

28 August 2015

The Health and Care Professions Council response to DfE consultation on Knowledge and skills: practice leaders and practice supervisors

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) welcomes this opportunity to respond to the consultation on the proposed knowledge and skills statements for child and family practice leaders and practice supervisors published by the Department for Education (DfE).
- 1.2 The HCPC is a statutory UK regulator of 16 health and social care professions, including social workers in England. We maintain a register of professionals; set standards for entry to our register; approve education and training programmes for registration; and deal with concerns where a professional may not be fit to practise. Our main role is to protect the health and wellbeing of those who use or need to use our registrants' services.
- 1.3 We have set out our comments on the knowledge and skills statements below.

2. Our comments

- 2.1 The HCPC welcomes the development of these knowledge and skills statements for practice leaders and supervisors. We believe that these, in combination with an effective assessment and accreditation system, will play an important role in ensuring that practice leaders and supervisors are able to develop, motivate and support excellent practice. Additionally, the knowledge and skills statements complement the HCPC's professional standards for social workers in England and touch on a number of the topics covered by them.
- 2.2 We produce standards of proficiency for social workers¹, which set out the threshold level of knowledge, skills and understanding at the point at which an individual enters the profession. By threshold we mean necessary for safe and effective practice. They state, for example, that social workers must be able to do the following:
 - practise within the legal and ethical boundaries of their profession (standard 2);
 - practise as an autonomous professional, exercising their own professional judgement (standard 4);

¹ Available here: <http://www.hcpc-uk.org/publications/standards/index.asp?id=569>

- communicate effectively with colleagues, service users, carers and others (standard 8);
- reflect on and review practice (standard 11);
- understand the key concepts of the knowledge base relevant to the profession (standard 13);
- draw on appropriate knowledge and skills to inform practice (standard 14); and
- establish and maintain a safe practice environment (standard 15).

These standards cover social workers in all settings – both statutory and non-statutory, adult and child and family social work, as well as academic and other settings – and are therefore intended to be generic.

2.3 In addition, we produce standards of conduct, performance and ethics², which are high level principles which we expect social workers (and all professionals registered with the HCPC) to adhere to in their practice including their interaction with service users, carers and colleagues. Among other things, the standards require professionals to do the following:

- act in the best interests of service users (standard 1);
- communicate properly and effectively with service users and other practitioners (standard 7);
- effectively supervise tasks you have asked other people to carry out (standard 8); and
- keep accurate records (standard 10).

2.4 We view the role of practice supervisors and leaders as key in promoting safe and effective practice by social workers at all levels, including understanding of and adherence to threshold regulatory standards. We would welcome references to the HCPC standards of proficiency for social workers and the standards of conduct, performance and ethics, either in the statements for practice leaders and supervisors themselves, or in any forthcoming introductory text.

2.5 It may also be useful to clarify whether these statements should be viewed as building on the knowledge and skills statement for child and family practitioners (which in turn builds on the competencies set out in the HCPC standards of proficiency and documents from other stakeholders). In other words, a practice leader or supervisor would be expected to demonstrate all of the attributes and competencies expected of a social worker at the point of qualification and registration with the HCPC, as well as of a child and family practitioner. We note in particular that the knowledge and skills statement for practitioners covers some areas of professional conduct, such as recognising one's own limitations, which are not included in the statements for supervisors and leaders currently being consulted on.

² The current standards are available here: <http://www.hcpc-uk.org/aboutregistration/standards/standardsofconductperformanceandethics/>. We have recently reviewed these standards and expect that revised standards will be published in early 2016.