



## Strategic Level Professional Capabilities

This document presents the Strategic level Professional Capabilities.

The capabilities should be read in conjunction with the level descriptors which can be found directly after this introduction – the details of the capability statement at each level are intended to be used diagnostically to help identify strengths and areas for development, rather than as a list of areas for which evidence must be produced.

The nine domains are interactive – they work together to describe the knowledge, skills and values that social workers need to practise effectively. At the strategic level of the PCF, they also describe how being a social worker should influence the ways in which one works at this level.

There are three developmental pathways, covering education, practice and management. The three pathways, or areas of expertise, whilst distinctive, will not necessarily be mutually exclusive, and many social workers will wish to develop capabilities across the pathways, reflecting their expected career progression

The following shorthand is used for the developmental pathways:

Strategic Social Work Educator (SSWE)
Principal Social Worker (PSW)
Strategic Social Work Manager (SSWM)

Most capabilities are relevant to all social workers at this level, but where an area of capability is specific to a particular pathway, this is indicated by using the initials in brackets, as above.

## **The PCF at 'Strategic' Level**

Social workers at a strategic level work to ensure that organisations are aware of and respond to the views of people who use services, families and carers, as well as the political context within which social work is delivered locally, regionally and nationally. They take responsibility for the implementation of the Standards for Employers of Social Workers. They manage and are accountable for using available resources effectively. Using a human rights and ethical framework, they support complex decision-making at a strategic level, balancing the needs of different interests. They ensure that professional social work counsel and experience are available and inform decision-making at a strategic level, supporting the organisation to do things right and also to do the 'right thing'.

They aim to ensure that the services provided promote positive outcomes and experiences for people, families, carers, and communities. They pro-actively seek feedback from a range of sources to inform strategic decision-making. They provide strategic leadership to ensure effective risk management practice, through the development of excellent inter-agency collaboration and communication. Strategic leaders work across organisations with partners, at local, regional and national levels seeking out best evidence-informed or emerging practice. They support the development of social work knowledge and skills, influencing the development of the profession. They lead and initiate change within and across organisations to improve quality and outcomes.

As with the advanced level, there are three developmental pathways: ***Strategic Social Work Educator, Principal Social Worker*** and ***Strategic Social Work Manager***. The three pathways, or areas of expertise, whilst distinctive, will not necessarily be mutually exclusive, and many social workers will wish to develop capabilities across the pathways, reflecting their expected career progression.

- ***Strategic Social Work Educators:*** take the responsibility for responding to professional development needs, including those from initiatives and policy, liaising locally, regionally and nationally to seek out best practice. They respond to learning needs that emerge from audit, analysis and serious case reviews locally and nationally. They will use this information to plan implementation across the organisation ensuring such developments dovetail with other organisational developments and priorities. They ensure that a workforce and/or academic development strategy is in place within the organisation to ensure that staff and students are equipped to deliver quality outcomes for people who use services, families and carers. This will include collating, analysing and reporting on information to measure the impact and outcomes for the workforce, organisation and the service provided. They will lead on ensuring that partnership arrangements are in place to deliver workforce or academic development requirements. They will take a pro-active stance on developing the body of social work knowledge within and outside of the organisation; they will champion research and evidence-informed practice.

- **Principal Social Workers:** take a professional lead across an organisation, and have a responsibility for supporting and advising on the quality of practice. They provide professional leadership for social work practice, and continue to directly engage and work with people who use services, families and carers. They draw on this professional experience to influence strategic decision-making across the organisation. They use their knowledge and skills to inform the wider functions of the organisation, beyond social work and 'social care' boundaries. They take the responsibility for identifying and responding to new initiatives and changes in legislation and government policy. They will liaise and develop professional networks locally, regionally and nationally to identify and influence practice improvements. Principal Social Workers ensure that organisational change takes account of professional social work issues. They develop and sustain partnership arrangements with stakeholders within and across organisations. They promote and take part in developing the body of social work knowledge and research within and outside of the organisation, working in partnership to ensure that developments reflect the needs of front line practice.
- **Strategic Social Work Managers:** are skilled managers and leaders. They work with stakeholders, including service users, carers, families and communities to deliver change and quality improvements. Professional leaders at this level are responsible for ensuring social work practice and values deliver positive outcomes. They promote local and national research and evaluation to influence and develop social work evidence-informed practice. They lead, motivate and inspire social workers and others across organisations ensuring the services provided are effective and responsive. They are knowledgeable about the communities and the political context in which they work. They promote equalities, inclusion and diversity within strategic decision-making. They advise on the impact of policy and practice for people in more excluded groups or communities. They use their influence within and across organisations working pro-actively to initiate, manage and support change within and across organisations to meet the needs of their whole community.

