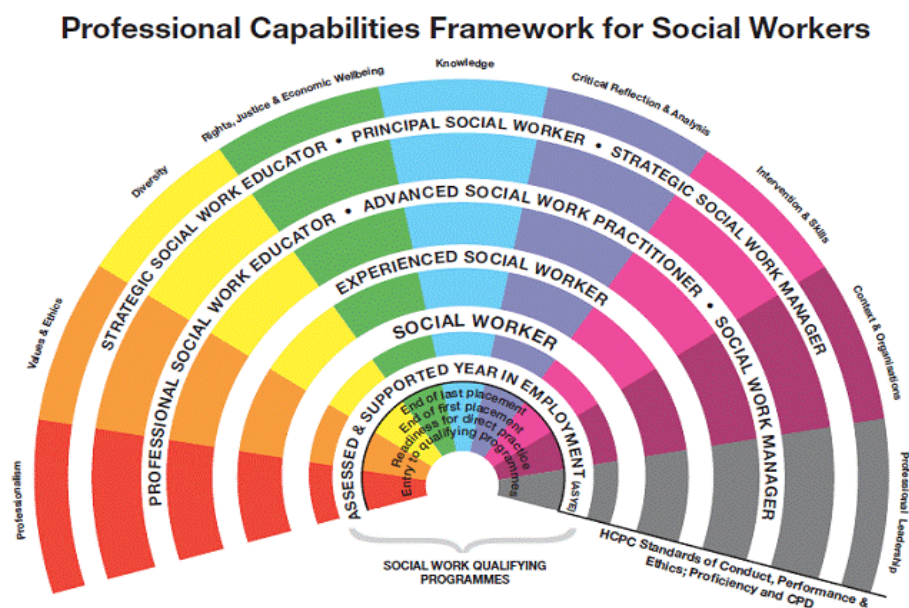


Return to Social Work: Learning Materials



MODULE 2: UNDERSTANDING THE PCF

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Introduction to the module

The Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) was introduced in Module 1. In this module it is covered in more detail, with a focus on how it can be used to guide continuing professional development (CPD).

The PCF has been developed by social workers and is owned by The College of Social Work (TCSW). This brings social work in line with other professionals in terms of career development and in setting its own professional standards. This PCF module will help you think about your professional development; it will support you in identifying the level of work you should be aspiring to when you return to practice. It will also generate a framework to structure your preparations as you undertake shadowing experiences, start applying for jobs, complete induction programmes and develop ongoing learning and development plans with line managers.

The nine domains that make up the PCF help to explain what social workers do. Social work involves complexity and needs to be viewed holistically. Capabilities interact together to make up professional practice; they should not be viewed in isolation.

This module helps you to understand the shift in thinking about social workers' ongoing learning and professional development need. The different levels of the PCF are determined by the social worker's abilities to work with issues of complexity, ambiguity, risk, confidence, autonomy, decision making, professional authority and leadership. A tool developed by Barcham (2012) is introduced as an aid to support self-reflection around the levels of the PCF.

The learning outcomes for the module are focused on learning and development. Studying this module and undertaking the learning activities will provide you with valuable evidence of reflecting on and developing your capabilities as a professional social worker.

After studying this module you might want to reread the learning outcomes and the links with the PCF before completing the end of module final reflections. This will support you in identifying gaps and ongoing learning needs.



As you work through this module remember to keep a note of your thoughts, reflections and answers to any of the exercises. You can include these in your social work portfolio as evidence of your continuing professional development (CPD).

Learning outcomes

By reading this module and completing the associated exercises and reflective activities you should achieve the following outcomes:

- Understand the role of the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) as the framework for professional development.
- Have identified your own development needs in relation to the PCF at the appropriate career level.
- Have developed your own professional development plan.
- Apply the PCF to own practice and development planning.
- Reflect upon, and take a holistic view of your own capabilities across the PCF domains.
- Reflect upon and identify further learning or development needs in relation to this module.

Links to the Professional Capabilities Framework

By working through this module and completing the activities and self-assessment exercise, you will be able to reflect on and further develop your professional capabilities in the following areas at *Social Worker* career level.

Domain 1: Professionalism: Identify and behave as a professional social worker, committed to professional development.

- *Be able to meet the requirements of the professional regulator.*

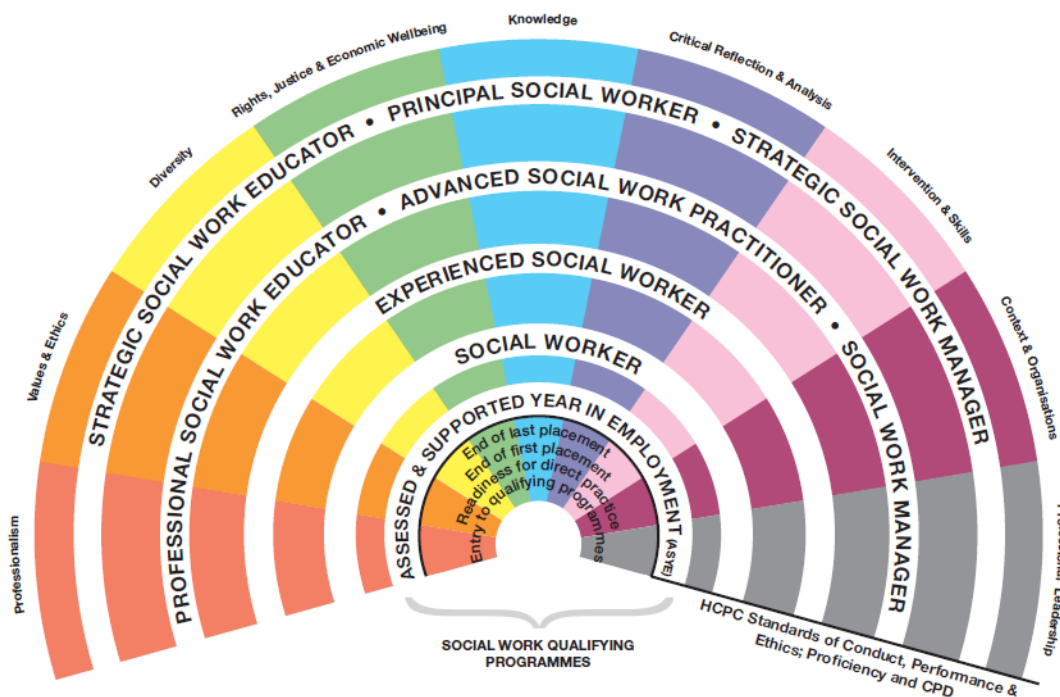
Domain 8: Context and organisations: Engage with, inform, and adapt to changing contexts that shape practice.

- *Keep abreast of changing contexts at local and national level, and take account of these in practice.*

The PCF helps you think about the level of work you should be aspiring to when you return to practice. It also helps you think about the steps you might want to take before you start applying for jobs. The 'fan' diagram below is the visual representation of the PCF, and underpins everything that follows in this module. You will find an interactive version of this diagram on the TCSW website at www.tcsw.org.uk, but in this module we will also describe the framework and its levels and dimensions without the benefit of that interactivity.

