Standards of Proficiency for Social Workers

Practice Areas Affected:
Prospective Social Workers and Social Workers

Status:
Health and Care Professions Council – Standards of Proficiency

Introduction
1 August 2012

Introduction

From 1 August 2012, the Health Professions Council became known as the Health and Care Professions Council and took on the regulatory function of social workers in England.

It is required by legislation to develop standards of proficiency for social workers.

Key stakeholders in the social work field were involved in developing the standards including employers, those in the social work educators’ field and related organisations. A formal consultation on the draft standards was held with service users and carers. Feedback from the consultation shaped the final document ensuring it reflected the values and practice of social work.

Standards of proficiency

The standards of proficiency detail the thresholds of knowledge and abilities required from a social worker in England following the completion of their social work degree before they start practising prior to them registering with the HCPC.

Work on the standards has been developed alongside the work of the Social Work Reform Board who has also produced the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) which is now managed by the College of Social Work.

Whereas the standards of proficiency provide expectations on what a social worker should be able to do to start practising, the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) outlines the capabilities...
required throughout their social work career. When social workers renew their registration they will be asked to declare that they continue to meet the standards of proficiency that apply to their practice.

The standards of proficiency include generic elements and profession specific elements which are relevant to those professions the HCPC regulate. A social worker may become more focused on one area of practice or take on roles in management or research, which may mean that they cannot demonstrate that they meet all the standards for the whole of their profession. Social workers should ensure they undertake appropriate training and experience before moving into new areas of practice to ensure they are practicing safely and effectively.

**Conduct, performance and ethics standards for continuing professional development**

Alongside the standards of proficiency, there are standards for conduct, performance and ethics for continuing professional development set by the HCPC. All standards need to be met in order to stay on the register to practise social work. For further information click here

http://www.hpc-uk.org/aboutregistration/standards/standardsofconductperformanceandethics/index.asp

**How do the standards for proficiency relate to the Professional Capabilities’ Framework?**

The Health Professions Council and the College of Social Work have produced a document which looks at the relationship between the standards of proficiency and the PCF. For more information click here

http://www.hpcuk.org/assets/documents/10003B0BMappingoftheHPC'sstandardsofproficiencyforsocialworkersinEnglandagainstthePCF.pdf

**Meeting the standards of proficiency**

There are 15 numbered standards, all of which hold equal importance and should be used alongside relevant guidance issued by an employer or other organisations. The HCPC do not state how the standards should be met and acknowledge that there will be a number of ways to do this. They also raise an issue that has been queried with them regarding ways of working and policies which may affect how the standards can be met. They acknowledge that as an autonomous professional, an individual will need to make reasonable decisions about their practice to ensure that the well-being of service users is safeguarded. If they are able to justify their decisions they feel the standards are achievable.
These standards will be used alongside the conduct, performance and ethics standards if a social workers practice was challenged.

The standards of proficiency will continue to be reviewed to ensure they reflect changes in the social work profession.

**Useful Links**

Health and Care Professions’ Council - Standards of proficiency

http://www.hpc-uk.org/assets/documents/10003B08Standardsofproficiency-
SocialworkersinEngland.pdf