

Education and Training Committee, 4 June 2015

Review of the standards of proficiency for social workers in England

Executive summary and recommendations

Introduction

The standards of proficiency for social workers in England were first published in 2012 prior to the opening of the Register to this profession on 1 August 2012.

We have previously committed to reviewing the Standards once the three year programme of visits to transitionally approved social work programmes has been completed.

The attached paper outlines the background and context of the review and includes a proposed outline work plan and timetable.

Decision

The Committee is invited to discuss and agree the attached paper.

Background information

See paper

Resource implications

- The resource implications have been accounted for in Policy and Standards Department planning for 2015-2016.

Financial implications

- The financial implications are minimal but include around £5,000-£10,000 for a small piece of commissioned work with service users and carers. The financial implications have been accounted for in Policy and Standards Department budgeting for 2015-2016.

Appendices

None

Date of paper

26 May 2015

Review of the standards of proficiency for social workers in England

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The standards of proficiency for social workers in England were first published in 2012 prior to the opening of the Register to this profession on 1 August 2012. The Standards were developed by a Professional Liaison Group (PLG) which comprised of members of the Council; education providers; unions; professional bodies; employers; and a representative of the outgoing regulator, the General Social Care Council (GSCC).
- 1.2 When the Register opened, we approved on a transitional basis all those education and training programmes approved by the GSCC as leading to eligibility to apply for registration. A three year schedule of visits to those programmes was developed. We have previously committed to reviewing the Standards once these visits conclude at the end of the 2014-2015 academic year.¹
- 1.3 This paper outlines the background and context for the review and includes a proposed outline work plan and timetable.

2. Background to standards reviews

- 2.1 We review our standards in two different ways (this paper proposes a review of the second type).

On-going review means ‘day-to-day’ review of the standards by the Council, Committees and the Executive. On-going review might indicate that a specific change to a standard was necessary or indicate that a more detailed ‘periodic’ review should be brought forward.

Periodic review refers to when we review standards in more detail to ensure that they:

- remain fit for purpose;
- are well understood by our stakeholders including registrants, service users and carers, education providers and the public; and
- take account of change, including changes in practice, legislation, technology, guidelines and wider society.

¹ Council, 27 March 2014. Reviews of social work education in England. See page 10.
<http://www.hpc-uk.org/assets/documents/1000452AEnc01-ReviewsofsocialworkeducationinEngland.pdf>

- 2.2 The following principles inform our approach to periodic review of the standards.
- Periodic reviews should take place no more than once every five years unless it is considered necessary to bring forward the review.²
 - The sequencing of periodic reviews should ensure that resources can be managed effectively. If a Professional Liaison Group (PLG) is required, there should normally only be one PLG running at any one time.
 - Stakeholders should be engaged in the review in the most appropriate way (which could be through a PLG or other appropriate mechanism for engagement).
 - Any periodic review should have a clear work plan, setting out the timescales for the work.
 - Feedback on the relevant standards received outside the periodic review process should be recorded for consideration during the next review.
- 2.3 In the past, we have normally reviewed the standards of proficiency for professions who are new to the Register at the end of any transitional ‘grandparenting’ arrangements which normally last for two to three years after the Register has opened. Such arrangements did not exist for social workers in England as they were previously statutory regulated prior to becoming regulated by the HCPC.

Review of profession-specific standards of proficiency

- 2.4 In 2011, new generic standards of proficiency were agreed. Since then, we have been reviewing the standards for each of the first 15 professions on a rolling basis in order to update them and to implement the new overarching structure. This review is now almost complete with the final set of standards subject to review – practitioner psychologists - due to be published from July 2015.
- 2.5 The review has involved the following.
- The existing profession-specific standards of proficiency for each profession have been mapped under the new generic structure.
 - The professional body or bodies of the profession have been asked to review this and to suggest and justify changes, if any, to the draft.
 - The proposed changes have been reviewed by the Executive.

² This five year period will normally be from the date of the republication of the standards following the last review.

- The Executive has sought the input of the Education and Training Committee and/or the Council member for that profession and/or has sought the advice of HCPC partners, often on specific standards / issues.
- The draft has been finalised for public consultation.
- The responses to the consultation have been analysed. The Executive has sought further input from the Education and Training Committee and/or Council member for that profession and/or has sought the advice of HCPC partners, often on specific standards / issues, where necessary / appropriate.
- The final draft has been approved by the Education and Training Committee and Council.