Keep this picture in mind while you work through this module.

Professional Capabilities Framework for Social Workers



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Introducing the PCF

In February 2009 the Social Work Task Force (SWTF) was established by the Department of Health (DH) and the then Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). The remit of the group was:

'...to undertake a comprehensive review of frontline social work practice and to make recommendations for improvement and reform of the whole profession, across adult and children's services.' (p13)

The Task Force's final report in December 2009 made 15 recommendations that have underpinned a range of subsequent reforms and developments to social work education and practice. The Social Work Reform Board (SWRB) replaced the SWTF in early 2010 and had the responsibility of making the recommendations a reality.

The SWTF was clear that both social workers and their employers need to take responsibility for enhancing the quality of social work practice, but also that the current way in which initial and continuing education were conceived and organised was not sufficient to meet the current or future needs of the profession.

This view of an inconsistent pattern of continuing professional development (CPD) led the SWRB to develop the concept of the PCF. The concept of a professional framework that describes progression is one used by other professions such as nursing and teaching. The SWRB learned from their experiences.

Reflective exercise:

Think about your own experience of CPD when you were last in practice.

- *How did you plan what learning you did or identify what you needed to learn?*
- *What impact is the PCF likely to have on how you identify and plan your development activities now you are returning to practice?*

The nine PCF domains

Under the General Social Care Council (GSCC), social work was described and assessed in terms of competencies, which described what social workers in 11 occupational areas should know and be able to do. You are probably familiar with the notion of competencies, as social work students have, until now, been assessed against competency statements during and at the end of their qualifying courses. The competency approach was based on

the observation of performance as the key indicator of how well a person performs their role. It has been criticised as a tool for assessing the many complex tasks and knowledge needed for professional work, and risks reducing these complexities to a set of 'tick box' activities that are assessed largely by observation.

The PCF represents a move away from a competence-based approach and uses instead the concept of 'capability'. This approach attempts to define and describe the things social workers should know and be able to do throughout their entire professional lives, regardless of the context in which they are working. The framework also includes such vital issues as the use of professional judgment and working with uncertainty.

The notion of capability is significant because, as Eraut indicates, *'it implies that the individual has the necessary knowledge and skills to perform in a wider range of situations than those that are observed'* (Eraut, 1994 p203). This includes the cognitive processes being used by the professional person, and also makes the assumption that they have or will acquire a knowledge base that will support future practice.

This approach also implies an assumption that the individual will understand the role of their profession in relation to individuals, employing organisations and wider society. Capability is about knowledge in use, in context and integrated into practice. None of this can be captured through an approach to practice which defines the professional's performance through a series of tasks and performance-related knowledge.

The PCF underpins all stages of a social worker's development, from initial entry through to senior levels of strategic manager and policy maker. A principal children and family social worker is measured against the outcomes of the PCF in the same way as a first year student preparing to go out on placement. Entry, readiness to practice, placements and graduation are all framed by the professional capabilities of the PCF, and assessment of achievement will be made against those professional outcomes.

Learning activity: Evaluating assessment methods

Consider a day in practice that you remember from your past experiences as a social worker. Try and write down:

- *what you did during the day,*
- *why you did what you did*
- *what the expected outcome was, and what the actual outcome was*
- *what underpinning knowledge you were using*
- *what professional judgements you made*
- *what you were contributing that no other profession (e.g. doctor, occupational therapist, psychologist) could offer.*

Now think about how you would want someone to assess your practice on that day. How could you explain or demonstrate the integrated skills and knowledge you were using?

Try and explain the opportunities and limitations of using only one or some of the following assessment methods:

- *direct observation*
- *case notes*
- *written account*
- *verbal account*
- *feedback from service users.*

The PCF articulates and exemplifies complexity and interdependency of skills, knowledge and values needed for effective social work practice. It is divided up into nine domains and the capabilities should be seen as interdependent. You use all of them in different ways and at different times in your professional practice, and each professional action or interaction will relate to one or more of the domains and the capabilities.

It is the combination and interaction of all the capabilities that defines what a social worker does. Regardless of when you undertook your social work training, which career level you last worked at, or which development pathway you might follow once you return to social work, the nine domains within the PCF should be familiar to you. They are based on the core social work values and skills that underpin social work practice.

The domains set out the capabilities that social workers are expected to meet at each career level, and these are designed to build upon each other to increase and expand your skills and knowledge as you progress and develop your practice. Each domain sets out an overarching statement of what is expected from a professional social worker. The domains are designed to be considered holistically rather than as a capability-by-capability exercise.

Domain	Overarching statement
Professionalism	Identify and behave as a professional social worker, committed to professional development
Values & Ethics	Apply social work ethical principles and values to guide professional practice
Diversity	Recognise diversity and apply anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive principles in practice.
Rights, Justice & Economic Wellbeing	Advance human rights and promote social justice and economic wellbeing.
Knowledge	Apply knowledge of social sciences, law and social work practice theory.
Critical Reflection & Analysis	Apply critical reflection and analysis to inform and provide a rationale for professional decision making.
Intervention & Skills	Use judgement and authority to intervene with individuals, families and communities to promote independence, provide support and prevent harm, neglect and abuse.
Contexts & Organisations	Engage with, inform, and adapt to changing contexts that shape practice. Operate effectively within own organisational frameworks and contribute to the development of services and organisations. Operate effectively within multi-agency and inter-professional settings.
Professional Leadership	Take responsibility for the professional learning and development of others through supervision, mentoring, assessing, research, teaching, leadership and management.

You can find all the capabilities for social worker and experienced social worker levels of the PCF in the additional resources section of this module. Each module in the return to social work materials (including this one) is linked to the PCF to help you to think about how your learning is contributing to your capabilities within the PCF framework and domains.

Learning activity: Linking your learning to the PCF

Look back at the notes you have made from the previous exercise and the event you described. As you consider the answers to the questions we asked, try and say which activity or piece of behaviour or use of knowledge you have described relates to which of the nine domains. To remind you, these are:

- *Professionalism*
- *Values and ethics*
- *Diversity*
- *Rights, justice and economic wellbeing*
- *Knowledge*
- *Critical reflection and analysis*
- *Interventions and skills*
- *Contexts and organisations*
- *Professional leadership*

Can you see by doing this how the interaction works, so a piece of knowledge you used was also linked, for example, to values and ethics or professionalism?

Levels within the PCF

The nine domains within the PCF are interactive and illustrate the range of capabilities professional social workers need in order to do their job. There are nine levels of social work practice in the PCF each of which encompasses the nine domains. The framework is designed to underpin a social worker's professional career and provides a progression pathway from

pre-qualifying to strategic career levels. These levels are defined as:

- entry to qualifying programme
- readiness for practice
- end of first placement
- end of last placement
- assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE)
- social worker
- experienced social worker
- advanced – professional social work educator/advanced social work practitioner/social work manager
- strategic – strategic social work educator/principal children and family social worker/strategic social work manager.

The final two levels – advanced and strategic – provide three development pathways. This recognises that there are different career pathways for social work professionals and while

there are commonalities between the three there are also specific capability areas which are distinct depending on the route taken.

