



Department  
for Education

# **Post-qualifying standards and induction for child and family social workers**

**Government consultation response**

**February 2026**

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## Introduction

High-quality social work is central to reform of the children's social care system. Social workers should be respected for their knowledge and skill and the incredible difference they make to the lives of children and families. We know that social work can be a complex and challenging career, which requires an immense amount of care, compassion and resilience. Social workers should feel confident that they have the skills and knowledge to keep children safe and have access to ongoing, structured and high-quality professional development.

The consultation set out our plans to support this: we proposed updating the current post-qualifying standards (PQS) to provide greater clarity and depth and enable more detailed and consistent early career support aligned to the outcomes set out in the children's social care national framework<sup>1</sup>; and we set out our plans for a new two year programme to support the development of newly qualified social workers.

The new standards describe what a new social worker should know and be able to do to be highly effective by the end of their second year in the role. They draw on the key theories which underpin the most effective social work practice and have been shaped by the best evidence of the most effective whole-system approaches to working with children and families: systemic practice, restorative practice and strengths-based practice. The new standards and associated development programme will support social workers through the steep learning curve at the beginning of their career, helping to improve retention and the quality of practice.

The standards have been developed by an expert writing group which included experts in child and family social work practice, workforce development, pedagogy, those with direct personal experience and representation from Social Work England. This group was commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE), with oversight from the chief social worker and input from members of DfE's national practice group (NPG).

The standards support the objectives of the opportunity mission<sup>2</sup> and will help improve the quality of new social workers' practice so that they are better able to support children and families. By building on the national framework, which sets out the expectations for practice for the whole children's social care system, the new standards align closely with these outcomes and set out the skills and knowledge required from social workers to meet the expectations of the framework. This will help social workers to understand what

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<sup>1</sup> [Children's social care: national framework - GOV.UK.](#)

<sup>2</sup> The Opportunity Mission aims to give children the best start in life. Every child deserves a safe loving home. The new PQS supports high-quality social work which in turn allows children to grow up in a safe loving home.

the framework is asking of them and will support employers as they in turn support their new social workers.

The early experiences of social workers lay the groundwork of professional confidence and can support them to stay in practice for longer. We want to improve the support social workers receive to make the transition from initial education into the early part of their career easier. To achieve this, the proposed new 2-year programme will be designed to embed the new standards into structured support for newly qualified social workers, helping them transition from education to autonomous practice.

## Who this consultation was for

- local authorities
- social workers
- other practitioners in children's social care, including youth justice workers and family support and early-help workers
- relevant public, private and charitable sector organisations, including voluntary, community and charity workers
- parents and carers, including foster carers, kinship carers and special guardians
- social work students
- social work training providers
- higher-education institutions

## Consultation period

The consultation ran for 10 weeks from 20 March 2025 to 28 May 2025. Responses were submitted:

- online via the government's online consultation portal (Citizen Space)
- by email
- by post

## Methodology

The consultation asked a total of 14 policy questions relating to the PQS, our proposed programme of early career support and the advanced pathways. Respondents were asked to indicate on a rating scale the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with what was being proposed. They were also invited to give a 'free text' response to support the answer given on the rating scale. In addition, the consultation asked questions to

enable us to obtain general information about the respondent, for example, whether they were replying as an individual or as an organisation.

All submitted responses were considered. This document summarises the main points raised by respondents after responses were grouped into categories or themes and sets out the next steps in each area.

## Summary of responses received and the government's response

In total the consultation received 128 responses. Two responses were discounted because they were not in scope or were submitted after the consultation closed.

We asked a series of questions at the start of the consultation to understand more about those responding.

Examples of questions asked included:

- whether they were responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation
- if they were representing an organisation, what part of the sector were they representing

We also asked whether the respondent wanted their response to be kept confidential or not.

The breakdown of organisation versus individual in the responses that we received was as follows:

**Table 1: Breakdown of responses on organisation versus individual**

<b>Breakdown of whether they were responding as an individual or as an organisation</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
Individual	65	52
Organisation	58	46
Not answered	3	2
Total number of consultation responses	126	100

A breakdown of the responses of those respondents answering on behalf of an organisation was as follows:

**Table 2: Breakdown of respondents answering on behalf of an organisation**

Type of organisation <sup>3</sup>	%
Local authority	66
Higher-education institute	3
Private care provider	0
Training and learning provider	2
Public body	2
Charity	9
Other	17

We received a total of 126 responses to this question.

Of those responding on behalf of an organisation, the highest proportion (66%) was those who stated that they were responding on behalf of a local authority.