2.6 The newly developed standards of proficiency for social workers in England were the first standards to be published using the new generic standards in 2012.

3. Background to reviewing the standards of proficiency for social workers in England

- 3.1 The following summarises some of the context of this review. The review is proposed as it is standard HCPC practice to review new standards after they have been in place for an appropriate period of time. The format of the review, its content and the possible outcomes are informed by a number of factors, including stakeholder perceptions of the existing standards and developments in the social work profession.
- 3.2 The following is not intended to be exhaustive. In general it can be observed that the social work profession was undergoing a period of reform (for example, efforts to improve the quality of education and training and the creation of a professional college) when the HCPC took over responsibility as the professional regulator so it is timely to review standards of proficiency after they have been in place for three years and those reforms have bedded in.

Croisdale-Appleby and Narey reviews of social work education

- 3.3 In February 2014, two independent reviews of social work education were published. David Croisdale-Appleby was commissioned by the Department of Health to look at adult social work; Martin Narey was commissioned by the Department for Education to look at social work with children.
- 3.4 Both reports were critical of the existing standards of proficiency. Croisdale Appleby concluded that they ‘...do not amount to the knowledge and abilities

a social worker needs to know and be capable of applying in practice.’ (Page 72.) He does not, however, outline what he considers is missing.³

- 3.5 Narey’s report makes a similar conclusion, although this is made with specific reference to children’s social workers. Narey concludes that many of the standards of proficiency are ‘generic’ in nature; that they provide an incomplete list of what a children’s social worker needs to know; and that the non-hierarchical nature of the standards means that the profession-specific content is ‘lost in a sea of genericism’ (page 6).⁴
- 3.6 This view is indicative of an ongoing debate in the social work profession about whether should be a ‘generic’ or specialist profession at entry. The profession as currently regulated is ‘generic’ in that someone qualifies as a social worker first, with specialisation in particular areas chiefly taking place post-qualification. The standards of proficiency are therefore not specifically designed to set out the knowledge and skills of a children’s social worker but of a so-called ‘generic’ social worker who is equipped with the knowledge, understand and skills to work across the breadth of social work practice. Once registered, newly qualified social workers then typically choose to specialise in work with adults, with children and families, in mental health or in other areas. However, a small number of pre-registration programmes have or are being developed which have or aim to meet the standards of proficiency, but which have a more explicit focus on social work with specific client groups, namely social work with children and families and with people with mental health problems.
- 3.7 The reviews raised a number of other issues that are relevant in some way to the standards of proficiency including, but not limited to, a lack of availability in some areas of placements in statutory services and anecdotal concern from some employers about the calibre of social work students and the ability of newly qualified social workers. These are, however, issues that are highly contested and which continue to be debated in the profession. They are relevant to the standards of proficiency because there may be a case for considering whether the standards should be more explicit in articulating the ability to undertake statutory assessments, for example.
- 3.8 The Council considered both reports at its meeting in March 2014 and did not consider that any specific actions were required. The Council noted that the standards of proficiency for social workers in England and standards of education and training would be reviewed in due course in any event.

³ David Croisdale-Appleby (2014). Re-visioning social work education. An independent review. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/285788/DCA_Accessible.pdf

⁴ Martin Narey (2014). Making the education of social workers consistently effective. Report of Sir Martin Narey’s independent review of the education of children’s social workers. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/287756/Making_the_education_of_social_workers_consistently_effective.pdf

Statements developed by the Chief Social Workers for Adults and for Children and Families

- 3.9 There are two Chief Social Workers, reflecting the division of responsibilities between the Department of Health (adult social services) and Department for Education (children's social services).
- 3.10 In 2014, both Chief Social Workers launched consultations on knowledge and skills statements for social workers working with children and families and with adults.⁵ The statements are designed to describe the knowledge and skills required at the end of a social worker's first year in practice. It is suggested that they will be used in qualifying education and training; induction; supervision; CPD; assessment at the end of the first year in practice; and, with reference to social work with children and families, in assessments which identify distinct post-registration levels of professional competence.
- 3.11 These statements are therefore different in content and purpose to the standards of proficiency, which are about the threshold required for safe and effective practice at entry to the Register. They are also more detailed in nature than standards of proficiency. The Executive has mapped the statements against the existing standards of proficiency which will help to identify if there are any gaps, and then to consider whether those gaps are relevant to the review.