Determining which level you are practising at will require you to reflect on your practice in relation to several key areas. The PCF presumes that as you progress through the levels, you are increasingly embracing in your work in relation to the issues of:

- complexity
- ambiguity
- risk
- confidence
- autonomous decision making
- professional authority and leadership.

Reflective exercise:

Thinking about your own practice:

- *How confident do you feel working with complexity and risk?*
- *What do these terms mean to you?*

Each level of practice has an overarching statement that describes what is expected of a social worker operating at that level, relating this to the level from which they have progressed. We have not included pre-qualifying levels or ASYE level at this point as you should be at a more advanced stage in your development as you already have professional experience.

- **Social worker:** they progress to practise effectively, exercising higher quality judgements, in situations of increasing complexity, risk, uncertainty and challenge. Through growing understanding they expect and anticipate, but do not pre-judge, the issues that may develop. They have greater confidence and independence (while accessing support when needed), and use their initiative to broaden their repertoire of responses. They have expertise in one or more areas of practice, are familiar with local resource networks and are recognised by peers as a source of reliable knowledge and advice.
- **Experienced social workers** are more autonomous in their role. They demonstrate expert and effective practice in complex situations, assessing and managing higher levels of risk, striking a balance between support and leadership, liaising with a wide

range of professionals, including more senior levels. They manage complex caseloads, and offer expert opinion within the organisation and to others. They chair a range of meetings, offer expert support to case conferences, and produce high quality assessments and reports for a range of functions. They model good practice, setting expectations for others. They start to take responsibility and be accountable for the practice of others, mentoring newly qualified social workers, and supervising the work of junior staff. They undertake capacity building with individuals, families, communities, user groups and voluntary organisations, and contribute their views on service provision to commissioners.



If you feel you are more advanced than these descriptors, you can look at the advanced and strategic levels by visiting the TCSW website at [www.tcsw.org.uk/uploadedFiles/PCF13NOVAdvancedLevelDescriptors%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.tcsw.org.uk/uploadedFiles/PCF13NOVAdvancedLevelDescriptors%20(2).pdf)

Reflective exercise:

- *As a qualified returner to social work how well do you feel these descriptors relate to your level of practice?*
- *How do the descriptors help you to identify any areas you might need to develop?*

Now you have looked at the overarching statements about levels of social work practice, you might want to think in a little more detail what it means in terms of your ability to take on complex tasks and work autonomously. The following exercise will help you do this. (This exercise is intended for the use of social workers and should not be used for any other purposes or for any form of financial gain.)

Learning activity: What level are you?

Think about your last position as a social worker. In order to decide what level of capability you have previously been working at, you should ring the statement that most closely represents how you feel about the various aspects of your work.

Each statement has a number alongside, which represents the five post-qualifying levels in the PCF (ASYE to strategic levels).

<p>Confidence</p> <p>I routinely need to articulate my point of view with a range of people and organisations, including in hostile and challenging situations.</p> <p>I can maintain and articulate my point of view, even in challenging and hostile situations.</p> <p>I can hold my own in a debate with colleagues and people from different professional groups.</p> <p>I would always want to have someone with me if I know I have to have a challenging conversation with other professionals.</p> <p>I feel confident with my peers but would always defer to the judgement of more experienced social workers and other professionals.</p>	<p>5</p> <p>4</p> <p>3</p> <p>2</p> <p>1</p>
<p>Ambiguity</p> <p>I am often making decisions in complex and uncertain situations, and need to deal with the ambiguity and uncertainty of others.</p> <p>A lot of the work I do involves managing my own and others' anxieties in the face of decisions where the answers are not always clear-cut.</p> <p>I sometimes need to make decisions as part of my work where the issues are not always clear and so rely on my professional judgement.</p> <p>Where I am faced with a decision where the issues are unclear and there are a number of possible outcomes, I would refer the issue to a more experienced worker.</p> <p>I would not expect to have to make decisions on my own when the issues are very unclear.</p>	<p>5</p> <p>4</p> <p>3</p> <p>2</p> <p>1</p>
<p>Complexity</p> <p>I deal constantly with complexity, working within and across organisations in ways which are challenging and invigorating.</p> <p>The work that I do involves complexity in many forms and on a daily basis; it helps make the work I do interesting and challenging/</p> <p>A lot of the work I do is complex, and I enjoy the challenge this brings to my work.</p> <p>Some of what I do is complex, and I am learning to take on more challenges on my own.</p> <p>I prefer to co-work complex cases; I wouldn't have the confidence to take on such cases alone.</p>	<p>5</p> <p>4</p> <p>3</p> <p>2</p> <p>1</p>

<p>Risk</p> <p>I deal with high levels of organisational and professional risk issues on a regular basis, and expect to need to make such decisions in the most complex situations.</p> <p>The work I do involves balancing risk all the time, in team and organisational contexts as well as in relation to complex cases.</p> <p>I work with risk and make decisions based on assessment of risk in cases a lot of the time.</p> <p>There are risks involved in some of the cases I work with, and I am learning make more decisions on my own involving risks.</p> <p>I would prefer to co-risk cases involving complex risks.</p>	<p>5</p> <p>4</p> <p>3</p> <p>2</p> <p>1</p>
<p>Autonomous decision making</p> <p>I expect to make autonomous, professionally informed decisions on a regular basis, and ensuring the organisation and those within it are also able to make autonomous professional decisions appropriate to their level of capability.</p> <p>I am constantly making professional decisions autonomously, and supporting others to develop this ability as well.</p> <p>In specific complex professional situations I make autonomous professional decisions.</p> <p>I would check out complex professional decisions with more senior colleagues, but expect to make some decisions on my own.</p> <p>I would always check out my professional decision making with others.</p>	<p>5</p> <p>4</p> <p>3</p> <p>2</p> <p>1</p>
<p>Professional leadership and authority</p> <p>I represent and lead professional social work with and across the organisations that I work with.</p> <p>I represent professional social work both inside and outside the organisation I work for.</p> <p>I support peers, less experienced social workers and students in the work that they do.</p> <p>I help less experienced social workers and students develop confidence in their skills and knowledge.</p> <p>I present a professional image to others and help people understand what social workers do.</p>	<p>5</p> <p>4</p> <p>3</p> <p>2</p> <p>1</p>

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Once you have identified the statements that most closely correspond to the level you have been working at, you can start to consider what level of post you might look for once you start applying for jobs.

Most people have more or less ability and confidence across the range of aspects, and the picture you present will be 'spiky' with high scores in some areas and lower scores in others. Do not expect to have responded at the same level for every statement.

These are areas that you are expected to develop as you progress through the career levels, and doing this exercise might help you to identify future learning needs as you return to social work. How you have rated yourself is an indicator of the level you might currently be operating at, so for example if you rated yourself as:

- mainly 1s you are likely to be at newly qualified social worker level
- mainly 2s you are likely to be at social worker level
- mainly 3s you are likely to be at experienced social worker level
- mainly 4s you are likely to be at advanced level
- mainly 5s you are likely to be at strategic level.