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

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 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 management, practice or organisational supervision settings to enhance your own, others and the organisation's strategic outcomes.
- Model and demonstrate professionalism, ensuring professional social work standards are promoted and enhanced throughout the organisation.
- Identify and quantify the social work and other resources required to support the work of the organisation. Take responsibility for the implementation and evaluation of workload tools. Ensure the organisation's workload is actively monitored and evaluated, taking action to promote positive solutions.
- 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.
- Maintain awareness of own professional limitations, knowledge gaps and conflicts of interest and actively seek to address issues for self and others.
- 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.
- Create and sustain a work environment that promotes health, safety and wellbeing of self and others across the organisation.
- Create and maintain a culture where concerns about practice are effectively dealt with, including reporting to the regulator as appropriate.
- Take responsibility to ensure that organisational procedures are relevant, reflect effective practice and contribute to better outcomes.

## **2. Values and Ethics: Apply social work ethical principles and values to guide professional practice.**

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.

- Provide leadership in the critical application of professional ethics to strategic decision-making, using a legal and human rights framework.
- Develop and promote an organisational culture which encourages reflection on the influence and impact of own or agency values on organisational culture and practice.
- Demonstrate confident leadership for the organisation in taking account of and arbitrating in complex ethical situations.

- Lead effective partnership working within and outside of the organisation, creating a culture that promotes meaningful participation of individuals, communities, families and carers. Ensure that the outcomes that service users and carers experience are the focus for review.
- Promote a culture where individuals and communities can exercise their rights to autonomy and self determination; ensuring this is balanced against the responsibility not to harm others or be harmed themselves.
- 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.

### **3. Diversity: Recognise diversity and apply anti-discriminatory 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 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.

- Lead and be accountable for strategic approaches to diversity and identity creating and embedding equality and diversity within the organisation.
- Create and sustain an organisational environment where people feel supported to challenge on issues of discrimination and oppression.
- Lead on ensuring that policies, practice and strategies concerning discrimination and oppression reflect the law and current best practice.
- Lead and model at a strategic level appropriate and effective use of power and authority. Provide challenge in situations where power is used inappropriately.

### **4. Rights, Justice and Economic Wellbeing: Advance human rights and promote social 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 case law and applying these rights in their own practice. They understand the effects of oppression, discrimination and poverty.

- Take responsibility for developing and sustaining a culture where the principles of social justice, social inclusion and

equality are applied to strategic decision-making.

- 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. Create and sustain environments where people are enabled to provide effective challenge and ensure human rights are upheld.
- Secure expert advice in complex human and civil rights situations to ensure an appropriate and proportionate response by the organisation. Promote and contribute to policy and practice developments to support service improvement.
- Develop strategies (including regarding resources and commissioning) to promote social inclusion and access to opportunities which may enhance people's economic status.
- Monitor and evaluate their effectiveness and impact, leading and informing new approaches. Take action to address and alleviate emerging issues, working pro-actively with partner organisations to achieve positive outcomes. (SSWM/PSW)
- 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.

## 5. Knowledge: Apply knowledge of social sciences, law and social work practice theory

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.

- Encourage a culture of professional curiosity.
- Maintain a well developed understanding of knowledge relevant to your area of organisational practice, and a confident self awareness of knowledge limits.
- Access and make critical use of relevant knowledge from a variety of sources, and apply this knowledge in strategic settings.
- Continue to maintain and use a strong socio-cultural knowledge base (including in relation to law, human development, social, psychological and spiritual issues) to inform strategic thinking and decision-making.
- Be able to apply knowledge to hypothesise and make complex decisions in strategic situations.
- Ensure the organisation structure accommodates, through a range of approaches, appropriate resourcing for the development of and critical engagement with knowledge debates.
- Actively challenge structures and processes which inhibit knowledge development and debate.
- Ensure access to knowledge resources and relevant practice debates.
- Lead and promote the incorporation of adult learning into workforce development. Use knowledge of adult learning theories to lead the development of a learning organisation. (SSWE)
- Identify and address knowledge gaps across the organisation. (SSWE)

- Commission knowledge development of holistic assessment. (SSWE)
- Ensure social work workforce strategies address and incorporate supporting the development of practice knowledge. (SSWE)
- Have a good knowledge of organisational dynamics, resources, and the ability to maximise team and organisational potential. (SSWM)
- Maintain a high level of expertise, informed by knowledge in both established and emergent areas relevant to their field of practice. (PSW)
- Provide consultation that is knowledge informed to professional /strategic decision-making (PSW/ SSWM)
- Maintain and model a confident body of knowledge that informs management practice and style. (SSWM)

## 6. Critical Reflection and Analysis: Apply critical reflection and analysis to inform and provide a rationale for professional decision-making

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.

