The Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) provides social workers in England with an overarching context for their professional development from pre-qualifying level, through to experienced social worker and advanced roles in areas including practice, strategy and education. It is designed to ensure social workers in all specialisms have a shared, coherent framework for the development of their capabilities throughout their careers, whatever areas of practice they choose to pursue.

The PCF was designed and developed by social workers through the former College of Social Work for England. It is now hosted by the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) on behalf of and in partnership with organisations and professionals across our sector.

Having the PCF has been important in helping to create and sustain a unified professional identity at a time when social work has become increasingly sub-divided within job roles – into adults, children and families, mental health sectors etc. The PCF guides all social workers on the importance of ongoing development in key domains that define us as a profession. It has become an essential and living part of the professional support system for social workers as individuals and has informed workforce development strategies.

It is also an underlying framework for qualifying courses and the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment. It is explicitly referenced in the Chief Social Worker for Adults Knowledge and Skills Framework and has been used to develop and refresh other specialist capability areas, such as the recent work on defining capabilities for forensic social work.

The Department for Education and Department of Health are currently working on proposals for a new regulatory and registration framework for social workers in England (to replace that currently provided by the HCPC). This may set new curriculum content for qualifying courses, new practice standards at qualifying and post-qualifying levels and new expectations on practitioners seeking renewal of registration. In this context, it is particularly important that the PCF – created through wide consultation across the sector – continues to be promoted and developed. It needs to be an important and influential part of how social workers have a voice in the development of a new regulator.
PCF Steering Group

Social workers, workforce leads, senior managers and educators continue to tell us that the PCF is integral to their professional learning and practice. With BASW as Chair, interagency partners have come together to form the PCF Steering Group. To remain relevant and contemporary, the PCF needs buy-in and support from across the social work landscape and the Steering Group is a vital part of that. It will preserve the integrity of the PCF but, in consultation with the sector, the steering group will keep the framework refreshed and relevant.

The Steering Group will also ensure the PCF can continue to support emerging, new directions in standard setting and curriculum content for specific areas of continuing professional development (CPD). This includes the knowledge and skills statements (KSS) from the Chief Social Workers and developments in regulation, occupational standards and other aspects of standard setting and specialist CPD pathways.

The complexities of practice and work settings across the profession requires the development of specialist practice. In England, there are around 93,000 registered social workers working in diverse settings who require a wide range of post-qualifying training and development opportunities. This includes statutory post-qualified roles (such as Approved Mental Health Professional) and proposed new accredited roles such as that for statutory children’s social workers. The PCF will continue to be developed to ensure it complements and is relevant to in-depth CPD pathways that practitioners choose throughout their careers.

A refresh

The Steering Group will undertake a ‘refresh’ of the PCF in the first half of 2017. The findings of the review carried out by TCSW last year will be included in this work. This will include particular attention to domain 9 – leadership. The refreshed terms of reference will be framed by the Steering Group and there will be communications with all parts of the social work community and people who use social work services.

A chance to be involved

We want to hear from social workers and other stakeholders who would be interested in being involved in this work including anyone interested in being a member of the Professional Capabilities and Development Group to take this work forward within the Association and across the sector.

If you want to get involved, please register your interest by emailing PCF@basw.co.uk

---

1 Current members of the PCF Steering Group: BASW (Chair/Host) Skills for Care, SCIE, APSW, JUC SWEC, RIP/RIPFA, former members of the PCF development group from the College of Social Work. Further members/organisations to be added.

BASW will be producing a full update with steering group input in December 2016.