Looking at capabilities and career development

Now that you have a sense of what the nine domains mean, and what level you consider you have previously worked at, or should now be working at, we will spend a little time looking at the capabilities within the domains and how you can use these for your own career development.

The SWTF noted that at the time of their review that there was:

'...no recognised progression route for keeping experienced, effective professionals in frontline practice' (p39).

The SWTF therefore sought to set out a system similar to those seen in other professions such as nursing and teaching, which enabled social workers to develop both their skills and their careers, while remaining connected to frontline practice.

The PCF embodies this recognition and sets out career pathways that encompass practice, leadership and management, and academia/education, setting the standards that would be expected of a social worker as they progress through their respective career pathways. Because each level in each domain provides the foundation for the next progression, you can maintain practice and extend it throughout your career, charting your development against the nine domains in a logical and structured way.

As social workers move into more senior posts there has traditionally been a lack of emphasis on their social work skills and capabilities and more focus on management and leadership. The PCF can help employers with their expectations of social workers working at different levels. In a team with a range of experience, it would be natural that they will be working at different levels of the PCF and that the allocation of caseload should reflect this.

Reflective exercise:

Think about when you were last in practice:

- *Which development pathway would have been the most appropriate for you then?*
- *Is that different to now, as you return to practice?*

Advanced level of the PCF

The advanced levels of the PCF attempt to address this gap and link management, leadership, education and practice skills into the framework, allowing social workers to develop and demonstrate their capabilities in a more holistic way. This recognises that practice occurs in a range of contexts, and that the capabilities and development needs of practitioners at advanced levels should still be appropriately prioritised by both social workers and their employers.

Social workers in roles at these levels are responsible for leading, educating and supporting others in practice and need to be able to model good practice to others. They also need to remain reflective and critical practitioners who can draw on evidence, operate within context and maximise the social work contribution to improving outcomes.



There are three pathways within the advanced career levels. We have set these out below, but you can also find them on the TCSW website:

[www.tcsnw.org.uk/uploadedFiles/PCF13NOVAdvancedLevelDescriptors%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.tcsnw.org.uk/uploadedFiles/PCF13NOVAdvancedLevelDescriptors%20(2).pdf)

Advanced practitioners

The capabilities in this pathway support social workers who continue to work directly with people who use services, as well as providing leadership and professional guidance and consultation to colleagues. The capabilities aim to support constructive challenge to improve both practice and service delivery and emphasise the use of evidence-based practice and critical reasoning as would be expected of a practice leader.

Professional educators

Many social workers are involved in education including practice educators and supervisors, researchers and teachers within universities and other settings. They contribute to teaching, curriculum development and assessment approaches, and may be trainers providing quality CPD programmes for social workers in practice, or people in learning and development roles with a responsibility for developing CPD programmes across the workforce. The capabilities of these practitioners will have a direct impact on the practice of others and they are expected to take a lead role in modelling good practice in relation to their own career development.

Social work managers

Managers are expected to '*lead, motivate, nurture and manage*' (TCSW, 2012a; p.1) and the capabilities in this pathway focus on supporting quality practice through managing performance, quality and partnerships. As with the other pathways within the advanced career level, social work managers are expected to model best practice and are accountable for the practice of others. Both they and their employers need to place appropriate priority on their own career development.

Strategic level of the PCF

Practitioners operating at this level, particularly within an organisational, regional or national context, may feel that their own CPD and career development has moved away from social work and is far more appropriately located within the sphere of politics, policy, and leadership. This career level within the PCF recognises these skills but firmly links them back into social work core values and capabilities, enabling leaders to relate their roles more effectively to the values of the profession.

Practitioners at this level are able to influence and shape standards and expectations; they are accountable for resources and outcomes and make strategic decisions that may affect a

range of groups, communities or society. There are three pathways within this final level, which are designed to support strategic leaders to consider their own development needs within the context of the profession and set the standard for what is expected of social workers operating at this level.

Strategic social work educators

Social work educators at this level in their careers are responsible for responding to professional needs across a range of areas, including policy, partnerships and changes in law and evidence. They lead change management within the context of social work education and take a strategic approach to ensuring that education, research and/or learning deliver the desired outcomes for service users and other stakeholders, and are rooted in best practice and underpinned by robust quality assurance mechanisms and support structures. The capabilities expected of a social worker in this type of role are complex and multi-faceted but clearly linked to the same core social work capabilities.

Principal children and family social workers

The principal children and family social worker (PCFSW) role was introduced as a result of recommendations made in the Munro report (Recommendation 14). The role is designed for a senior manager who retains responsibility for practice with a local authority child and family setting to both support and represent the views of frontline staff at management level. The capabilities expected in this career pathway are focused on how practice can inform and influence at various organisational levels. Social workers in these roles are expected to be able to manage competing demands, represent professional issues, influence systems and organisations and model good practice on an organisation-wide level.

- ✓ An equivalent role in adults' services was introduced under the Care and Support White Paper *Caring for our future: reforming care and support*.

Strategic social work managers

Social workers within this pathway are likely to be skilled senior managers and leaders working at local, regional or national levels. They work across the full range of stakeholder groups and are responsible for delivering service change and quality improvements. As with other managers they are responsible for leading, motivating and managing but they are expected to develop the capabilities to influence on a more strategic level and lead the consideration of '*...equalities, inclusion and diversity in strategic decision making*' (p4).

Learning activity: PCF capabilities

At this point, it will be helpful for you to look in more detail at the capabilities within the PCF and consider where you believe your strengths lie, and where you think there is room for further development. The easiest way for you to do this is to use the interactive 'fan' on the TCSW website at www.tcsw.org.uk/professional-capabilities-framework/ Alternatively you can look at the full range of capabilities in the additional resources section of this module and use that version.

Having made a general decision about what level you think you are at, look at the capabilities across all nine domains at that level.

- *Which do you feel confident you could meet?*
- *Which would you need support or further experience in before you could meet them?*

As with the 'What level are you?' exercise, you should not expect to feel confident in every capability within every domain. Some you will feel very confident about, others you will know you need to develop further.

You might also find it helpful to look at the levels above and below the one you have identified for yourself. This will show you the capabilities you have already developed and those you might aspire to.

