

THE 2018 REFRESH OF THE PROFESSIONAL CAPABILITIES FRAMEWORK

OVERVIEW AND A CHANCE TO HAVE YOUR SAY ON THE FINAL VERSION

Introduction

This refresh of the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) has been led by the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) with Research in Practice/RiPfa (RiP) on behalf of the whole social work sector and with the involvement of key stakeholders – individuals and organisations. We would like to thank the following for their particular contribution and leadership input to this review, primarily through the cross-agency Steering Group but also through other key support and involvement:

Skills for Care, Shaping Our Lives, Local Government Association, Principal Social Worker Networks – adults and children, Association of Directors of Adults Social Services, Association of Directors of Children’s Services, Department for Education and Chief Social Worker for Children and Families, Department for Health and Social Care and Chief Social Worker for Adults, Social Workers Union, Joint Universities Council for Social Work Education Committee, Association of Professors of Social Work, BASW Policy, Practice and Education Groups.

We want to hear from you about the changes described in this document. Please complete our online survey between 12th March – 2nd April 2018 on www.basw.co.uk to tell us what you think so this refresh can be finalised with direct input from the profession.

Background to the PCF Review

BASW took over as guardian of the PCF on behalf of the whole profession when the College of Social Work closed in 2015. Throughout 2015/16, BASW continued to promote the PCF and undertook a rolling review of its use through an ongoing survey and group discussions across England. In late 2016, a multi-agency Steering Group for the PCF refresh was established and in summer 2017, RiP became a partner to work with BASW on the review and refresh. The Steering Group has continued to meet regularly to oversee the completion of this work.

The PCF was originally developed by social work practitioners, people using services and carers, employers, educators and leaders across the social care sector as part of the work of the ‘Social Work Reform Board’ which sought to develop the confidence and professionalism of social workers. The PCF is owned by the social work profession as a whole and it represents our accountability to those we serve and help, and others with stake in the quality of social work.

The need for a refresh of the PCF has been known in the sector since the College of Social Work closed in 2015. At that point, a ‘mini-review’ of the PCF had just been completed¹ and made a range of recommendations many of which are still relevant and have been taken into account in the 2018 review. The 2015 review concluded that ‘*Substantial work has been done to integrate the PCF successfully into social work education, CPD and performance management*’. In 2018, we have found the PCF to be still well embedded and valued. As in 2015, the current review has endeavoured to ensure diverse stakeholders could contribute and have their views and experiences of using the PCF honoured in how it’s future form is described.

¹ The College of Social Work (2015) Review of the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) Final Report.

The 2015 mini-review was prompted by significant changes emerging in the social work sector at that time, particularly the emergence of new Knowledge and Skills Statements (KSS) for adults and for children and families social work and concern how these would relate to the PCF. Since 2015, the landscape has changed further. The two Chief Social Worker roles have become more established and have promoted aligned but separate development trajectories for social work in England, with the further development of the KSS at practice, supervisory and leader levels and through other interventions such as funding the establishment of the Teaching Partnerships.

In 2017 the Children and Social Work Act created the legislation for the establishment of a new regulator for social work – Social Work England. This will supersede the Health and Care Professionals Council (HCPC) and will bring a new approach to setting and maintaining standards in the profession for the protection of the public. It will also have powers to set improvement standards and may include records of attainment at post-qualifying levels – such as Approved Mental Health Professional, Best Interest Assessor and Approved Children and Families Professional (attainment through the National Assessment and Accreditation Scheme).

The PCF as the profession-led ‘backbone’ of all social work education needs to be relevant and owned by the profession in this context. The PCF represents our collective identity now and our ambitions for a unified profession and profession-led standards of quality. It needs to be implemented and promoted with confidence and we need to move towards gaining more evidence of its benefits in practice and education – and refining it on the basis of such evidence.

It is therefore very important that at the same time as this refresh of the PCF is launched we are publishing a joint statement about how the KSS and PCF relate to each other, issued in the name of BASW on behalf of the PCF Steering Group and the profession as a whole, and the two Chief Social Workers. The joint statement is available on the PCF pages on the BASW website www.basw.co.uk/pcf

For the profession, for the people we serve

“The Professional Capabilities Framework confirms what we can expect social workers to know, what they should be able to do and how they should behave.” (Expert by Experience: 2018 PCF Refresh Consultation)

Putting this statement from a service user prominently in this PCF refresh summary document is intentional and important; while the PCF is about our identity, confidence and abilities as a profession, it exists fundamentally to improve and sustain excellent practice for the benefit of people working with or affected by the decisions of social workers.

