

9 September 2016

By email: kss-ap.consultation@education.gsi.gov.uk

ADCS Response to the Consultation on Knowledge and Skills Statement: Achieving Permanence

1. The Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd (ADCS) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the knowledge and skills statement: achieving permanence. 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. The consultation document states that the Government plan to consult on the future implementation of the assessment and accreditation system in the autumn. ADCS members would have welcomed the opportunity to respond in the round to one consultation covering both policy and implementation issues relating to KSSs and assessment and accreditation rather than the piecemeal approach that has been adopted by DfE.
3. It is unclear how the KSS for permanence and the CPD module links to the three new social work statuses and the process of assessment and accreditation. The Government has not yet indicated which roles will be subject to assessment and accreditation or if this will be mandatory. The current consultation document states, "the statement is relevant for a broad range of social workers involved in identifying and securing permanence arrangements for children.....These include supervising social workers, adoption social workers, those who support residential placements and social workers who support families on the edge of care where children are returning home". From this description, the KSS could be applied to both child and family social workers and practice supervisors however this has not been confirmed by DfE. Presumably, as a specialist KSS, this would only be available to those who have been accredited for the status relevant to their role.
4. ADCS members are concerned that the introduction of the KSS for permanence and an associated CPD module may have unintended consequences for the profession. As with assessment and accreditation of the three new statuses, there is a risk that the introduction of individual specialist KSSs and in-depth CPD modules has the potential to create further tiers within the workforce: social workers, accredited social workers and accredited social workers who have completed the CPD module. It potentially creates barriers in terms of retention and CPD for those staff who wish to gain a breadth of experience and knowledge across several domains of social work practice. Moreover, ADCS would not wish to see perceptions of hierarchies within social work which a KSS for achieving permanence may imply.
5. The Government's expansion of teaching partnerships as a means of improving the quality of the social work workforce provides an opportunity to ensure students graduate with the appropriate knowledge and skills. The links between this KSS, the CPD module and teaching partnerships is unclear.

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6. ADCS members welcome the development of a new regulatory body for social work with a whole-profession remit. As the new body will be responsible for social work standards and regulation, it is concerning that KSSs and CPD modules are being developed by Government, prior to the establishment of the new body with no assurances that they will be endorsed.
7. While initiatives to support the continued professional development of social workers are welcomed, ADCS members do not support the development of a suite of individual specialist KSSs. The three KSSs covering child and family social worker, practice supervisor and practice leader are sufficient. Rather than the development of further specialist KSSs, ADCS members would like to see the new regulatory body for social work develop a CPD curriculum in a range of areas of practice available to those who need it. KSSs are an insufficiently flexible base upon which to design CPD programmes.
8. It is difficult to disagree with the content of the statement. It is right that social workers working in permanence should have the knowledge and skills as outlined. The statement could go further in reflecting the provisions set out in the draft Children and Social Work Bill, reinforcing the need for a child's care plan to take account of not only their current needs but also future anticipated needs, and how these will be met in both the short and long-term.
9. The Association's Workforce Development Policy Committee has met with DfE officials on a number of occasions to discuss different aspects of the social work reform agenda. The committee would be happy to continue this dialogue as the programme of reform progresses.

For further information, please contact Esther Kavanagh Dixon, ADCS Policy Officer, esther@adcs.org.uk / 0161 826 9487

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