This question allowed respondents to self-declare via a free text box what organisation they were responding on behalf of. Examples of organisations responding included:

- Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS)
- Blackburn with Darwen Council
- City of Doncaster Council
- Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS)
- Ofsted

A full list of organisations responding can be found in [Annex A](#).

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<sup>3</sup> Organisation were self-declared by respondents and DfE has not verified this.

For those that responded as an individual, Table 3 provides a breakdown of the types of organisation that individuals worked for:

**Table 3: Breakdown of the types of organisation that individuals worked for**

<b>Organisations that the individual works for<sup>4</sup></b>	<b>%</b>
Local authority-employed social workers	45
Other practitioners in children’s social work, including youth justice workers and family support and early-help workers	1
Charitable sector organisations, including voluntary, community and charity workers	4
Parents and carers (including foster carers, kinship carers and special guardian)	10
Social work students	3
Social work training providers	6
Higher-education institutions	7
Others	23

## Main findings from the consultation

Overall, there was broad support from the sector for our proposals:

- replacing the current PQS with the new standards
- replacing the one-year assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE) with the 2-year programme of support for newly qualified child and family social workers

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<sup>4</sup> The consultation allowed individuals to self-declare what organisation they worked for. DfE cannot verify this information.

## **Key positive findings from the consultation**

### **PQS**

- a majority of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the proposed domains (73%) and outcomes (78%) contained within the revised new PQS set a reasonable expectation regarding what a newly qualified social worker should know and be able to do by the end of their second year, post-qualification
- a majority of respondents (64 and 63% respectively) agreed that the 'knows' and 'does' statements in the PQS were the right ones; 26% of respondents were unsure in relation to the 'knows' statement and 27% of respondents were unsure in relation to the 'does' statements

### **Programme of support**

- a majority of respondents, 54%, either agreed or strongly agreed with our proposals regarding a new 2-year programme of support for newly qualified social workers (NQSWs). 31% neither agreed or disagreed with our proposals regarding the programme of support
- all of our proposals to support employers to deliver the 2-year programme of support received a positive response from the sector

## **Key negative findings from the consultation**

### **PQS**

- concerns were raised around the volume and complexity of the PQS, particularly in relation to the 'knows' and 'does' statements and that these would be overwhelming for participants
- some of the content may duplicate existing standards and may be too basic or bureaucratic
- concerns were raised around splitting the profession, particularly between child and family and adult social workers and also between local-authority and non-local-authority-employed social workers

### **Programme of support**

- greater clarity is needed around expectations for employers' duties to support delivery of the programme
- too local-authority focused, limiting the relevance of the programme to those not employed by local authorities

We also received feedback from stakeholders regarding the name of the new proposed programme of support, as the term 'induction' is usually used to refer to an initial orientation period for new social workers. We recognise this and propose that we move from the term 'social work induction programme' to the 'early career development programme' (ECDP). Similarly, we decided to change the name from post-qualifying standards (PQS) to early career standards (ECS) to better reflect their purpose: these standards are specifically designed for the first two years of practice, supporting social workers as they transition from qualification to confident, autonomous practice. The term 'early career' clearly signals that these standards focus on building strong foundations at the start of a social worker's professional journey.

## Definition of key terms

This document uses a number of terms, which are defined as follows:

### Standard

This was formerly referred to as 'domain' in the consultation document.

These are the 6 key aspects of children and families' social work as set out in the revised early career standards:

- Standard 1 – Builds and maintains impactful relationships and communicates effectively with children, parents and families
- Standard 2 – Undertakes effective assessments to develop a purposeful plan, adapting the approach as needed
- Standard 3 – Delivers interventions to support children and families to make positive change, build resilience and support effective life transitions
- Standard 4 – Explores identity to deliver anti discriminatory practice
- Standard 5 – Works collaboratively and effectively with other professionals
- Standard 6 – Reflects on and develops professional practice

### Outcome statement

The outcome statements in each standard define at a high level what a new social worker should demonstrate across each of the six standards by the end of the 2-year programme of support.

### 'Learn that' statement

This was formerly referred to as 'knows' statement in the consultation document.

These statements outline the key knowledge that a social worker needs to understand to practice effectively and achieve the outcomes.

### 'Learn how to' statement

This was formerly referred to as 'does' statement in the consultation document.

These statements outline the areas of practice that new social workers should be trained in during the course of the programme, based on the best available evidence.

