social workers' competence against the new post-qualifying standards, resulting in a summative outcome. This approach would continue to prioritise quality assurance and consistency of experience within the assessment process, and we will work with the sector to understand what structures could support consistent moderation.

This delivery model would have a role for 'assessors' within employing organisations, who would provide support and guidance to the new social worker on how they might best meet the requirements of the assessment. They will assess the quality of the 'assessment activities,' providing feedback and highlighting development opportunities to ensure the new social worker can successfully complete the induction. They might also take part in moderation activities within and outside of the employing organisation

and be required to record the progress of the social worker being assessed. We understand that the administration of delivering a learning programme can be burdensome on employers, assessors, supervisors and participants and we will seek to minimise this burden as much as possible.

Eligibility

The PQS is designed to support implementation of the national framework in children's social care and is focused on the skills and knowledge needed to work in this area. It is also about the early career when social workers are shaping their practice and getting used to the realities of social work. While many of the skills are applicable in all areas of social work, we do not believe that this programme would be appropriate for, or deliverable to, social workers in other areas of the profession, e.g. in non-statutory child and family social work or social workers who do not support children and families. The vast majority of non-statutory employers currently use the adult ASYE programme, which is provided by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC).

We want to test the eligibility criteria for the new social worker induction programme and further develop the criteria with the sector. As a starting point, we want to understand if the current child and family social worker ASYE eligibility would be appropriate for the new induction programme, in particular in light of recent changes, such as the introduction of new national rules on the use of agency child and family social workers.

The existing ASYE eligibility criteria is:

- newly qualified social workers employed in child and family, adult or mental health services, within the statutory or PVI (private, voluntary, independent) sectors
- agency newly qualified social workers - an agreement is made as to whether the agency or host employer fulfils the ASYE requirements
- social workers qualified up to four years

Examples of non-local authority employers who deliver statutory child and family social work include Cafcass, independent fostering agencies and national charities delivering services for local authorities. We are keen to understand whether these organisations could deliver the new induction and if there may be challenges covering the new PQS. Should there be challenges, an option might be for those organisations to work with local authorities to enable their new social workers to experience the full range of the PQS.

The new induction would be open to overseas social workers, as well those from the devolved administrations (Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland), as long as they satisfy all of the eligibility requirements. The SWIP will not replace the usual employer induction requirement and processes for overseas social workers.

We are interested in the potential equalities impact of the proposals described in this consultation.

Social work induction programme: Questions

Question 16: To what extent do you agree with our proposals for training, in the new social work induction programme?

Question 17: To what extent do you agree with our proposals for assessment in the new social work induction programme?

Question 18: To what extent do you agree that the eligibility criteria for the new social work induction programme should include the following:

Question 19: For employers only: Which of the following types of support would you need to deliver the social work induction programme:

Question 20: For employers only: How could we most effectively limit the challenges of delivering the assessment of the social work induction programme?

Question 21: Do you believe that the proposals set out in this consultation are likely to have a differential impact (positive or negative) on people with any of the following protected characteristics? Please ensure your response does not include any sensitive information that may identify an individual

Question 22: Looking at the years beyond the post-qualifying standards (PQS) for practitioners, and accompanying social work induction programme, what areas of further specialist development, in addition to child protection, should be considered?

Question 23: Do you have any other comments on the proposals outlined in the consultation?

Question 24: Please confirm that responses do not include any sensitive information that may identify an individual

List of all questions

About you

1. What is your name? (optional)
2. Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation?
3. If you are responding as an individual, how would you describe yourself?
4. If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, which of the following best describes who/which part of the sector your organisation represents?
5. What is the name of your organisation? (optional)
6. What is your role within the organisation? (optional)
7. Would you like us to keep your name and/or organisation confidential?
8. Would you like us to keep your responses confidential? If yes, we will not quote your responses in any report, including anonymously.

Policy questions

Question 9: To what extent do you agree that the proposed domains as set out in the new post-qualifying standards set a reasonable expectation that social workers should meet by the end of their second year? *(domains are detailed in the post-qualifying standards document)*

Question 10: To what extent do you agree that the proposed outcomes as set out in the new post-qualifying standards set a reasonable expectation that social workers should meet by the end of their second year? *(domains are detailed in the post-qualifying standards document)*

Question 11: Do you think there are any areas of practice missing from the proposed new post-qualifying standards?

Question 12: Do you think there are any areas of knowledge and skills missing from the proposed new post-qualifying standards?

Question 13: Are there any 'knows' statements in the proposed new post-qualifying standards that you think should not be included? *(knows and does statements are detailed in the post-qualifying standards document)*

Question 14: Are there any 'does' statements in the proposed new post-qualifying standards that you think should not be included? (*knows and does statements are detailed in the post-qualifying standards document*)

Question 15: Are you aware of any other evidence of effective social work practice, not already reflected in the new post-qualifying standards, that we should consider?

Question 16: To what extent do you agree with our proposals for training, in the new social work induction programme?

Question 17: To what extent do you agree with our proposals for assessment in the new social work induction programme?

Question 18: To what extent do you agree that the eligibility criteria for the new social work induction programme should include the following:

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Confidentiality

Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal data, may be subject to publication or disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 2018, or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004. If you want all, or any part, of a 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 confidential will be taken into account, but no assurance can be given that confidentiality can be maintained. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Department for Education.

Privacy notice

The personal data (name and address and any other identifying material) that you provide in response to this consultation is processed by the Department for Education as a data controller in accordance with the UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018, and your personal information will only be used for the purposes of this consultation. The Department for Education relies upon the lawful basis of article 6 (1) (e) of the UK GDPR which process this personal data as part of its public task, which allows us to process personal data when this is necessary for conducting consultations as part of our function. Your information will not be shared with third parties unless the law allows or requires it. The personal information will be retained for a period of 10 years following the closure of the consultation period, after which it be securely destroyed.

You can read more about what the Department for Education does when we ask for and hold your personal information in our personal information charter, which can be found here: [Personal information charter - Department for Education - GOV.UK](#)

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