

**1 September 2015**

**By email:** [KnowledgeandSkills2015.CONULTATION@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:KnowledgeandSkills2015.CONULTATION@education.gsi.gov.uk)

## **ADCS Response to the Consultation on Knowledge and Skills for Practice Supervisors and Practice Leaders**

1. The Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd (ADCS) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft knowledge and skills statements for both practice leaders and practice supervisors. ADCS is the professional association for directors of children's services (DCS) and their senior management teams. Under the provisions of the Children Act 2004, the DCS is the chief officer responsible for the discharge of local authority functions with regard to education and children's social care and champion for children across wider children's services.
2. ADCS welcomes initiatives to improve the quality of social work at a local level, where these initiatives are embedded in a sound understanding of the work undertaken in a local authority context. The role of social workers is critical in protecting children and young people from harm and helping families to overcome the challenges they face. ADCS is committed to ensuring that social workers have high quality guidance and support to do their jobs well. Care needs to be taken, however, to ensure that flexibility at the local level is maintained to ensure localities can effectively respond to the needs of their communities.
3. ADCS welcomes the continued focus on the specific skills and knowledge required by those working with children and family at a supervisory and senior level. It is helpful that the statements have been developed to complement the knowledge and skills for Approved Child and Family Practitioners. Together these provide a quality framework for practice development throughout a social worker's career, from front line practitioner to senior leader.
4. The statements are ambitious and cover the broad range and scale of challenges facing supervisors and leaders working with children, young people and families. Whilst it is difficult to argue with the spirit of the statements, they may need further work to ensure they appropriately balance the realities of the current practice context with our collective aspirations for the profession.
5. The statements reference a number of systemic issues which effect practice environments. They do not, however, provide the additional context required to understand the role of supervisors and leaders within the totality of the system. For example, decisions regarding resources, effective processes and the wider local government environment are outside of the direct control of practice supervisors and leaders who may not be able to exert the influence currently advocated within the draft statements. To suggest such roles should be held to account within an assessment and accreditation system for systemic issues which are outside of their direct control is worrying for our members.
6. It is for national and local government to set the right environment in which practice supervisors and leaders can excel. A clear gap in the statements is the absence of any reference to national government, local government or indeed Ofsted as the inspectorate.

**The Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd**

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7. What is not clear from the consultation document is how performance will be assessed and the accreditation framework which will underpin this. It will be necessary to establish a proportionate and affordable accreditation mechanism which does not freeze professional mobility, deprive the sector of experienced practitioners or inflate the costs of practice supervision or leadership roles. Further, the implications for individual staff members of not meeting the standards are unclear. This essential detail must be fully and thoughtfully considered prior to implementation, particularly if any such scheme is to become compulsory. ADCS acknowledge that the assessment and accreditation processes are being developed separately from the standards. It will be essential that these processes effectively marry with the statements to ensure compliance with any standards can be accurately measured and that implementation leads to genuine improvements in quality.
8. It is unclear why the draft statements do not reference their relationship to the already established national framework for social work registration and the professional capabilities framework (PCF). As with the knowledge and skills for Approved Child and Family Practitioners, it is essential that these new statements are linked to the PCF and this relationship is clear and meaningful. As ADCS has stated previously, if this does not happen, there is a risk that these statements will simply add another reference point for staff, employers and educators which adds complexity, bureaucracy and cost but does not add value.
9. It is not clear how the draft document put forward for consultation fits with the current structure of local government terms and conditions, career pathways and performance management frameworks at the local level. If, as stated, the aim of the statements are to *“create a status amongst child and family social workers which will be recognised widely not only as evidence of the skills and knowledge they have to do the job well, but also as a passport towards career progression,”* this could have further implications for local government in terms of pay and conditions, and recruitment and retention. It is also not clear how the practice leader statement links to the role of principal child and family social worker. As these latter roles are becoming more firmly and clearly established and starting to demonstrate their value within the system, ADCS members would not want any new arrangements to undermine the progress that has been made in practice leadership.
10. It is essential that there is clarity around which statements apply to which sections of the social work workforce. There is substantial variation across the country in relation to local authority staffing structures and clear guidance will be needed to ensure a consistent approach is adopted across the piece.
11. The Association’s Workforce Development Policy Committee looks forward to discussing these plans in greater detail with the Chief Social Worker at its meeting on 25 September and would like to extend the invitation to any additional interested parties in DfE.

For further information, please contact Esther Kavanagh Dixon, ADCS Policy Officer, [esther@adcs.org.uk](mailto:esther@adcs.org.uk) / 0161 826 9487

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