## Policy questions analysis

The analysis of the policy questions was broken down into a number of sections:

1. Sought feedback on the high-level domains and outcomes of the PQS.
2. Sought feedback on the details of the revised PQS – these included knowledge and skills and areas of good practice.
3. Sought feedback on the shape of the potential programme of support we are proposing for new social workers that would be underpinned by the content of the revised PQS, as well as what support employers would need to deliver it.
4. Sought feedback regarding the assessment element of our proposed programme of support for new social workers and what employers would need to deliver this element.
5. Sought feedback on the proposed eligibility criteria for our programme of support for new social workers.
6. Sought feedback on potential equality implications of our programme of support for new social workers.
7. Sought feedback on our high-level proposals for the advanced pathways beyond the support offered for new social workers.
8. Gave respondents the opportunity to provide any more potential feedback that was not covered elsewhere.

We summarise the responses to the consultation and set out our policy response for each of these sections in the text that follows.

## Section 1 – the overall structure of the PQS

This section asked two questions around the high-level structure of the PQS. Tables 4 and 5 gives the number of responses for each question (percentages are in brackets).

**Note:** the calculation of the percentages does not include those who did not answer the question.

We asked:

- Q9. To what extent do you agree that the proposed domains as set out in the new post-qualifying standards set a reasonable expectation that social workers should meet by the end of their second year?

**Table 4: Breakdown of responses for question 9**

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total number of responses
8 (7%)	11 (10%)	12 (11%)	54 (48%)	28 (25%)	113

- Q10. To what extent do you agree that the proposed outcomes as set out in the new post-qualifying standards set a reasonable expectation that social workers should meet by the end of their second year?

**Table 5: Breakdown of responses for question 10**

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total number of responses
7 (6%)	8 (7%)	10 (9%)	58 (53%)	27 (25%)	110

Both questions allowed respondents to provide additional written feedback via a free text box.

We will go on consider each of the responses in detail for each of the questions before providing a government response for this section.

## Question 9 – PQS ‘domains’

### We asked

To what extent do you agree that the proposed domains as set out in the new post-qualifying standards set a reasonable expectation that social workers should meet by the end of their second year?

### We heard

From the responses received, a significant majority (73%) either agreed or strongly agreed with the proposal. 17% of respondents either strongly disagreed or disagreed with the proposal. 11% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal.

Amongst those who agreed or strongly agreed with the proposal and expanded upon their response, examples of reasons included:

- the domains were viewed as being clearer and more structured than the current PQS
- they were viewed as being more fit for purpose than the current PQS and were better aligned with current standards in place for the profession, for example, the professional capability framework (PCF)

Among the minority who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposal, reasons given included:

- duplication and bureaucracy across frameworks – there were concerns that the new PQS replicated existing standards, but did not offer anything new
- concerns that the domains were mandating unrealistic expectations for newly qualified social workers

## Question 10 – PQS outcomes

### We asked

To what extent do you agree that the proposed outcomes as set out in the new post-qualifying standards set a reasonable expectation that social workers should meet by the end of their second year?

## We heard

Amongst those who responded to this question, a significant majority (78%) either agreed or strongly agreed that the proposed outcomes contained within the new post-qualifying standards set a reasonable expectation that social workers should meet by the end of their second year in the profession. By contrast, only 13% either strongly disagreed or disagreed. 9% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Amongst those who agreed or strongly agreed with the proposal, examples of reasons provided included:

- they were viewed as being supportive of the professional development of newly qualified social workers because they would help build confidence and competence and was achievable within the 2-year window
- they welcomed the strong emphasis on the building of positive and impactful relationships with children, families and networks

Among the minority who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposal, reasons provided included:

- concerns that the outcomes were too heavily focused on local authority-employed social workers and would potentially create a split in the profession, for example, between those social workers employed by local authorities and those who were not and between adult and child and family social workers
- concerns that the requirements contained within the revised PQS would be overwhelming for newly qualified social workers, both in their volume and in their complexity

## Government response to section 1

For question 9, having carefully considered all of the responses, DfE intends to **proceed** with the proposed new domains, with some amendments as outlined below.

For question 10, having carefully considered all of the responses, DfE intends to **proceed** with the proposed outcomes within the new domains, with some amendments as outlined below.

Overall, there was broad support from the sector for both the revised standards and outcomes. We also noted the positive response from the sector to the addition of anti-discriminatory practice (ADP) as a separate standard. We believe that practising in an anti-discriminatory way is fundamental to all areas of social work practice, supporting the social work profession to better address inequality and discrimination.

We acknowledge the concerns raised by some respondents around the potential to split the social work profession. We do not anticipate that the introduction of the revised standards and the new development programme for child and family social workers will

lead to the perception of there being a split within the profession; rather, it reflects the fact that post-qualification specialisation takes place within many professions and that social work is no exception.

It is also the case that the current programme of support and post-qualifying standards for adult social workers, offered by Department of Health and Social Care, will not change as a result of the introduction of revised standards for child and family social workers. We are aware that there is currently some mobility between child and family and adult social work and we do not anticipate that the introduction of the updated standards and the new programme of support will act as a barrier between future movement between the two parts of the profession.