From the outset, the Steering Group for this review wanted to ensure the value placed on social work capabilities by ‘end users’ of our services and carers was equally heard alongside the views of social work practitioners, educators, managers, academics, policy makers and other professional stakeholders. The principle of developing our capabilities through dialogue with those directly affected by our practice has been in place since the inception of the PCF.

But there is further to go, both in how we use and implement the PCF in its 2018 refreshed form, and in how we develop it further. BASW and the PCF Steering Group will work further with stakeholders to ensure the PCF is developed, is implemented and explained in ways that are valued and recognised as helpful and valuable by people who use social work services.

In the end, the value of the PCF must be judged by whether and how it makes a difference to the lives of people needing social work services.

Key messages from sector consultation on the PCF in 2017

This refresh has taken its lead from what stakeholders across the sector have told us they value about the PCF now and what might usefully change and be clarified. The consultation has been led by Research in Practice/RiPfa as partners to BASW in this work.

The role of the Steering Group has been to understand and sense-test the consultation responses and ensure that the PCF is (re) positioned positively and strongly in the current social work policy and political landscape. The Group also took on board the unfinished 2015 refresh document which made recommendations that included the need to

augment the 'Professional Leadership' domain; to review the level descriptors and make them more relevant to work context and consider how contemporary job roles are described at different levels; and to ensure better strategic partnerships between the custodian of the PCF, the wider social work practice, education and employment sectors and government departments. While some of the recommendations from 2015 have been superseded, these have been carried forward into this review as they chime with the recent consultation findings and contemporary priorities.

The Outcome of the 2017 Consultation

An overwhelming message from the sector was – *'don't change too much. The PCF works well for many practitioners, academics, workforce leads, managers and other stakeholders.'* The way the PCF is embedded in culture, education, practice and management is important and the value placed on the original needs to be conserved, but also strengthened and developed for the future.

In summary, the consultation in 2017 found that social workers and others wanted:

- Clarity about ownership of the PCF by and for social workers
- A clear explanation of the PCF
- Minimal changes to the visual of the PCF
- The levels to remain as they are
- Simplified language throughout and clarity about the progression between levels
- To include views of experts by experience from the consultation who were asked what the PCF should do
- Clear link to professional development for practice
- Confirm the concept of an underpinning framework
- Explain how PCF links with other standards, guidance and frameworks
- Ensure social work's fundamental values are clear
- Raise the profile of the PCF through publicity materials, activities and ongoing communication
- Link the PCF clearly to the IFSW definition of social work and to the BASW code of ethics
- Create a clear pathway for a career that gives an outline of how the PCF is used and that links to guidance and to examples
- Offer learning and development around using the PCF in partnership

Some changes have been made in this refresh and these are described in the next section with a rationale for each. There is more to be done and the next steps are listed at the end.

Changes and additions in the 2018 Refresh

Linking the PCF with the International Federation of Social Workers definition of social work and the BASW Code of Ethics

Social work is an international profession. The consultation responses pointed to the fact that the PCF exists in the context of international evidence, common thinking across national boundaries, international commitments and laws on universal human rights and justice. The PCF should be explicitly linked with this international context and to the UK professional Code of Ethics.

BASW is the representative body for the UK within the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) which represents over 3 million social workers worldwide through Associations in 126 countries. IFSW is the originator of World Social Work Day and has a definition of social work that has been agreed by all Associations across the world (<http://ifsw.org/policies/definition-of-social-work>).

The BASW Code of Ethics (www.basw.co.uk/codeofethics) is a guide for social work practice across the UK that draws on the IFSW work on ethics and human rights.

The link with the international definition and with the BASW Code of Ethics has been made in:

- The PCF description (as below)
- The domain descriptors for Values and Ethics, Diversity and Equalities, Rights and Justice.

Professional Capabilities Framework



www.basw.co.uk/pcf

Defining the PCF – 2018

The consultation for the refresh found that people wanted a clearer description of the PCF. Below is the new description.