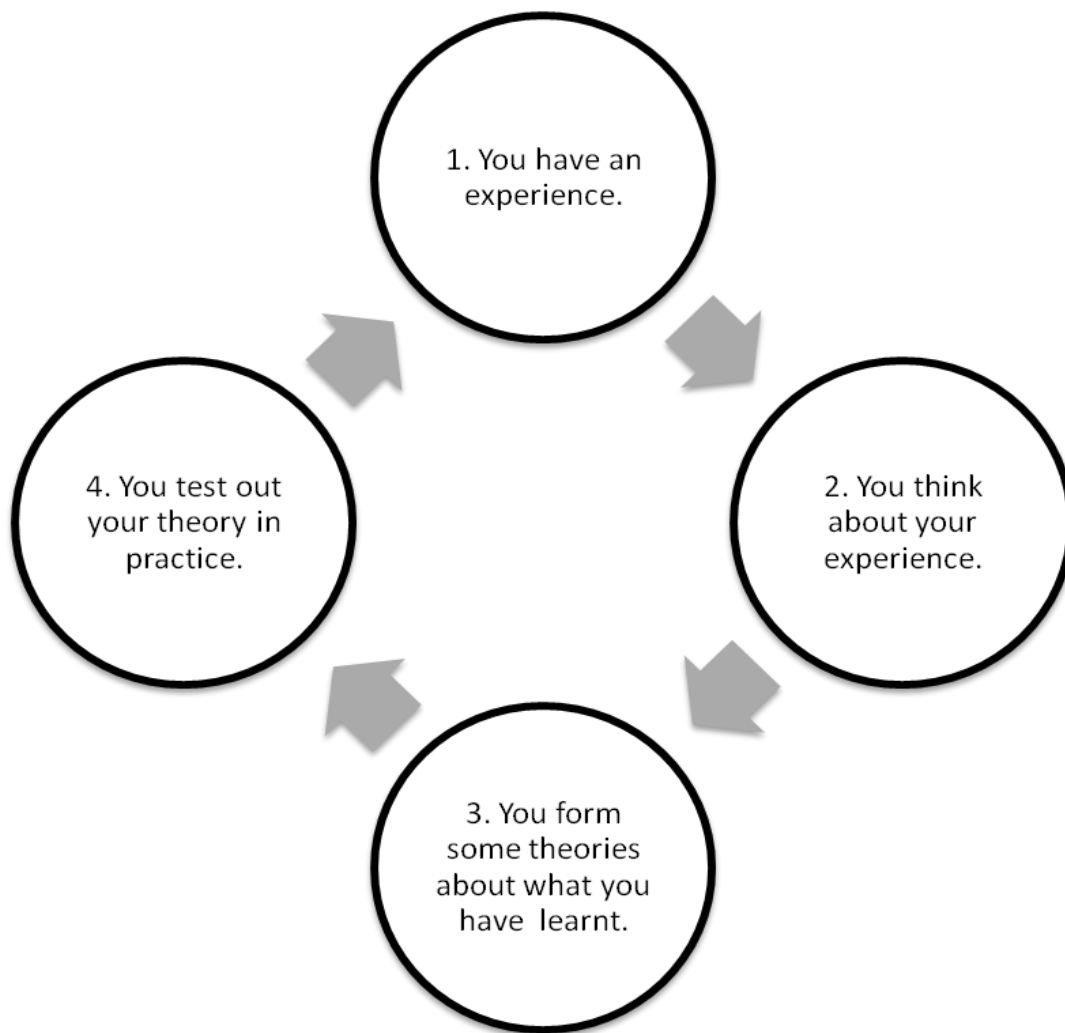
Using the PCF for CPD

In Module 1: Returning to social work, we looked at the requirements of the HCPC in relation to CPD. As you no longer need to record a number of courses or days in learning in order to remain registered, you need to consider how you will meet and evidence that you have met your CPD needs once you return to practice. The PCF can help you with this.

A key feature of maintaining and improving your practice is to become what is termed a 'reflective practitioner'. You will find the term 'reflection' is used throughout the PCF. In essence, it means that you use a process of structured critical examination to consider your professional practice and how you can develop it further. Educationalists believe that it is only when you consider your experiences in a structured way that you can use those experiences to influence what you do in future.

David Kolb (1984) introduced the concept of a 'learning cycle' incorporating reflection. Donald Schön (Schön, 1987; Schön, 1991) has written extensively about reflection as fundamental to the way in which professionals work, learn and develop, showing how 'reflection on action' (that is looking back after the event) can help with professional judgement at the time of an event.

The following diagram describes how learning and reflection are integrally intertwined. Any experience can lead to learning as long as you take the time to consider what has happened, why it happened, and what the outcome was. If you link this to a critical incident analysis as we suggested in Module 1, you will find you have a means of structuring your thinking about your learning. If you are a member of TCSW you will find the online e-portfolio will guide you through the process of reflection to plan and record your CPD.



Different people like the activities involved in the different parts of this cycle to a greater or lesser extent. **Activists** like the 'doing' part. **Reflectors** enjoy thinking about and considering what has happened. **Theorists** like drawing abstract conclusions and developing theoretical frameworks. **Pragmatists** like testing the theories in practice. Being able to engage equally in each part of the cycle makes for a more effective practitioner, but as with all the

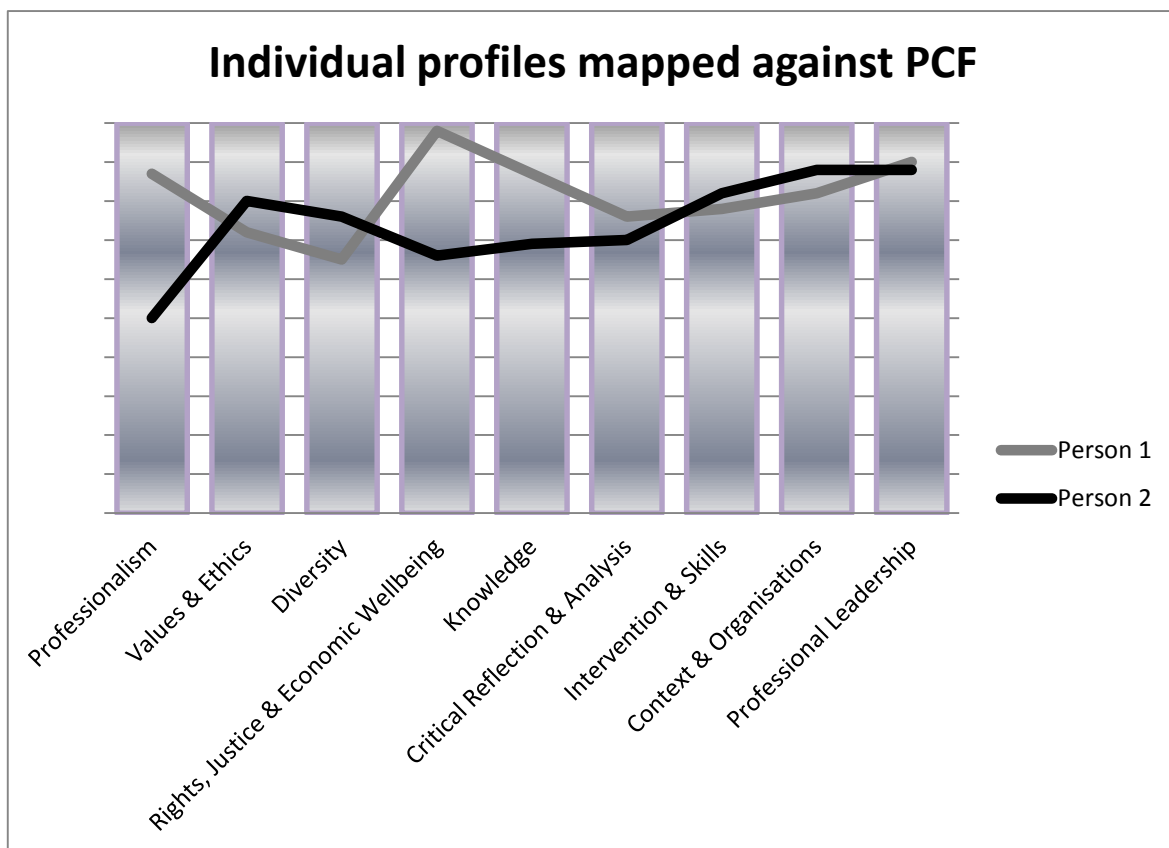
frameworks and theories we are discussing in this module, it is usual to find preferences and a spread of experience.