We also recognise the concerns some respondents raised about the standards feeling overwhelming for new social workers – particularly in relation to the volume and complexity of the original ‘knows’ and ‘does’ statements and the number of outcome statements.

To make the framework easier to understand and apply in practice, we have replaced the term ‘domain’ with the term ‘standard,’ as this is a more widely understood term in professional and regulatory contexts and clearly signals expectations and benchmarks for practice. We have retained the same number of standards as the previous domains with the first three standards – relationship, assessment and intervention – focusing on key aspects on social work and standards 4, 5 and 6 focusing on broader practice.

We have reduced the number of outcomes – from 26 proposed in the consultation to 20. The revised outcomes still reflect the full scope of effective child and family social work and remain aligned with the children’s social care national framework. The shorter format is designed to reduce burden, avoid duplication with Social Work England’s professional standards and improve clarity and usability for social workers.

The most significant change to the standards that we have made is to substantially reduce the number of ‘knows’ and ‘does’ statements and replace them with fewer but clearer ‘learn that’ and ‘learn how to’ statements, focusing on the key skills that social workers are expected to demonstrate at this stage in their career.

The reduction in length marks a shift in emphasis – from lists of illustrative behaviours to a clearer focus on what social workers need to learn and learn how to do in order to meet the outcomes. We believe this approach responds to feedback in the consultation while re-focusing the standards on the skills that social workers need.

## Section 2 – detailed questions about the PQS

We asked a series of detailed questions about the PQS. Table 6 gives the number of responses for each of the questions with the figure as a percentage in brackets.

**Table 6: Breakdown of responses for each question 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15**

Question	Yes	No	Maybe	Total number of responses
Q11. Do you think there are any areas of practice missing from the proposed new post-qualifying standards?	48 (43%)	42 (38%)	21 (19%)	111
Q12. Do you think there are any areas of knowledge and skills missing from the proposed new post-qualifying standards?	45 (42%)	40 (38%)	21 (20%)	106
Q13. Are there any 'knows' statements in the proposed new post-qualifying standards that you think should not be included?	18 (16%)	64 (58%)	29 (26%)	111
Q14. Are there any 'does' statements in the proposed new post-qualifying standards that you think should not be included?	17 (15%)	63 (57%)	30 (27%)	110
Q15. Are you aware of any other evidence of effective social work practice, not already reflected in the new post-qualifying standards, that we should consider?	21 (20%)	59 (56%)	25 (24%)	105

Each of these questions allowed respondents to provide additional written feedback via a free text box.

We will go on to consider each of the responses in detail for each of the questions before providing a government response for this section.

## Question 11 – missing areas of practice

### We asked

Do you think there are any areas of practice missing from the proposed new post-qualifying standards?

### We heard

There was a relatively even split in the responses to this question, with a narrow majority (43% vs 38%) indicating that they thought areas of practice were missing from the proposed new PQS. 19% of respondents indicated that they were unsure.

Amongst those who responded 'Yes', examples of areas of practice that were considered missing from the new proposed PQS included:

- greater detail on legal framework underpinning social work decision-making and making more explicit reference to the relevant legalisation
- managing teams, group dynamics and building and maintaining team resilience

Amongst those who responded 'Maybe', reasons included:

- lack of information about what support would be needed to enable the social worker to meet the requirements of the proposed new PQS

## Question 12 – missing areas of knowledge and skills

### We asked

Do you think there are any areas of knowledge and skills missing from the proposed new post-qualifying standards?

### We heard

There was a fairly even split in the responses to this question, with a narrow majority (42%) saying that they thought areas were missing from the proposed PQS, versus 38% who indicated that they thought areas were not missing. There was a minority, 20%, saying that they were unsure.

Among those who responded 'Yes,' examples of areas of knowledge and skills that it was believed were missing from the proposed new post-qualifying standards were:

- domestic abuse and safeguarding
- trauma-informed and therapeutic practice

## Question 13 – 'knows' statements

### We asked

Are there any 'knows' statements in the proposed new post-qualifying standards that you think should not be included?

### We heard

A majority of those who responded, 58%, indicated that they did not believe that any of the 'knows' statements in the proposed new PQS should not be included. 16% stated that they thought that some of the 'knows' statements should not be included. However, a higher percentage, 26%, said 'Maybe' in response to whether any of the 'knows' statements within the PQS should not be included.

Respondents who answered 'Yes' and provided comments highlighted the need for greater detail on specific issues such as legislation, domestic abuse and drug misuse, rather than suggesting that any of the 'knows' statements should be removed from the standards.

