

**Response to the Department for Education Consultation on Post-Qualifying Standards (PQS) and the Social Work Induction Programme (SWIP)**

*The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) is the professional association for social work in the UK with offices in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. We are the independent voice of social work. We champion social work and help members achieve the highest professional standards. With over 22,000 members we exist to promote the best possible social work services for all people who may need them, whilst also securing the wellbeing of social workers working in all health, social care and youth justice settings. BASW works in partnership with a range of organisations in criminal justice; education and childcare; health and social care; local government; law enforcement and the private and voluntary sectors to promote the best interests of social work and social workers.*

**Introduction**

BASW England welcome the opportunity to comment on the Department for Education’s proposed new set of Post-Qualifying Standards (PQS) and a two-year Social Work Induction Programme (SWIP) for newly qualified child and family social workers. These proposals represent an important opportunity to enhance early career support, address issues of professional consistency, and ultimately improve retention across the children’s social work workforce.

However, while the ambition behind these proposals is clear and the intent to support newly qualified social workers (NQSWs) is positive, BASW England has serious concerns that the proposed changes may not deliver their intended outcomes unless they are accompanied by significant systemic reforms and adequate resourcing.

Based on our engagement with practitioners, including a recent focus group of social workers, practice educators, managers, our response sets out key areas of support, concern, and recommendations for improving the proposed model.

**1. Addressing root causes: Retention and recruitment crisis**

The PQS and SWIP cannot be viewed in isolation from the wider workforce crisis facing children’s social work in England. Our members report widespread and distressing examples of NQSWs being allocated highly complex cases without appropriate supervision, with many left overwhelmed, isolated, and at risk of burnout.

These proposals risk being perceived as tinkering at the edges or offering window dressing, rather than addressing the structural and systemic issues driving high attrition. The recruitment and retention crisis will not be resolved by changes to standards alone; it requires a fundamental shift in workload management, supervisory capacity, financial support for student social workers, and clear career pathway without having to progress into management to support retention of experienced staff.

Without a stable and experienced workforce to support NQSWs, the effectiveness of any induction programme, regardless of its content, is undermined. We urge the Department to place these standards within a wider strategy for workforce sustainability, including investment in experienced social workers, widening access to well-funded student bursaries, and supervision infrastructure.

**2. Over-complexity and risk of overwhelm**

The draft PQS includes 368 “knows” and “does” statements, which practitioners have described as unrealistically complex and unmanageable. While we acknowledge the importance of clarity in professional expectations, the sheer volume of statements is likely to result in confusion, duplication, and cognitive overload - for both NQSWs and their supervisors.

Rather than supporting professional development, such complexity may lead to heightened anxiety, perceived failure, and ultimately increased drop-out rates, particularly for neurodivergent practitioners or those already marginalised by current systems.

We strongly recommend that the Department:

* Streamline and prioritise the “knows” and “does” statements.
* Provide clear guidance on core mandatory elements.
* Introduce a flexible and proportionate assessment model.

**3. Gaps in values, knowledge, and existing framework**

Despite positive developments, such as a stronger emphasis on relationship-based and anti-discriminatory practice, the proposed PQS fall short in key areas when compared with the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF). Notably, they lack sufficient focus on:

* Theoretical knowledge and research literacy.
* Professional values and ethics.
* Social justice, rights, and economic wellbeing.

Our members have clearly told us that they would expect to see a stronger focus on Anti Racist and anti-oppressive practice.

These omissions risk reinforcing a transactional model of practice rather than the transformational potential of social work. We urge the Department to ensure greater alignment with the PCF, explicitly embedding these core domains in the standards to support a richer, holistic understanding of social work practice.

**4. Inadequate inclusivity: Disproportionate impact on marginalised practitioners**

We are deeply concerned that the current proposals may unintentionally exacerbate the existing well documented inequality within the profession. Global majority social workers and neurodivergent practitioners already face disproportionate challenges within the existing ASYE framework. Extending and intensifying these standards over a two-year period risk heightening these barriers.

We therefore call on the Department to:

* Conduct and publish a full Equality Impact Assessment (EIA).
* Engage with representative groups to shape inclusive implementation strategies.
* Provide reasonable adjustments guidance and dedicated support.
* Monitor and report on differential outcomes by protected characteristics.

Without clear mitigation strategies, there is a real risk that SWIP could become a gatekeeping mechanism that excludes, rather than includes, diverse social workers.