- Take responsibility for the creation and maintenance of an organisational environment within which critical reflection and analysis take place and are valued and supported.
- Promote and provide critical reflection, challenge and evidence-informed decision-making in complex situations. Support others in developing these capabilities, and finding their own solutions. (PSW)
- Model good practice and reflective supervision skills.
- Take strategic responsibility for the development 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. (SSWM/PSW)
- Routinely provide professional social work opinion within a strategic context.
- Using evidence and practice knowledge, be the voice of professional social work opinion within strategic decision-making. (PSW)
- Be responsible for ensuring that the value of social work professional knowledge and opinion influences good practice, service delivery and organisational strategy. (PSW)
- Champion the development of empowered professional social work decision makers throughout the organisation.

## 7. Intervention and Skills: Use judgment and authority to intervene with individuals, families and communities to promote independence, provide support and prevent harm, neglect and abuse

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 judgment, they employ a range of interventions: promoting independence, providing support and protection, taking preventative action and ensuring safety whilst 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.

- Model effective communication skills within a strategic context, creating the opportunity/environment where effective communication is promoted within the organisation.
- Communicate in an effective and competent manner in highly charged, complex or challenging circumstance in strategic settings, inside and outside the organisation.
- Ensure strategic communication is informed by current direct practice experience. (PSW)
- Provide effective strategic leadership, support and model engagement in the most challenging of circumstances, including with partner agencies, stakeholders and other professionals.
- Create an ethos in the organisation where social workers are supported to engage positively with people in challenging circumstances.
- Maintain empathetic compassionate relationships with strategic leads, other professionals, people who use services and those who care for them.
- Be 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.
- Support and enable others to use their own experience and expertise to analyse information and make informed professional decisions.
- Maintain and use expert assessment and intervention skills in complex practice situations, and support others to do so. Engage in and facilitate research and evaluation of practice. (PSW)
- Develop a culture that supports and encourages engagement in research, as well as development and maintenance of expert intervention skills. (PSW/SSWE)
- Create and maintain a culture of support for engagement with networks both within and outside of the organisation. Developing strategic engagement with a range of stakeholder groups.
- Strategically understand the interface between information systems and practice, and ensure systems support delivery of positive outcomes for people who use services, families, carers and communities. (PSW)
- 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 service users, 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. (PSW)
- Be able to work with and contain the anxiety of other people in complex and highly charged situations, ensuring that there is a proportionate response between perceived risk and protection from harm when necessary. (PSW/SSWM)
- 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. (PSW/SSWM)
- Develop service user outcome focused evaluation of their experience of the social work interventions, such as safeguarding, and embed any learning into practice. (PSW/SSWM)

## **8. Contexts and 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 partnerships and settings**

Social workers are informed about and pro-actively 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.

- 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 your area of responsibility, using it to support strategic decision-making. Advise others and seek out specialist advice where necessary. Ensure social workers have access to legal advice and information where needed.
- Initiate, facilitate and enable organisational development at a local, regional and national level, providing professional leadership as needed.
- Lead the positive use of mechanisms for feedback about social work to inform organisational development.
- Ensure that a social work perspective informs organisational decision-making. (PSW).

- 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, maintain a collaborative working approach, resolving intractable dilemmas where necessary.

## **9. Professional Leadership: Take responsibility for the professional learning and development of others through supervision, mentoring, assessing, research, teaching, leadership and management**

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.

- Model professional social work leadership, and provide opportunities to support others' development.
- Lead a culture of professional curiosity within the organisation, embracing research and encouraging the exploration of different cultures, concepts and ideas.
- 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.
- Create opportunities and systems for current practice to inform and be informed by research and current professional knowledge.
- Lead, articulate and promote a positive social work identity which actively seeks and respects the contributions and views of all.
- Drive improvement in line with the Standards for Employers of Social Workers.
- 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.
- Lead a culture of talent identification and development.
- 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.