College of Social Work Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF)

- 3.12 The College of Social Work was in its relatively infancy at the time the standards of proficiency were published. The College publishes the Professional Capability Framework (PCF). The PCF is a competency framework, outlining the capabilities required at different levels of career progression – as a student; at qualification; at the end of the first year in employment; and as they become experienced and progress to advanced, manager and educator roles.
- 3.13 The PCF is used in curriculum design and the College uses it a number of ways including in its endorsement process for qualifying programmes and some post-qualifying programmes.
- 3.14 The PCF is currently being evaluated / reviewed by the College and a meeting has already taken place with the College to discuss this and how it relates to our work.

⁵ Knowledge and skills statement for social workers in Adult Services

https://lynromeo.blog.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/70/2015/03/KSS_for_Social_Workers_in_Adult_Services.pdf

Knowledge and skills for child and family social work

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/338718/140730_Knowledge_and_skills_statement_final_version_AS_RH_Checked.pdf

4. Review process

- 4.1 As this is the first time the standards of proficiency for social workers in England have been reviewed, and given the wider context outlined, the Executive does not propose adopting the same methodology as that used in the recent review of the profession-specific standards of proficiency of the other professions. Instead, the Executive has proposed a proportionate review which will involve more engagement with key stakeholders.
- 4.2 The review will have three phases as set out below. An indicative timetable is attached at appendix 1.

Phase 1: Preparation

- 4.3 The Executive will look at other standards, statements and frameworks which have changed since the standards of proficiency were first published and where useful map them against the standards of proficiency to identify any possible gaps.
- 4.4 In addition to the Chief Social Workers' statements, this might include mapping the standards of proficiency against the standards published by the other UK Care Councils, for example.

Phase 2: Stakeholder engagement

- 4.5 There are a range of different stakeholder groups with an interest in (or who are affected by) the standards of proficiency for social workers in England.
- 4.6 During the review we will make every effort to engage in some way with the following stakeholders.
- Department for Education including Chief Social Worker for Children and Families.
 - Department of Health including Chief Social Worker for Adults.
 - Education providers (and representative organisations).
 - Employers.
 - HCPC visitors and registration assessors.
 - Newly qualified social workers.
 - The other UK care Councils.
 - Practice placement educators.
 - Professional bodies.

- Service user and carers.
- Social work students.

4.7 At this stage we anticipate the following activities.

- Surveys of education providers delivering approved social work programmes, social work practice placement educators, HCPC visitors and registration assessors (and potentially other stakeholders).
- Meetings with other stakeholders to seek their feedback, utilising existing forums / meetings wherever possible. We hope that this might be a more targeted way of engaging with employers, for example.
- Work with service users and carers. At this stage we anticipate commissioning a small piece of work from a service user and carer led organisation to carry out interviews / focus groups with service users and carers in social care. However, we will also explore the possibility of direct engagement if this is possible in the timescale.
- Holding a meeting with key social work stakeholders to discuss the feedback we have received and to seek consensus on the changes that might be necessary.

4.8 Given the need for a proportionate and timely review it may not be possible to engage directly with all the groups above. If this is the case, we will make every effort to ensure that they are involved in the consultation phase (phase three).

4.9 Research has been commissioned as part of the standards of education and training, looking at 'preparation for practice' – assessing how effective the existing standards of education and training are in ensuring that registrants are fit to practise at entry to the Register and identifying any improvements to the Standards (if any). The outcomes of that research – which includes engagement with newly qualified professionals and students – may be helpful to this review.

Phase 3: Public consultation

4.10 A full 12 week public consultation will be held on draft revised standards produced as a result of the review.

4.11 The consultation document will be considered by the Education and Training Committee and the Council and will include draft proposed standards together with information about the review process and an explanation of the changes proposed.

4.12 An analysis of the responses received during the public consultation, as well as any final amendments to the revised standards, will be presented to the ETC and to the Council for approval prior to publication

Appendix 1 – Indicative timetable

Activity	Timescale
Discussion / approval of workplan by Education and training Committee	June 2015
Stakeholder engagement activities to January 2016, including:	
Surveys of education providers, practice placement educators, visitors and registration assessors	From September 2015
Service user and carer research / engagement	Completion by end of 2015
Meetings with stakeholders	To end of 2015
HCPC stakeholder meeting.	January / early February 2016
Discussion / approval of revised draft standards and consultation document by Education and Training Committee and Council	March 2016
Public consultation (12 weeks)	April to July 2016
Discussion/approval of consultation outcomes and revised standards for publication	September 2016
Publication of new standards	November / December 2016
Implementation in the operational processes	From 2017-18 academic year