

# PCF

2026

# Professional Capabilities Framework



**Strategic social worker**

**BASW**  
**England**

The professional association for  
social work and social workers

## 1. VALUES AND ETHICS

Apply social work ethical principles and value to guide professional practices

Social workers have an obligation to work in accordance with our [Code of Ethics](#), in terms of our conduct, our processes and decisions, and our interventions. We involve individuals, carers and communities meaningfully at both an individual and a structural level, up to and including partnership working and co-production. We promote human rights and social justice. We develop and maintain our understanding of the value base of our profession throughout our career, its ethical standards and relevant law.

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- ensure that the experiences and outcomes for individuals, families, carers and communities, are at the heart of the organisation's values and ethical concerns, and promote this across the system
- provide leadership in the critical application of professional ethics to strategic decision-making, using a legal and human rights framework and our [Code of Ethics](#)
- develop and promote an organisational culture which encourages reflection on the influence and impact of values on the organisation and on practice
- demonstrate confident leadership for social work within the organisation and in the wider system
- promote application of social work values and ethical opinion in complex organisational and system situations
- lead effective partnership working within and outside of the organisation, creating a culture that promotes meaningful participation of individuals, communities, families and carers and co-production of services and solutions
- promote a culture where individuals and communities can exercise their rights to autonomy and self-determination balancing this effectively with safeguarding responsibilities
- lead on ensuring that policies and strategies concerning information sharing and privacy are informed by current legal and professional requirements concerning safeguarding, information sharing, confidentiality and data protection
- ensure the organisation is aware of and responds to changes in legislation and guidance that affect social work, advocating for and contributing to change where appropriate, using co-production principles.

## 2. DIVERSITY AND EQUALITY

Recognise diversity and apply anti-discriminatory, anti-racist and anti-oppressive principles in practice

Social workers understand that diversity characterises and shapes human experience and is critical to the formation of identity. Diversity is multi-dimensional and includes race, disability, class, economic status, age, sexuality, gender (including transgender), faith and belief and the intersection of these and other characteristics. We understand that because of difference, and perception of difference, a person's life experience may include oppression, marginalisation and alienation as well as privilege, power and acclaim. We identify this and promote equity, equality, diversity and inclusion.

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- lead and be accountable for strategic approaches to promoting diversity, identity and equality creating and embedding equality and diversity within the organisation
- lead on ensuring that policies, practice and strategies concerning discrimination, racism and oppression reflect the law and current best practice. I endeavour to contribute to the development of law and policy, using co-production approaches where possible, to ensure that these reflect social work values and ethics
- engage with a range of anti-oppressive approaches, such as anti-racist and anti-poverty practice, that might be used to address power dynamics and change the values, structures and behaviours that perpetuate oppression. I promote and contribute to policy and practice developments to ensure service improvement
- create and sustain an organisational environment where people feel supported to challenge on issues of discrimination, racism and oppression
- lead and model at a strategic level appropriate and effective use of power and authority
- provide challenge and show leadership in situations where power is used inappropriately.

### 3. RIGHTS, JUSTICE AND ECONOMIC WELLBEING

Advance human rights and promote social justice and economic wellbeing

Social workers recognise and promote the fundamental principles of human rights, social justice and economic wellbeing enshrined in national and international laws, conventions and policies. These principles underpin our practice and we use statutory and case law effectively in our work. We understand and proactively address the effects of oppression, discrimination and poverty. We are committed to the ethical and accountable use of technology, including AI and we promote digital inclusion. Wherever possible, we work in partnership with people using services and their carers and families, to challenge inequality and injustice, and promote strengths, agency, hope and self-determination.

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- take strategic responsibility for developing and sustaining a culture where the principles of social justice, social inclusion, equity and equality are applied to strategic decision-making. Recognise and contribute to effective rights-based practice, structure and policy
- understand the impact and social determinants of characteristics, including neurodiversity, sensory impairment and mental or physical health needs. Ensure that services accommodate and support individuals, families and colleagues equitably
- develop organisational and practice strategies to promote strengths, agency, hope and self-determination in people using services, carers, families and communities
- apply a range of strategies to influence political, social, and structural factors affecting human rights, social justice, inclusion, equity, and equality. Contribute to organisational, local, and national policy development
- enable the organisation and wider system to support citizens raising their own challenges and finding solutions to inequality, social injustice and rights violations.
- develop strategies (including regarding resources and commissioning) to promote digital and social inclusion and access to opportunities which may enhance people's economic status. I monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and impact of strategies, leading and informing new approaches
- take action to identify, address and alleviate emerging issues, working proactively with people with lived experience and partner organisations to achieve positive outcomes
- create and sustain environments where people (staff, and people using services and their carers advocates) are enabled to provide effective challenge and ensure human rights are upheld

- take strategic responsibility for ensuring that the service is compliant with the law, and secure the provision of expert advice, making judicious use of such advice. I secure expert advice in complex human and civil rights situations to ensure an appropriate and proportionate response by the organisation
- address complaints around social work practice and systemic failings, taking a restorative approach and facilitating the use of whistleblowing procedures as needed
- create an environment that promotes partnership working with independent advocates. Ensure resources are available to support access to independent advocacy, in line with statutory duties and local need.