Reflective exercise:

- Which part of the cycle do you feel most comfortable with?
- Which part challenges you most?
- Can you think of any ways to strengthen the areas you feel less comfortable with?

✓ We say more about reflection and reflective practice in Module 3: Reflective self.

Now let us go back to the capabilities in the PCF and apply a little critical reflection to your profile. Take a look at the following diagram.



Source: Bogg and Challis, 2013 p83.

This shows two social workers at the same career level who have mapped their capabilities across the nine domains as we have asked you to do.

The first person sees themselves as particularly capable in relation to rights, justice and economic wellbeing but has some needs in relation to diversity, while the second person has identified themselves as having a development need in the domain of professionalism and a more consistent level of capability across the other domains.

Each person's development plan needs to take account of these needs, with a range of activities being identified to support their learning. This might include, for example, shadowing colleagues, reading literature, completing open-learning packs like this one, attending training courses and reflecting on experiences to identify how this learning can translate into practice.

Learning activity: Your PCF profile

Try and draw the map of your own 'spiky profile' that shows your strengths and areas for development in each domain of the PCF at your chosen level.

- *What are your strengths, and what type of job do you think will enable you to use them once you get back to work?*
- *Where are your areas for development?*
- *What will you do to address these areas before you start applying for jobs?*

Module summary

We have reached the end of this introduction to the PCF. You should by now have a picture of where your existing experiences locate you within the framework, and how you might start to think about using the relevant capability statements to prepare you for re-entry to social work practice. Module 3: Reflective self will help you to engage in reflective practice and use this to build a CV and development plan.

Before moving on, complete the module self-assessment exercise to check your learning from this module.

Module self-assessment exercise

Complete the following quiz. You may find it helpful to discuss your answers with a colleague or supervisor if available. Remember to keep a note of your answers and any reflections as part of your ongoing CPD portfolio.

1. What is the purpose of the PCF?
2. What are the three development pathways at advanced and strategic levels?
3. What factors indicate your career level within the PCF?
4. How might the PCF be used?
5. How can the PCF help to identify your development needs and activities?

When you are happy with your answers refer to the accompanying resource pack to check how many you got right.

How did you score?

- Less than 2 =** Revisit the entire module and complete the relevant exercises and additional reading indicated
- 3-5 =** Revise the relevant sections where you did not answer correctly
- 6+ =** Well done! Check any answers that you did not get right and make a note of them. Now review the references and resources and follow up on any areas of interest or professional development needs.

Finally, before you move on, complete the following template to identify any further development needs in relation to this area and identify how your learning relates to your capabilities under the PCF.

Maximum score = 8 marks

Final reflection and further development needs

Module 2: Understanding the PCF

What are the three key areas of learning you have achieved as a result of working through this module?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

This module is linked to the PCF. Write a short reflection about how you think your learning has contributed to your capabilities in each identified domain:

- Domain 1: Professionalism: Identify and behave as a professional social worker, committed to professional development.
- Domain 8: Context and Organisations: Engage with, inform, and adapt to changing contexts that shape practice.

What else do you need to know and/or learn to demonstrate your capabilities in this area?

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Module self-assessment exercise: Answer sheet

1. What is the purpose of the PCF? (1 mark)

The PCF underpins all stages of a social worker's development, from initial entry through to senior levels of strategic manager and policy maker. A principal social worker is measured against the outcomes of the PCF in the same way as a first year student preparing to go out on placement. Entry, readiness to practice, placements and graduation are all framed by the professional capabilities of the PCF, and assessment of achievement will be made against those professional outcomes.

2. What are the three development pathways at advanced and strategic levels? (3 marks)

Educator, practitioner and manager. These three pathways recognise the ways in which social workers' careers develop. Some wish to move into management or specialise in education, while others wish to remain in front-line practice. The PCF capabilities encompass all these possibilities.

3. Name two factors used to indicate your career level within the PCF? (2 marks)

The level of an individual social worker on the PCF is determined by their abilities to work with issues of increased complexity, ambiguity, risk, confidence, autonomous decision making, professional authority and leadership.

4. How might the PCF be used? (1 mark)

The PCF can be used by individual social workers to consider their continuing professional development (CPD) needs, by mapping their level of capability to the statements within each domain and at the relevant level. It may also be used by employers to understand the role of social workers and to help them to make appropriate provision for CPD, including supervision.

5. How can the PCF help to identify your development needs and activities? (1 mark)

You can draw your own 'spiky profile' based on your self-assessment of your knowledge and skills against the PCF capabilities. This will show your stronger and weaker areas, and help you identify how you might specify your learning needs and find means to meet them.

Maximum score = 8 marks

Appendix 1: PCF domains and capabilities

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The capabilities in each domain at social worker and experienced social worker level are set out in this appendix for reference purposes but it should be remembered that the PCF is designed to be applied holistically. You will not need to evidence every single capability statement at your level, but rather your portfolio should provide a view across capabilities with plans and activities mapped to different domain areas.

Detailed descriptors of all levels are available on The College of Social Work website at www.tcsw.org.uk/professional-capabilities-framework/

Level – social worker

Professionalism

Social workers are members of an internationally recognised profession, a title protected in UK law. Social workers demonstrate professional commitment by taking responsibility for their conduct, practice and learning, with support through supervision. As representatives of the social work profession they safeguard its reputation and are accountable to the professional regulator.

- Be able to meet the requirements of the professional regulator
- Promote the profession in a growing range of contexts
- Take responsibility for obtaining regular, effective supervision from a SW for effective practice, reflection and career development
- Maintain professionalism in the face of more challenging circumstances
- Manage workload independently, seeking support and suggesting solutions for workload difficulties
- Maintain appropriate personal/professional boundaries in more challenging circumstances.
- Make skilled use of self as part of your interventions
- Maintain awareness of own professional limitations and knowledge gaps. Establish a network of internal and external colleagues from whom to seek advice and expertise.
- Identify and act on learning needs for CPD, including through supervision
- Routinely promote wellbeing at work
- Raise and address issues of poor practice, internally through the organisation, and then independently if required

Values and ethics

Social workers have an obligation to conduct themselves ethically and to engage in ethical decision making, including through partnership with people who use their services. Social workers are knowledgeable about the value base of their profession, its ethical standards and relevant law.