## Question 14 – 'does' statements

### We asked

Are there any 'does' statements in the proposed new post-qualifying standards that you think should not be included?

### We heard

57% of those who responded included that they did not believe that any of the 'does' statements should not be included in the proposed new post-qualifying standards. By contrast, only 15% indicated that there were 'does' statements that should not be included. A greater number of respondents, 27%, responded 'Maybe' to this question.

An example of why respondents believed that some of the 'does' statements should not be included was:

- the need for clearer and more specific 'does' statements that were not open to interpretation so that participants on the programme would be clearer about what the expectations on them are
- a concern that some 'does' statements were seen as not relevant or applicable to all social work roles or contexts, with calls for flexibility to accommodate different specialisations and settings

## Question 15 – evidence of effective social work practice

### We asked

Are you aware of any other evidence of effective social work practice, not already reflected in the new post-qualifying standards, that we should consider?

### We heard

A majority of those who responded, 56%, stated that they were not aware of any evidence of effective social work practice not already included in the new PQS. Only 20% said that there was good practice that was not already included in the new PQS, with a higher proportion, 24%, of respondents who were unsure.

Amongst those who indicated that there was other evidence of effective social work practice not already reflected in the PQS and expanded upon their answer, they included the following areas:

- trauma-informed and trauma-responsive practice
- social work values and ethics

## Government response to section 2

While we received a range of responses to these questions, it should be noted that respondents tended to make the same point across these questions and often the response was to add more detail about a particular issue.

After the consultation closed, we reviewed all feedback and made revisions. We re-drafted several statements to focus on the key knowledge and skills social workers should demonstrate and to highlight complex areas of practice such as domestic abuse, trauma and mental ill health. We kept the standards concise by referencing relevant knowledge, skills, theories and tools without going into extensive detail. Future

development programmes based on these standards will explore these issues in more depth.

We also acknowledge the feedback around the volume of the 'knows' and 'does' statements. The updated standards have been deliberately streamlined, reducing the number of statements under the newly named 'learn that' and 'learn how to' categories and focusing on the outcome statements that social workers must meet by the end of their second year in practice.

The final early career standards retain the integrity of the original version, while responding to concerns raised by respondents to the consultation. Although they are shorter and more focused, we have retained most of the proposed content we consulted on. The new format is clearer and more actionable, helping social workers and supervisors focus on what needs to be learned and applied in practice to meet each outcome. It also supports a more personalised and developmental approach to learning, rather than a checklist of statements. We remain committed to reviewing the standards in the future to ensure it continues to reflect best practice.

## Section 3 – the shape of the programme of support

We asked a series of questions in the consultation regarding the shape of the proposed support programme for new social workers. We also sought feedback about what types of support employers would require in order to deliver the programme.

### Question 16 – programme training proposals

#### We asked

To what extent do you agree with our proposals for training, in the new social work induction programme?

#### We heard

**Table 7: Breakdown of responses for question 16**

Answer	Total	%
Strongly disagree	8	7
Disagree	8	7
Neither agree nor disagree	34	31
Agree	44	41
Strongly agree	14	13

There were 108 responses to this question. The question also allowed respondents to provide written feedback via a free text box.

Overall, our training proposals have received a positive response from the sector with a majority, 54%, of those who responded either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the proposals for training in the new programme. A minority, 14%, of those who responded either strongly disagreed or disagreed with the training proposals. A significant minority however (31%), neither agreed nor disagreed with the training proposals.

Amongst those who disagreed with our proposed training proposals, the main issue highlighted was:

- concerns about capacity of employers to deliver a 2-year programme of support

## Question 19 – employer support to deliver the social worker induction programme

### We asked

For employers only: which of the following types of support would you need to deliver the social work induction programme?

- centrally provided learning materials
- funding, guidance on programme delivery
- support for practice supervisors and assessors
- practice supervisor and assessor capacity
- events
- digital hosting of materials
- other

### We heard

**Table 8: Breakdown of responses for question 19**

Answer	Total	%
Centrally provided learning materials	56	80
Funding, guidance on programme delivery	69	99
Support for practice supervisors and assessors	64	91
Practice supervisor and assessor capacity	53	76
Events	49	70
Digital hosting of materials	56	80
Other	14	20

There were a total of 70 responses to this question. Respondents were able to select multiple options. The question also allowed respondents to provide written feedback via a free text box.

Broadly, there was strong support from respondents for the suggestions for assisting employers to deliver the programme. An overwhelming majority, 99%, was in favour of funding and the provision of guidance on programme delivery, followed by support for practice supervisors and assessors (91%). The lowest level of support was for events, at 70%, which still represents a significant majority.

## Government response to section 3

We note that our proposals for a new early career development programme and support for employers to deliver the programme were broadly well-received by the sector.