The PCF is the underpinning framework for social work practice in England. It sets out the common capabilities that we expect of ourselves as social workers, and which others can expect of us, at different levels of practice and stages of our career, across all fields of social work. It promotes social work as one profession.

The PCF does not define specialist knowledge and skills or lay out learning content that may be needed in particular work contexts. It describes the capabilities that all social workers should aspire to develop throughout their career.

We use the PCF to identify how we should act and approach our work. It also underpins our continuing professional development because we use it to identify how we need to learn and develop.

It has been the framework for social work in England since 2012 and its implementation across the sector – from qualifying training through to strategic workforce planning – has been and continues to be highly successful and influential.

The PCF may evolve as the profession evolves. We add to it and make revisions as our knowledge and expertise increases.

It is aligned with the International Federation of Social Workers global definition of social work and draws on the BASW Code of Ethics for social workers across the UK.

What are 'Professional Capabilities'?

"The PCF clarifies what the expectations people should have from any social worker." (Expert by experience: 2018 PCF Refresh Consultation)

Social work was the first health and care profession in the UK to develop a comprehensive professional capabilities framework. The value of this approach has influenced other professions – because it is seen to provide a unifying and generic approach which can shape collective professional identity, commitment to improvement and enhance shared understanding of the profession by the public and stakeholders.

It is notable that in May 2017, the medical profession adopted a generic professional capabilities framework for the first time, aimed at drawing together common themes across the diverse specialisms of medicine as reflected in their multiple colleges.

'The GMC has developed the Generic professional capabilities framework with the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges to describe the fundamental, career-long, generic capabilities required of every doctor. This describes the requirements to develop and maintain key professional values and behaviours, knowledge and skills, using a common language'

The 2017 Consultation suggested a need for a clarifying statement about what is meant by 'professional capabilities' in the context of the PCF. The following definition is given:

Capabilities are 'An integration of knowledge, skills, personal qualities, (behaviour), understanding (and values) used appropriately and effectively, not just in familiar and highly focused specialist contexts but in response to new, (complex) and changing circumstances'²

The capabilities as described in the PCF provide the foundation and rationale for practice and for social workers to explain and be accountable for their actions. As social workers develop experience and expertise, their capabilities develop so they can take more responsibility, have more impact, and use their professional judgement in more complex and uncertain situations.

Social workers should always explain their actions and the PCF provides a common language across the nine domains to assist in this.

² Adapted from Stephenson, 1992, p 2 cited by Burgess H and Kearney P, Presentation and Report to the Social Work Reform Board, 2010/2012.

Social work is dynamic and often distinctively addresses complex, unique combinations of issues. The social and interpersonal context of issues is key and there are often many uncontrollable factors in play.

Social workers need to develop, deepen and sustain capabilities that they can draw on in such diverse, challenging situations. Developing capabilities at the nine levels in the PCF means developing the expertise and confidence needed not just to address familiar or repeatedly encountered situations and issues, but to respond effectively in unfamiliar and dynamic social work circumstances.

The PCF guides social workers to develop their capabilities through the nine levels in dealing with situations of:

- Risk
- Ambiguity
- Complexity

As social workers develop their capabilities, they can take more responsibility, have more impact, increase their confidence and resilience, and use their professional judgement and expertise effectively in more complex and uncertain situations.

Implementing the PCF in strategic context

Social workers are often accountable to multiple authorities and groups, as well as primarily to the people they provide services to. Therefore, the PCF must relate to other development initiatives and requirements upon social workers. In particular:

- Expectations of social workers for public protection (our registration standards)
- Expectations of social workers for particular roles (Knowledge and Skills Statements)
- Expectations of social workers for particular areas of practice (specialist qualifications).

The PCF goes alongside the Standards for Employers of Social Workers. These standards are intended to enable social workers to meet the capabilities by providing the necessary support.

The refresh has produced a joint statement between the two Chief Social Workers and BASW (on behalf of the PCF Steering Group and the profession as a whole) on the relationship between the PCF and KSS (see PCF pages on www.basw.co.uk) which clarifies the relationship, summed up in the following excerpts:

‘Together, the PCF and KSS provide the foundation for social work education and practice in England at qualifying and post-qualifying levels and are used to inform recruitment, workforce development, performance appraisal and career progression.

The KSS map onto the Practice domains of the PCF (Knowledge, Critical Reflection and Analysis, Interventions and Skills) and should help guide everyday practice.’