- Demonstrate confident application of ethical reasoning to professional practice, rights and entitlements, questioning and challenging others using a legal and human rights framework
- Critically reflect on and manage the influence and impact of own and others' values on professional practice
- Recognise and manage conflicting values and ethical dilemmas, in practice, using supervision and team discussion, questioning and challenging others, including those from other professions
- Negotiate and establish boundaries to underpin partnership work with service users, carers and their networks, using transparency and honesty
- Ensure practice is underpinned by policy, procedures and code of conduct to promote individuals rights to determine their own solutions, promoting problem-solving skills, while recognising how and when self-determination may be constrained (by the law)
- Work to protect privacy and promote trust, while being able to justify, explain and take appropriate action when the right to privacy is overridden by professional or legal requirements

Diversity

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 and transgender, faith and belief. Social workers appreciate that, as a consequence of difference, a person's life experience may include oppression, marginalisation and alienation as well as privilege, power and acclaim, and are able to challenge appropriately.

- Recognise the complexity of identity and diversity of experience, and apply this to practice
- Recognise discriminatory practices and develop a range of approaches to appropriately challenge service users, colleagues and senior staff
- Critically reflect on and manage the power of your role in your relationship with others

Rights, justice and economic wellbeing

Social workers recognise the fundamental principles of human rights and equality, and that these are protected in national and international law, conventions and policies. They ensure these principles underpin their practice. Social workers understand the importance of using and contributing to caselaw and applying these rights in their own practice. They understand the effects of oppression, discrimination and poverty.

- Routinely integrate the principles of and entitlements to social justice, social inclusion and equality, and with support, consider how and when challenge may be needed
- Routinely apply the law to protect and advance people's rights and entitlements, identifying and highlighting situations where interpretations of the law are neither proportionate nor fair to promote autonomy and self-determination
- Apply the principles and entitlements of human and civil rights to analyse, evaluate and challenge interventions that are unlawful and/or disproportionate.
- Analyse differing needs, perspectives and competing rights and apply to practice
- Enable and support people to consider and pursue a range of options that may enhance economic status (through access to education, work, housing, health services and welfare benefits)
- Where appropriate, set up and/or enable access to effective independent advocacy

Knowledge

Social workers understand psychological, social, cultural, spiritual and physical influences on people, human development throughout the life span, and the legal framework for practice. They apply this knowledge in their work with individuals, families and communities. They know and use theories and methods of social work practice.

- Demonstrate a comprehensive understanding and use of knowledge related to your area of practice, including critical awareness of current issues and new evidence based practice research
- Demonstrate knowledge and application of appropriate legal and policy frameworks and guidance that inform and mandate social work practice. Apply legal reasoning, using professional legal expertise and advice appropriately, recognising where scope for professional judgement exists.
- Demonstrate and apply to practice a working knowledge of human growth and development throughout the life course
- Recognise the short- and long-term impact of psychological, socio-economic, environmental and physiological factors on people's lives, taking into account age and development, and how this informs practice

- Recognise how systemic approaches can be used to understand the person-in-the-environment and inform your practice
- Acknowledge the centrality of relationships for people and the key concepts of attachment, separation, loss, change and resilience
- Understand forms of harm and their impact on people, and the implications for practice, drawing on concepts of strength, resilience, vulnerability, risk and resistance, and apply to practice
- Demonstrate a critical knowledge of the range of theories and models for social work intervention with individuals, families, groups and communities, and the methods derived from them
- Demonstrate a critical understanding of social welfare policy, its evolution, implementation and impact on people, social work, other professions, and inter-agency working
- Recognise the contribution, and begin to make use, of research to inform practice
- Demonstrate a critical understanding of research methods
- Value and take account of the expertise of service users, carers and professionals

Critical reflection and analysis

The following capability pathways apply.

- Routinely and efficiently apply critical reflection and analysis to increasingly complex cases
- Draw on a wide range of evidence sources to inform decision making
- Ensure hypotheses and options are reviewed to inform judgement and decision making
- Start to provide professional opinion

Intervention and skills

Social workers engage with individuals, families, groups and communities, working alongside people to assess and intervene. They enable effective relationships and are effective communicators, using appropriate skills. Using their professional judgement, they employ a range of interventions: promoting independence, providing support and protection, taking preventative action and ensuring safety while balancing rights and risks. They understand and take account of differentials in power, and are able to use authority appropriately. They evaluate their own practice and the outcomes for those they work with.

- Communicate with compassion and authority in challenging situations and with resistant individuals

- Routinely explain professional reasoning, judgements and decisions
- Engage effectively with people in complex situations, both short term and building relationships over time
- Gather information so as to inform judgement for interventions in more complex situations and in response to challenge.
- Use assessment procedures discerningly so as to inform judgement
- Develop a range of interventions; use them effectively and evaluate them in practice.
- Expand intervention methods and demonstrate expertise in one or more specific methods relevant to your setting.
- Make timely decisions when positive change is not happening
- Actively support and initiate community groups and networks, including professional ones
- Clearly report and record analysis and judgements
- Demonstrate and promote appropriate information sharing
- Use contingency planning to anticipate complexity and changing circumstances
- Recognise and appropriately manage the authority inherent in your position
- Demonstrate confident and effective judgement about risk and accountability in your decisions
- Regularly undertake assessment and planning for safeguarding

Contexts and organisations

The following capability pathways apply.

- Keep abreast of changing context at local and national level, and take account of these in practice
- Demonstrate the ability to work within your own organisation, and identify and begin to work with the relationship between the organisation, practice and wider changing contexts
- Work to and explain the relevant legal structures in the organisation, including basic caselaw; know when and how to access support and appropriate legal advice and consultation
- Explore and identify how organisational practice can support good social work practice
- Keep abreast of changing roles in the organisation; recognise, value and engage with other specialist perspectives

- Be confident about your role in the team, working positively with others; draw on and contribute to team working and collaborative support wherever possible
- Take an active role in inter-professional and inter-agency work, building own network and collaborative working

Professional leadership

The following capability pathways apply.

- Contribute to and promote the development of practice, taking the initiative to test new approaches
- Contribute to the learning of others (*Practice Educator Standards Stage 1: Domains A, B, C*)

Level – experienced social worker

Professionalism

Social workers are members of an internationally recognised profession, a title protected in UK law. Social workers demonstrate professional commitment by taking responsibility for their conduct, practice and learning, with support through supervision. As representatives of the social work profession they safeguard its reputation and are accountable to the professional regulator.

- Be able to meet the requirements of the professional regulator
- Model the social work role, set expectations for others and contribute to the public face of the organisation
- Expect supervision that covers practice, organisational and management aspects of role, applying critical reflection throughout
- Model and help others to demonstrate professionalism
- Model and help others with effective workload management skills
- Model and help others to maintain professional/personal boundaries and skilled use of self
- Maintain awareness of own professional limitations and knowledge gaps. Establish a network of internal and external colleagues from whom to seek advice and expertise
- Contribute to a learning environment for self, team and, colleagues (*Practice Educator Standards Stage 2: Domain D (see also capability 9)*)
- Recognise and seek ways to promote wellbeing for team and colleagues
- Promote up to date expectations about practice norms, identifying and helping resolve poor practice issues

Values and ethics

Social workers have an obligation to conduct themselves ethically and to engage in ethical decision making, including through partnership with people who use their services. Social workers are knowledgeable about the value base of their profession, its ethical standards and relevant law.