## 4. KNOWLEDGE

Develop and apply relevant knowledge from social work practice and research, social sciences, law, other professional and relevant fields and from the experience of people who use services

We develop our professional knowledge throughout our careers and sustain our curiosity. As a unified profession, we develop core knowledge that relates to our purpose, values and ethics. We also develop specific knowledge needed for fields of practice and roles. Our knowledge comes from social work practice, theory, law, research, expertise by experience, and from other relevant fields and disciplines. All social workers contribute to creating as well as using professional knowledge. We understand our distinctive knowledge complements that of other disciplines to provide effective services.

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- create and maintain a culture of professional curiosity
- maintain the knowledge and understanding I need for my area of organisational practice and leadership and am aware of my knowledge limits and my need for continuous learning
- access and make critical use of relevant knowledge and evidence from a variety of sources, and apply this knowledge in strategic settings
- access and make critical use of knowledge and evidence from a variety of relevant sources to inform strategic thinking and decision-making
- ensure the organisational structure accommodates, through a range of approaches, appropriate resourcing for the development of and critical engagement with the development of excellent social work knowledge in practice
- actively challenge structures and processes which inhibit knowledge development and evidence informed debate
- ensure practitioners have access to knowledge resources and relevant practice debates
- promote effective adult learning in strategic workforce development. Use knowledge of relevant adult learning and organisational development theories to lead the development of a learning organisation
- identify and address strengths and gaps in knowledge across the organisation and/or system, and ensure social work workforce strategies prioritise the development of practice knowledge
- have a good knowledge of organisational dynamics, resources and the ability to maximise practitioner, team and organisational potential, bearing in mind the principles of equity, equality, diversity and inclusion

- maintain a high level of expertise, informed by knowledge in both established and emergent areas relevant to my field of practice or strategic responsibilities
- provide consultation and guidance that is knowledge and evidence-informed to professional/strategic decision-making
- maintain and model confident use of knowledge and evidence that informs my strategic leadership and practice
- lead on strategies to promote knowledge, understanding and application of the opportunities and risks of technologies such as Gen AI, digital resources, online communications, virtual environments and social media in social work
- apply organisational approaches to ensure that professionals are appropriately trained and any technology is adopted, challenged and applied judiciously in line with social work skills, knowledge and values
- value and take account of the expertise of individuals, families, carers and professionals and seek their feedback on my practice/role and on the service.

### 5. CRITICAL REFLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Apply critical reflection and analysis to inform and provide a rationale for professional decision-making

Social workers critically reflect on their practice, use analysis, apply professional judgement and reasoned discernment. We identify, evaluate and integrate multiple sources of knowledge and evidence. We continuously evaluate our impact and benefit to those using services. We use supervision and other support to reflect on our work and sustain our practice and wellbeing. We apply our critical reflective skills to the context and conditions under which we practise. Our reflection enables us to challenge ourselves and others, and maintain our professional curiosity, creativity and self-awareness.

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- create and maintain an organisational environment within which creativity and curiosity, and critical reflection and analysis, take place and are valued and supported and promote this across the relevant wider system
- promote and provide critical reflection, challenge and evidence-informed decision-making in complex situations. I support others in developing these capabilities, and finding their own solutions
- am able to evaluate and apply knowledge and evidence to hypothesise at organisational and system level and make complex decisions in strategic situations
- routinely provide professional social work opinion within a strategic context
- using evidence and practice knowledge, am the voice of professional social work opinion within strategic decision-making. I acknowledge and evaluate any AI-derived contribution to strategic decision making, and override or escalate AI-generated recommendations where necessary
- am responsible for ensuring that the value of social work professional knowledge and opinion influences good practice, service delivery and organisational strategy
- take strategic responsibility for the development, maintenance and review of a system of critical analysis and reflective professional supervision at all levels within the organisation, ensuring this is appropriately resourced, in line with the Standards for Employers.
- champion the development of empowered professional social work decision makers throughout the organisation and/or system.