As a result, in relation to question 16, having carefully considered all the responses, we intend to **proceed** with the proposal to develop a new 2-year programme of support for early career social workers and we will work to engage with the sector as we work to develop the detail of the programme.

Given the high level of support that the sector indicated that they would need to deliver a new induction programme, we have been thinking carefully about the best approach to the new early career development programme to ensure that social workers receive a consistent high-quality offer that does not place excessive burdens on employers. As a result, we are proposing a programme that sees more of a role for high-quality suppliers approved by DfE with expertise in the best evidence-informed social work practice and in effective pedagogy. We see these suppliers working with employers to deliver a programme that has the relationship between the supervisor and the new social worker at its core, but within a consistent structured programme.

We believe that new social workers will require protected time to fully realise the benefits of the programme of support. We are aware that this can be challenging for employers, given workload pressures in the sector and we are considering how best to address this.

## Section 4 – the assessment element of the support programme

We asked two questions regarding the assessment of the programme and what support employers would need to meet our assessment proposals.

### Question 17 – social work induction programme assessment proposals

#### We asked

To what extent do you agree with our proposals for assessment in the new social work induction programme?

#### We heard

**Table 9: Breakdown of responses for question 17**

Answer	Total	%
Strongly disagree	3	3
Disagree	14	13
Neither agree nor disagree	33	31
Agree	48	44
Strongly agree	10	9

There were a total of 108 responses to this question. The question allowed respondents to provide written feedback via a free text box.

A majority, 53%, indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed with our proposal for assessment in the new support programme, with a minority (16%), either strongly disagreeing or disagreeing. It should be noted that a significant minority of those responding (31%) were neutral.

Among those who disagreed or strongly disagreed, the most commonly reported themes included concerns about:

- the potential assessment burden and impact of the programme
- standardisation and consistency
- the potential negative impact upon recruitment and retention

## Question 20 – managing assessment challenges of the social work induction programme

### We asked

For employers only: How could we most effectively limit the challenges of delivering the assessment of the social work induction programme?

- central guidance and templates on assessment
- digital service to support administration
- external moderation support
- clear guidance for evidence requirements
- other

### We heard

**Table 10: Breakdown of responses for question 20**

Answer	Total	%
Central guidance and template on assessment	57	86
Digital service to support administration	51	77
External moderation support	37	56
Clear guidance for evidence requirements	59	89
Other	18	27

There were a total of 66 responses to this question. Respondents were able to select multiple options. The question also allowed respondents to provide written feedback via a free text box.

Among those who responded to this question, three suggestions were most popular.

These were:

- providing clear guidance for evidence requirements (89%)
- central guidance and template on assessment (86%)
- digital service to support administration (77%)

The least popular option was to provide external moderation support, with only 56% supporting this. 27% of those who responded chose the 'Other' option.

Amongst those who selected the 'Other' option and expanded upon their response, reasons included:

- concerns about potential split in the profession between child and family social workers and adult social workers
- how the PQS will intersect with the range of other standards already in place, for example, Social Work England standards and the PCF

## **Government response to section 4**

We note that the responses to our proposals around assessment were broadly supportive, with only 16% saying they disagreed or strongly disagreed (although we recognise that a substantial minority were not sure and that what we set out was too high level). As with the questions around the proposed programme above, we recognise concerns around the potential burdens of assessment and the support for a range of measures to mitigate this.

We have considered this feedback and we think that we can do more to reduce the burden of assessment, especially in light of the fact that completing this programme would not carry national or regulatory implication, for example annotations to the social work register. As a result, we envisage the new programme involving some light-touch formative assessment at key points to check understanding and proportionate summative assessment likely involving some direct observations of practice, related to the standards and outcome statements. We will provide further details of this approach in due course. We will also consider what support we shall offer to employers to deliver the assessment element of our proposed programme of support as we refine the assessment arrangements.

## Section 5 – eligibility

We asked a question around the eligibility of our new programme of support. When seeking feedback from the sector around eligibility we asked about the appropriateness of using the current AYSE eligibility as the basis for the new programme of support.

