

By email: consultation.responses@socialworkengland.org.uk

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ADCS response to Social Work England consultation on readiness for professional practice

1. The Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd. (ADCS) is the national leadership organisation in England for directors of children's services (DCSs) under the provisions of the *Children Act (2004)*. The DCS acts as a single point of leadership and accountability for services for children and young people in a local area, including children's social care and education. ADCS welcomes the opportunity to respond to Social Work England's consultation on its readiness for professional practice.
2. ADCS welcomes efforts to improve the consistency of outcomes achieved by social work students in initial education and training before entering the profession. The role of social workers is critical in protecting children and young people from harm and helping families to overcome the challenges they face and it is important to maintain the quality and confidence of the children and family social work workforce. In recent years the Department for Education has embarked upon a complex system of social work reform including the development of knowledge and skills statements for the three statuses and it is important that there is a clear link between these knowledge, skills and behaviour statements and post-qualifying standards.
3. ADCS broadly welcomes the knowledge, skills and behaviours that student social workers should be able to demonstrate in order to meet the professional standards as set out in the consultation. It is important that these are streamlined with other frameworks that shape course curricula so that there is greater consistency around how students meet the professional standards. Whilst it is recognised that this is the regulator's first step towards streamlining the landscape for providers and students, it is vital that providers are clear as to which knowledge, values, skills and behaviours that graduates should be able to demonstrate upon completing their qualifying social work course.
4. The pandemic and successive lockdowns will have had a significant impact on the workforce, particularly those who are newly qualified and recently qualified during the pandemic. It is important that we are alive to their needs as a sector. Whilst employers have in many cases adapted their offer for NQSWs, there is also a role for education and training providers to ensure students are equipped to meet the needs of children and families post-pandemic. Alongside the cost of living crisis, we are likely to see a dramatic increase in the number of families living in poverty, thus having a direct impact on the number of families supported by local authorities. It is welcome that the knowledge statements include the social context in which people live including poverty and deprivation.

5. ADCS welcomes the expectation that social workers have the skills to work effectively with other professionals in multi-disciplinary and multi-agency teams. Children and families will often engage with a range of professionals and volunteers who support different specific needs but ultimately are working towards the same goal. The use of restorative and relationship-based practices to support children and families is an example of an approach by which professionals of any discipline can seek to work with children and families so that they can find their own solutions to problems. It is important that both early help and child protection practitioners can work effectively with each other and a wider range of professionals through common approaches, such as these, based on shared values that are held across the wider children's workforce, not just social work.

6. The inclusion of anti-discriminatory, anti-racist and anti-oppressive practice is essential and therefore welcome, however, ADCS would also strongly encourage explicit reference to these within the professional standards. We know that children from Black and minoritised backgrounds are overrepresented in the youth justice and care systems and in school exclusions. We must do more as a sector and as a society to stand up for change, to challenge ourselves and each other and to ensure anti-racist and anti-discriminatory practice is at the heart of our work with children and young people if we are to achieve a fairer, more inclusive society that genuinely values diversity. It is equally important that we have a workforce that is diverse and reflects the communities we work with. Whilst this is in the gift of employers, there is a role here too for education and training providers. However, a limited number of bursaries which have been frozen for several years pose a direct barrier to equality, diversity and inclusion in the workforce. At a time when many people are struggling with the rising cost of living, there is a clear need to do more to attract more people into the profession and the use of bursaries provides a real opportunity to bridge this gap. Indeed, the current recruitment and retention crisis being experienced within the sector emphasises the paramountcy for additional and adequate bursary funding.

7. If you would like to discuss any of the points raised in this response, ADCS would be happy to engage via its Workforce Development Policy Committee. Please contact Policy Officer Matt.Cunningham@ADCS.org.uk in the first instance.