**5. Narrow scope and risk of fragmentation**

The current focus of the PQS and SWIP is exclusively on child protection roles within local authority children’s services. This scope is overly narrow and fails to account for the full range of children and family social work practice, including:

* Work with disabled children.
* Looked-after children and care leavers, including Fostering and Adoption practice.
* Contextual safeguarding and extra-familial harm.
* Social work roles in voluntary, community, and independent sectors.

Moreover, the development of a separate Induction Programme for children’s social workers that diverges from the current adult ASYE model risks fragmenting the profession. It may:

* Reduce career mobility between adult and children’s services.
* Create barriers for undecided students.
* Discourage new entrants from choosing children’s social work roles.

We recommend that the Department works with DHSC to develop a unified post-qualifying framework, applicable across all domains of social work practice, with tailored components for specific contexts.

**6. Student fatigue and the transition to practice**

Many new social workers enter the profession already exhausted and financially stretched, having juggled multiple jobs alongside demanding placements and academic study. Without reforming the financial and educational pressures placed on students, the ability of any PQS and SWIP to improve retention will be inherently limited.

The Department must engage with the whole career pipeline, including:

* Adequate bursaries and placement support, including the full payment of all travel expenses while on placement.
* Realistic student workload expectations.
* Smoother transitions into supportive first employment settings.

**7. Lack of alignment with other reforms and unrealistic role expectations**

The introduction of SWIP must be understood in relation to other ongoing policy reforms. We are particularly concerned about proposals, such as those within the Families First for Children programme, that would see social workers taking on lead child protection roles after just two years.

We do not believe the current PQS provides the necessary breadth or depth of experience to support such high-risk responsibilities.

We recommend a longer-term developmental trajectory, possibly aligned with the original vision of a five-year Early Career Framework (ECF), to ensure social workers are fully supported to progress into complex decision-making roles with appropriate support and only when they have reached sufficient maturity of practice.

**8. Manager and assessor capacity**

For SWIP to succeed, it requires not only engaged NQSWs but also well-supported managers and assessors. Current workforce conditions do not allow managers adequate time or capacity to fulfil complex supervisory or assessment roles.

We urge the Department to:

* Fund protected time for managers and assessors.
* Provide comprehensive training and guidance for managers and assessors.
* Offer a mentoring and peer support network for supervisors.
* Streamline evidence requirements to minimise unnecessary bureaucracy.

**9. Clarity on ASYE and non-Local Authority pathways**

The lack of clarity around the future of ASYE for social workers outside local authority children’s services is a serious concern. Many practitioners begin their careers in the voluntary sector, health, education, or as agency workers. A SWIP designed exclusively for local authority roles risks excluding a significant portion of the workforce. Additionally, we are concerned that this will lead to yet further fragmentation within the profession and limit career mobility between children and families and adult social work.

We request a clear statement from the Department on:

* The future of ASYE.
* Access to SWIP for non-LA roles.
* Portability of recognition across different employment contexts.

**10. Language, ethos, and co-production**

Language matters. We echo concerns about terms such as “intervention”, which can convey a deficit-based model, and “induction”, which may fail to capture the developmental, reflective nature of the programme.

We recommend adopting more relational and strengths-based language, such as “supporting,” “partnering,” or “enabling.” Furthermore, we call for co-production with practitioners and people with lived experience to ensure the standards reflect the values and ethos of social work.

**Conclusion and recommendations**

In summary, while we support the Department’s intention to improve early career development for children and family social workers, the current proposals require significant refinement. They must:

* Address structural issues in recruitment, retention, and funding.
* Be streamlined and made inclusive.
* Align with professional values and the wider workforce landscape.
* Be co-produced and piloted before national implementation.

We recommend:

1. **Simplifying the standards and reducing assessment burden**.
2. **Ensuring full alignment with the PCF and other national frameworks**.
3. **Publishing a detailed Equality Impact Assessment and mitigation plan.**
4. **Expanding scope to include all child and family social work roles and employers**.
5. **Reinstating a longer-term Early Career Framework**.
6. **Providing protected time, training, and support for managers and assessors**.
7. **Clarifying the future of ASYE and ensuring parity across settings**.
8. **Investing in the whole social work pipeline, from students to experienced staff**.

We remain committed to working with the Department to ensure any post-qualifying framework strengthens, not fragments, our profession, and delivers lasting improvement for social workers and the children and families they serve.