### Question 18 – eligibility proposals

#### **We asked**

To what extent do you agree that the eligibility criteria for the new social work induction programme should include the following:

- child and family social workers who qualified within four years of starting the social worker induction programme
- child and family social workers employed in statutory roles at local authorities
- child and family social workers employed in statutory roles at organisations who carry out statutory duties on behalf of local authorities
- child and family social workers employed in non-statutory roles (for example, in the private, voluntary, or independent sector)
- agency child and family social workers
- child and family social workers who qualified outside the UK
- child and family social workers from Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland

## We heard

**Table 11: Breakdown of responses for question 18**

Answer	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total responses
Child and family social workers who qualified within four years of starting the social worker induction programme	8 (8%)	20 (19%)	16 (15%)	40 (38%)	22 (21%)	106
Child and family social workers employed in statutory roles at local authorities	5 (5%)	4 (4%)	9 (8%)	40 (38%)	48 (45%)	106
Child and family social workers employed in statutory roles at organisations who carry out statutory duties on behalf of local authorities	5 (5%)	5 (5%)	8 (8%)	43 (41%)	45 (42%)	106
Child and family social workers employed in non-statutory roles (for example, in the private, voluntary, or independent sector)	6 (6%)	8 (8%)	16 (15%)	45 (42%)	31 (29%)	106
Agency child and family social workers	17 (16%)	14 (13%)	10 (9%)	34 (32%)	31 (29%)	106
Child and family social workers who qualified outside the UK	2 (2%)	10 (10%)	12 (12%)	41 (40%)	38 (37%)	103
Child and family social workers from Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland	3 (3%)	10 (10%)	15 (14%)	42 (40%)	34 (33%)	104

There was broad agreement from respondents to all of the eligibility proposals contained within the consultation. There was the highest level of agreement for the proposals to include new social workers employed in statutory roles at local authorities and new social workers employed in statutory roles at organisations carrying out statutory duties on behalf of local authorities. These are roles which the law mandates can only be undertaken by a social worker who is registered with the regulator.

The lowest level of support was for agency social workers to be in scope, with a significant minority either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the proposal.

## **Government response to section 5**

Having carefully considered these responses, we are proposing to limit eligibility for the forthcoming support programme to a new social worker permanently employed by a local authority or an organisation undertaking statutory duties on behalf of a local authority would be eligible.

In addition, to bring this policy area into line with our other workforce policies, we plan to limit eligibility to social workers who qualified within 3 years of starting the new programme of support (down from the current 4 years). Our assessment is that the number of NQSWs who are currently eligible for ASYE who will not be eligible for the new programme of support as a result of this change will be very small.

## Section 6 – equality impact assessment

We asked a question around the potential equality impact of our programme.

### Question 21 – potential equality impact

#### We asked

Do you believe that the proposals set out in this consultation are likely to have a differential impact (positive or negative) on people with any of the following protected characteristics?

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation
- none of the above
- not sure

#### We heard

**Table 12: Breakdown of responses for question 21**

Answer	Total	%
Age	23	23
Disability	28	27
Gender reassignment	15	15
Marriage and civil partnership	9	9
Pregnancy and maternity	29	28
Race	23	23
Religion and belief	15	15
Sex	14	14
Sexual orientation	11	11

Answer	Total	%
None of the above	25	25
Not sure	31	30

There were a total of 102 responses to this question. Note: the question allowed respondents to identify multiple protected characteristics potentially impacted by the proposed changes.

Among those who responded to this question, the protected characteristics that the most respondents thought would be impacted included:

- pregnancy and maternity (28%)
- disability (27%)

The protected characteristics that the least respondents thought would be impacted were:

- marriage and civil partnership (9%)
- sexual orientation (11%)

25% thought that none of the protected characteristics listed would be impacted by the proposed changes and 30% were not sure whether any of the protected characteristics would be potentially impacted by them.

For those who provided additional information, potential issues identified included:

- accessibility and inclusivity: respondents highlighted the need for reasonable adjustments, accessible training materials and inclusive assessment methods to support diverse learners, including those with disabilities, neurodivergent conditions and caregiving responsibilities.
- work-life balance and career progression: respondents highlighted the potential negative impacts on social workers' ability to balance work and family responsibilities, particularly for those taking maternity or paternity leave, working part-time, or with childcare responsibilities.
- programme structure and duration: respondent raised concerns about the prolonged programme duration deterring older candidates and affecting those with family commitments, highlighting the need for flexibility in programme structure and support mechanisms.

## **Government response to section 6**

Having carefully considered all of the responses regarding the potential impact (positive or negative) on people with protected characteristics, DfE intends to proceed with a new 2-year support programme, with amendments as outlined in this response, while recognising our ongoing duty to assess and mitigate the impact on those with protected characteristics.

We are keen to ensure that the new programme mitigates as much as possible any potential adverse impact on those individuals with protected characteristics. We will publish an equalities impact assessment (EIA) once the design of the programme has been finalised.

## Section 7 – support and training beyond the first two years

We asked a question around areas of further specialist development beyond the post-qualifying standards for practitioners and accompanying social work induction programme.

### Question 22 – further areas of support beyond the initial two years

#### We asked

Looking at the years beyond the post-qualifying standards for practitioners and accompanying social work induction programme, what areas of further specialist development, in addition to child protection, should be considered?