The 2018 changes to the Fan

We are proposing the version of the Fan shown in the centre pages of this document. Below is a description of the changes and the rationale. Please be sure to provide your feedback in the PCF online survey from 12th March – 4th April at www.basw.co.uk

Introduction of ‘super-domains’

The 2018 PCF Fan preserves the main PCF structure of nine domains and nine levels, but adds three new ‘superdomains’ – **Purpose, Practice and Impact**. The super-domains emerged from discussions in the consultation events and in the Steering Group. The rationale for this change is:

- The super-domains add more clarity to the PCF Fan graphic by capturing overarching principles (which have their own more detailed descriptors in the full refresh document online). In brief these are:
 - **Purpose:** Why we do what we do as social workers, our values and ethics, and how we approach our work
 - **Practice:** What we do – the specific skills, knowledge, interventions and critical analytic abilities we develop to act and do social work

– **Impact:** How we make a difference. Our ability to bring about change through our practice, through our leadership, through understanding our context and through our overall professionalism

Each super-domain sits over three domains that relate in a common-sense way with the super-domain above. However the principles of purpose, practice and impact can also be seen as cutting across all domains, so there is no hard visual demarcation between the super-domains. For instance, ‘impact’ can be directly related to interventions and skills, and ‘professionalism’ may be considered directly related to ‘purpose’ and the ethics behind how you approach your work. All domains can be directly related to practice – for instance, integrating rights and justice is fundamental to how social workers make interventions and apply their skills. The super-domains do not undermine the interrelationships between all the domains of the PCF.

Domain naming

All the domain names are retained with one addition – ‘& Equalities’ is added alongside ‘Diversity’. The rationale for this change is:

- While ‘Rights and Social Justice’ (Domain 4) overlaps with the legal and practice meaning of ‘Equalities’, the Steering Group considered the issue of equalities between diverse groups to be a particularly pressing issue in society – for instance, in a context of rising family, adult and child poverty and worsening health outcome differentials between groups.
- Having equalities on the face of the framework also highlights the importance of specific equalities legislation in framing how we do social work and protect people’s rights and dignity.
- It can be added without taking anything away from (and with minimal change to) the Diversity domain descriptor.

Ordering and numbering of domains

The fan retains the numbering of the domains and most of the order, but moves ‘Professionalism’ (number 1) to the bottom right position alongside ‘Contexts and Organisations’ and ‘Professional Leadership’. The rationale for this change is:

- This clusters professionalism with professional leadership and contexts and organisations. We believe that, while professionalism runs through how all the capabilities are delivered, it is certainly about the impact, profile and credibility of the profession, whether with individuals and families, with colleagues or the public.
- Placing number 1 domain in the bottom right corner is also intended to draw the viewer/user of the PCF to consider how all the domains work as a continuous, ‘circular’ whole. In listening to consultation feedback, no great change has been made to the shape of the graphic so the consideration of expressing the domains in a new way, in a circle, was rejected.

Further changes

In addition to the changes described above, further changes have been made as follows, all of which are available (with rationales) on the BASW PCF web pages.

- The Domain descriptors have been refreshed
- The Level descriptors have been refreshed
- How contemporary roles fit into the PCF levels has been described (e.g. where Practice Educator, Principal Social Worker, Team Manager, Practice Supervisor (amongst others) sit
- Domain 9 – Professional Leadership – has been augmented to reflect contemporary developments and priorities in leadership roles and thinking across the sector
- The voice of service users and carers has been integrated into all the refreshed elements of the PCF

Next steps

The PCF is a living framework. The launch of the refresh will provide further impetus to the promotion of the PCF. It will underpin how it is promoted, for instance, in discussions with those establishing the new regulator, Social Work England, and how the PCF relates to current and future KSS and qualifying and post-qualifying standards.

There is further detailed work underway to meet the requests from the 2017 consultation, which will be completed in the next six months. These include:

- Improving clarity with regard to progression between levels
- Integrating the PCF into new frameworks for continuing professional development
- An updated guidance for workforce leads on how to use the PCF alongside other standards
- Promoting the PCF as ‘owned by social workers’ and ‘owned by the whole profession’
- Further work to ensure the PCF is implemented in ways that enhance the experience and outcomes of people using services

For further information, to provide feedback or get involved, please email england@basw.co.uk