- Demonstrate confident and critical application of professional ethical principles to decision making and practice, supporting others to do so using a legal and human rights framework
- Model and support others to reflect on and manage the influence and impact of own values on professional practice
- Provide guidance and support to analyse, reflect on and work with ethical dilemmas
- Demonstrate confident application of an understanding of the benefits and limitations of partnership work, support others to do so, and promote service user and carer participation in developing service delivery
- Promote and advance wherever possible individuals' rights to autonomy and self-determination, providing support, guidance and challenge to others
- Demonstrate skills in the sensitive exploration of issues of privacy and information-sharing in complex or risky situations, offering support and guidance to colleagues in managing such dilemmas

Diversity

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 and transgender, faith and belief. Social workers appreciate that, as a consequence of difference, a person's life experience may include oppression, marginalisation and alienation as well as privilege, power and acclaim, and are able to challenge appropriately.

- Inform, guide and model good practice in the application of understanding of identity and diversity to practice; identifying and taking up issues when principles of diversity are contravened in the organisation
- Model critically reflective practice and support others to recognise and challenge discrimination, identifying and referring breaches and limitations in the ability of your own or other organisations' ability to advance equality and diversity and comply with the law
- Demonstrate and model the effective and positive use of power and authority, while recognising and providing guidance to others as to how it may be used oppressively

Rights, justice and economic wellbeing

Social workers recognise the fundamental principles of human rights and equality, and that these are protected in national and international law, conventions and policies. They ensure these principles underpin their practice. Social workers understand the importance of using and contributing to caselaw and applying these rights in their own practice. They understand the effects of oppression, discrimination and poverty.

- Provide guidance and challenge to others about applying the principles of social justice, social inclusion and equality to decision making.
- Demonstrate ability to interpret and use current legislation and guidance to protect and/or advance people's rights and entitlements, balancing use of different legislation to achieve the best outcomes; support colleagues (both inside and outside the organisation) to do so
- Be able to communicate legislative issues to other professionals and agencies
- Model best practice in applying human and civil rights, providing support to others and challenge where required
- Support others to enable individuals to access opportunities that may enhance their economic status (e.g. education, work, housing, health services and welfare benefits)
- Promote access to independent advocacy, ensuring best practice and critical review, and contribute to the evaluation of independent advocacy

Knowledge

Social workers understand psychological, social, cultural, spiritual and physical influences on people, human development throughout the life span, and the legal framework for practice. They apply this knowledge in their work with individuals, families and communities. They know and use theories and methods of social work practice.

- Develop knowledge in one or more specialist areas of your practice. Expand your knowledge to inform the connections between this and other settings or areas of practice
- Demonstrate knowledge and application of appropriate legal and policy frameworks and guidance that inform and mandate social work practice. Apply legal reasoning, using professional legal expertise and advice appropriately, recognising where scope for professional judgement exists
- Demonstrate and apply to practice a working knowledge of human growth and development throughout the life course

- Recognise the short- and long-term impact of psychological, socio-economic, environmental and physiological factors on people's lives, taking into account age and development, and how this informs practice
- Recognise how systemic approaches can be used to understand the person-in-the-environment and inform your practice
- Acknowledge the centrality of relationships for people and the key concepts of attachment, separation, loss, change and resilience
- Understand forms of harm and their impact on people, and the implications for practice, drawing on concepts of strength, resilience, vulnerability, risk and resistance, and apply to practice
- Demonstrate a critical knowledge of the range of theories and models for social work intervention with individuals, families, groups and communities, and the methods derived from them
- Demonstrate a critical understanding of social welfare policy, its evolution, implementation and impact on people, social work, other professions, and inter-agency working
- Recognise the contribution, and begin to make use, of research to inform practice
- Demonstrate a critical understanding of research methods
- Value and take account of the expertise of service users, carers and professionals

Critical reflection and analysis

Social workers are knowledgeable about and apply the principles of critical thinking and reasoned discernment. They identify, distinguish, evaluate and integrate multiple sources of knowledge and evidence. These include practice evidence, their own practice experience, service user and carer experience together with research-based, organisational, policy and legal knowledge. They use critical thinking augmented by creativity and curiosity.

- Model critical reflection and evidence-based decision making, and support others in developing these
- Provide professional opinion, giving the rationale and knowledge-base

Intervention and skills

Social workers engage with individuals, families, groups and communities, working alongside people to assess and intervene. They enable effective relationships and are effective communicators, using appropriate skills. Using their professional judgement, they employ a range of interventions: promoting independence, providing support and protection, taking preventative action and ensuring safety while balancing rights and risks. They

understand and take account of differentials in power, and are able to use authority appropriately. They evaluate their own practice and the outcomes for those they work with.

- Communicate skilfully and confidently in complex or high risk situations. Model and help others to develop communication skills
- Sustain and model engagement with people in fluctuating circumstances and capacities, including where there is hostility and risk
- Be able to gather information quickly and effectively so as to inform judgement for interventions including in crises, and in response to challenge, or in the absence of complete information
- Use assessment procedures discerningly so as to inform judgement
- Maintain and expand a range of frameworks for assessment and intervention
- Demonstrate skilled use of a range of frameworks for assessment and intervention
- Actively support and initiate community groups and networks, including professional ones
- Contribute to the development of the organisation's information strategy and systems
- Model and help others with appropriate information sharing
- Model and help others to manage changing circumstances
- Recognise and appropriately manage the authority inherent in your position
- Anticipate, assess and manage risk, including in more complex cases, and support others to develop risk management skills
- Undertake assessment and planning for safeguarding in more complex cases, and help others with safeguarding skills

Contexts and organisations

Social workers are informed about and proactively responsive to the challenges and opportunities that come with changing social contexts and constructs. They fulfil this responsibility in accordance with their professional values and ethics, both as individual professionals and as members of the organisation in which they work. They collaborate, inform and are informed by their work with others, inter-professionally and with communities.

- Contribute positively to the dialogue about opportunities and constraints for social work practice arising from changing local and national contexts and model proactive responses
- Model and demonstrate the ability to work within your own organisation, and regularly work with relationship between the organisation, practice and wider changing contexts

- Demonstrate sound working knowledge of all relevant legal requirements, and their implications for practice; support and advise others to interpret and use the law
- Engage positively with and contribute to organisational development
- Identify the need for the development of specialist roles and their contribution to team learning
- Model and encourage positive working relationships in the team, promoting strategies for collaboration and a supportive team culture
- Maintain and develop liaison across agencies at a more senior level

Professional leadership

The social work profession evolves through the contribution of its members in activities such as practice research, supervision, assessment of practice, teaching and management. An individual's contribution will gain influence when undertaken as part of a learning, practice-focused organisation. Learning may be facilitated with a wide range of people including social work colleagues, service users and carers, volunteers, foster carers and other professionals.

- Contribute to organisational developments.
- Play leading role in practice development in the team and help sustain a learning culture.
- Provide supervision to colleagues as organisation determines. Support others to manage and prioritise work
- Assess and manage the work of social work students and ASYE
- *Practice Educator Standards Stage 2: Domain B & C (see also capability 1)*