- practice education
- management and leadership skills
- assessment skills
- analysis and use of data
- specific harms
- adult mental health
- child mental health
- court skills
- other

#### We heard

**Table 13: Breakdown of responses for question 22**

Answer	Total	%
Practice educators	74	72
Management and leadership skills	74	72
Assessment skills	59	57
Analysis and use of data	62	60
Specific harms	60	58
Adult mental health	61	59
Child mental health	74	72
Court skills	74	72

Answer	Total	%
Other	26	25

There were 103 responses to this part of the question. Respondents were able to select multiple options.

All of the areas for further learning and development proposed in the consultation received majority support from respondents.

The areas which had the highest level of support were:

- practice educators (72%)
- management and leadership skills (72%)
- child mental health (72%)
- court skills (72%)

The areas which had the lowest level of support were:

- assessment skills (57%)
- specific harms (58%)
- adult mental health (59%)

25% of respondents indicated that specialist development should be focused on other areas not previously mentioned. Of those who responded with examples, these included:

- specialist knowledge and skills – focusing on acquiring specialised knowledge and skills in areas such as mental health, disability, domestic abuse and trauma-informed practice to enhance service delivery across child and adult services
- leadership and management – emphasising the development of leadership and management skills, including supervision and practice education, to support career progression and effective team development in social work

## Government response to section 7

Having carefully considered all responses, we propose introducing new programmes on advanced child protection practice and leadership. These will build on the new early career standards, using them as a foundation for practice at higher levels within the child and family social care system. As part of this, we plan to develop training for advanced child protection social work to build expertise and embed lead child protection practitioner roles, alongside a leadership programme for those moving into senior positions. We are developing the detail of how these programmes will be delivered, including funding and assessment, with implementation planned for 2027. We will continue to engage with the sector and share further details in due course.

## Section 8 – any other feedback

This section gave respondents the opportunity to provide any additional feedback.

### Question 23 – other comments

#### **We asked**

Do you have any other comments on the proposals outlined in the consultation?

#### **We heard**

The question allowed respondents to provide written feedback via a free text box. In total there were a total of 76 responses to this question.

Commonly reported key themes from respondents included:

- highlighting the importance of funding and resources
- possible impact upon workforce and retention
- need for clarity and simplification

### Government response to section 8

Having considered all of the responses, DfE is considering the additional comments made regarding the proposals outlined in the consultation.

DfE is aware of the importance of both funding and resources when it comes to the successful delivery of the proposed new programme of support. We are keen to ensure that we are, where possible, minimising administrative burden upon employers and participants. To help with the administration of programme, we are exploring a range of delivery options.

## Next steps

We are grateful to all the individuals and organisations who have responded to our consultation.

We intend to replace the current standards for child and family practitioners with the new early career standards. We believe that these will provide greater detail and clarity on outcomes social workers should achieve and capabilities they should develop in practice and be able to demonstrate by the end of their second year, post-qualification. The revised [early career standards](#) are now available. The revised standards will set the standard against which new social workers are assessed when the new programme of support launches in September 2027.

We will carefully consider the feedback received in this consultation and will use it to help and shape the design of the new professional development programme. In addition, we will continue to engage with the sector to help us refine the details of the programme and the assessment arrangements. We will look to share final details of the programme with the sector in due course.

## Annex A: Organisations that responded to the consultation

- Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS)
- Achieving for Children (Kingston, Richmond and Windsor and Maidenhead)
- Adoption England
- Adoption UK
- Association of Director of Children's Service Ltd (ADCS)
- Blackburn with Darwen Council
- Blackpool Council
- Bradford Children and Families Trust
- British Association of Social Workers (BASW)
- Buckinghamshire Council
- Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS)
- Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse
- City of Doncaster Council: Children, Young People and Families Directorate
- Cornwall Council
- Domestic Abuse Commissioner
- Hammersmith and Fulham London Borough Council
- Joint Universities Social Work Association (JUSWA)
- Kinship
- Lancashire County Council
- Lincolnshire County Council
- London Social Work for Children
- Manchester City Council Children's Services
- North Tyneside Children's Services
- Ofsted
- Oxford Brookes University
- Portsmouth City Council
- Purple Lace Consultancy Ltd
- Research in Practice: National Children's Bureau
- Rotherham Borough Council
- SafeLives
- Southwark Children's Services
- Stoke-on-Trent City Council
- Suffolk County Council
- Surrey County Council: Children's Services
- Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
- The For Baby's Sake Trust
- UNISON
- Warwickshire County Council: Warwickshire Children and Families

- Warrington Children's Services
- West Midlands Social Work Teaching Partnership
- Westmorland and Furness Council



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