### 6. SKILLS AND INTERVENTIONS

Use judgement, knowledge and authority to intervene with individuals, families and communities to promote independence, provide support, prevent harm and enable progress

Social workers engage with individuals, families, and communities, working alongside people to determine their needs and wishes, and what action may be helpful. We build productive, empathetic working relationships and communicate effectively. Using our professional judgement and values, we employ appropriate interventions, promoting self-determination, support, protection and positive change. We develop and maintain skills relevant to our roles. We understand and take account of power differentials and use our authority appropriately. We evaluate our own practice and its impact, and how we improve outcomes for those we work with.

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- model and lead effective communication skills within a strategic context, creating the opportunity/environment where effective communication is promoted within the organisation
- ensure strategic communication is informed by current direct practice experience
- communicate in an effective and competent manner in highly charged, complex or challenging circumstance in strategic settings, inside and across the system, and outside the organisation
- am able to gather complex and/or contradictory information, analyse it from different perspectives as a strategic leader and professional social worker, and use it to inform organisational and professional decision-making
- create an ethos in the organisation where social workers are supported to engage positively with people in challenging circumstances
- maintain empathetic and compassionate relationships with strategic leads, other professionals, people who use services and those who care for them
- lead on the development and maintenance on social work practice systems and approaches that best meet the needs of people using services, their carers, families and communities, developing staff and providing effective working conditions. Where possible and appropriate, use co-production methods to support this work
- provide effective strategic leadership, support and model engagement in the most challenging of circumstances, including with partner agencies, stakeholders and other professionals
- support and enable others to use their own experience and expertise to analyse information and make informed professional decisions
- maintain and use and/or promote others' expert assessment and

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intervention skills in complex practice situations and support others to do so. Maintain awareness of the implications for equity, equality, diversity and inclusion

- engage in and/or facilitate research and evaluation of practice and the use of improvement methodologies
- develop a culture that supports and encourages practitioner engagement in research and the generation of knowledge and evidence, as well as development and maintenance of expert intervention skills
- create and maintain a culture of support for engagement with networks both within and outside of the organisation. I develop strategic engagement, influence and relationships with a range of stakeholder groups
- understand the strategic interface between information systems and practice, and ensure systems support delivery of positive outcomes for people who use services, families, carers and communities. I take action to ensure information systems continue to be fit for practice
- have responsibility for advising and contributing to the organisation's information governance system, and ensure implementation is congruent with social work practice and legal requirements
- lead change within and across organisations, ensuring that strategic decisions are informed by social work knowledge and practice, and the need to develop positive outcomes for individuals, carers and communities
- model the appropriate use of authority across a range of complex and challenging situations, ensuring that systems are in place to support the appropriate use of professional authority by social workers within the organisation
- lead the development and use of evidence-informed risk assessment, which support both responsiveness and positive risk taking to improve outcomes for people who use services, families, carers and communities
- am able to work with and contain the anxiety of other people in complex and highly charged situations, ensuring that there is a proportionate and legally sound response, taking account of self-determination, perceived risk and protection from harm
- lead and develop an organisational culture which is responsive to developing best practice and research around risk assessment and management at all levels of the organisation, involving people who use services in strategy and practice wherever possible
- develop outcome-focused evaluation of individual and family experiences of social work, including systems for gaining direct feedback about social work services and co-producing changes, and embed any learning into practice.

### 7. CONTEXTS AND ORGANISATIONS

Engage with, inform and adapt to changing organisational contexts, and the social and policy environments that shape practice. Operate effectively within and contribute to the development of organisations and services, including multi-agency and interprofessional settings

Social workers are informed about and proactively respond to the challenges and opportunities that come from changing social, policy and work contexts. We fulfil this responsibility in accordance with our professional values and ethics, as individual and collective professionals and as members of the organisations in which we work. We collaborate, inform and are informed by our work with individuals and communities, other social workers and other professions.

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- anticipate and provide strategic leadership for social workers and others, engaging locally, regionally and nationally, to positively influence developments that affect social work
- initiate and facilitate effective multi-agency partnership working, to drive improvements in performance and outcomes for people who use services, families, carers and communities
- maintain a sophisticated knowledge of the law relevant to my area of responsibility, using it to support strategic decision-making. I advise others and seek out specialist advice where necessary and ensure social workers have access to legal advice and information where needed
- apply professional standards and values when procuring and implementing practice models, infrastructure (actual or digital), or technology, bearing in mind any concerns around subsidiarity, confidentiality and transparency. Where possible, apply principles of co-production in procurement processes
- initiate, facilitate and enable organisational development at a local, regional and national level, providing professional leadership as needed, informed by a wider understanding of organisational structures
- lead the positive use of mechanisms for feedback about social work to inform organisational development, and ensure that a social work perspective informs organisational decision-making
- develop and maintain a strategic plan to oversee performance management themes that arise, supporting positive resolutions and taking action with HR/the regulator where necessary
- promote positive working relationships across the organisation, using strategies to support collaboration and a supportive organisational culture
- initiate, facilitate and lead liaison across agencies at a local, regional and national level, and maintain a collaborative working approach, resolving intractable dilemmas where necessary.

## 8. LEADERSHIP

**Promote the profession and good social work practice. Take responsibility for the professional learning and development of others. Develop personal influence and be part of the collective leadership and impact of the profession**

We develop and show our leadership, individually and collectively, through promoting social work's purpose, practices and impact. We achieve this through diverse activities, which may include: advancing practice, supervising, educating others, research, evaluation, using innovation and creativity, writing, using social media positively, being active in professional networks and bodies, contributing to policy and taking formal leadership/management roles. We promote organisational contexts conducive to good practice and learning. We work in partnership with people who use services and stakeholders in developing our leadership and aims for the profession.

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- take responsibility for continuously developing my strategic leadership and my ability to have influence and impact on my local and wider systems
- demonstrate a nuanced understanding of leadership models within wider political and social contexts, drawing on diverse skills and tools to support and promote social work, social workers, and individuals and families
- lead, articulate and promote a positive social work identity which actively seeks and respects the contributions and views of all and links with national and global social work communities
- lead a culture of professional curiosity within the organisation, embracing research and evaluation and encouraging the exploration of different cultures, concepts and ideas
- create opportunities and systems for current practice to inform and be informed by research and current professional knowledge and evidence
- hold courageous conversations about complex sensitive topics, including in national and international forums, using a direct, professionally curious and empathetic approach
- ensure there is appropriate provision to identify, plan for and meet staff development needs within the organisation so that workforce planning and appraisal are informed by the PCF. Lead a culture of talent identification and development
- drive improvement in line with the Standards for Employers of Social Workers and create and promote a culture of high-quality supervision which covers practice, organisational and management issues (as appropriate to the role), promoting critical reflection throughout the organisation. Ensure systems are in place to monitor effectiveness
- ensure effective, sufficient and appropriate supervision is embedded across the organisation and that a strategy is in place to ensure that professional

supervisors are trained and skilled in a range of approaches

- model, promote and develop professional leadership within my area of responsibility, identify potential in the workforce and provide opportunities for social workers to develop their leadership capabilities
- understand concepts of holistic assessment of professional capability and be able to apply to appraisal processes/performance reviews of social workers within your area of responsibility
- engage effectively with the leadership of others, regardless of their role or position, demonstrating my own willingness to learn and develop.

## 9. PROFESSIONALISM

Identify and behave as a professional social worker, committed to professional development

Social workers are members of an internationally recognised profession. Our title is protected in UK law. We demonstrate professional commitment by taking responsibility for our conduct, practice, self-care and development. We seek and use supervision and other professional support. We promote excellent practice and challenge circumstances that compromise this. As representatives of the profession, we safeguard its reputation. We are accountable to people using services, the public, employers and the regulator. We take ethical decisions in the context of multiple accountabilities.

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- meet the requirements of the professional regulator
- model the social work role at a senior level, taking a strategic approach to representing and promoting the profession within and outside of the organisation
- model and use critical reflective skills in leadership, management, practice or organisational supervision settings to enhance my own, others and the organisation's strategic outcomes
- model and demonstrate professionalism, ensuring professional social work standards are promoted and enhanced throughout the organisation
- maintain awareness of own professional strengths and limitations, knowledge gaps and conflicts of interest and actively seek to address issues for self and others
- model the sophisticated use of self and professional/personal boundaries in a range of complex situations, and ensure policies and procedures recognise or reflect this approach
- create and sustain a work environment that promotes health, safety and wellbeing and self-care for myself and others across the organisation
- take responsibility to ensure that organisational procedures are relevant, reflect effective practice and contribute to better outcomes
- use my strategic position to improve working conditions for good practice including workload management
- identify and quantify the resources required to support the work of social workers and of the organisation as a whole
- create and maintain a culture where practice quality and service experience are effectively managed; good practice is shared and celebrated, concerns are addressed and – where appropriate – issues are reported to the regulator

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- maintain a professional and strategic network of internal and external colleagues, with whom to seek and share advice, expertise and new developments in social work
- create and sustain an environment that promotes learning and practice development, facilitating research within the organisation and with strategic partners.