

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) – Equality Impact Assessment

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Introduction

Social Work England is the new, specialist regulator for social workers in England. Between 7 August and 17 October 2019, we held a public consultation on our proposed approach to continuing professional development (CPD).

This equality impact assessment sits alongside our consultation response. It is a written record that shows how we've taken care to eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote equal opportunities.

Outline of our approach to CPD

CPD is the reflection and learning activity that social workers undertake throughout their career to maintain and improve their practice. By undertaking and recording CPD, social workers demonstrate to us and to the public that they uphold our professional standards and continue to remain fit to practise. Meeting the requirement for CPD is one element of maintaining registration with us.

Working with social workers, people who use social work services, employers and others with an interest in social work, we've developed an approach to CPD that emphasises reflection and the impact that learning has on practice.

Our professional standard on CPD sets out our expectations on what social workers need to do to maintain their registration.

Part of our expectation is that social workers keep an up to date record of CPD in an online account. We've not specified an amount of CPD that social workers should do in the first year, but we would expect to see at least one learning activity. We encourage social workers to decide how much CPD to undertake, taking into account their personal circumstances, their learning needs and how they're practising.

At the point of registration renewal, social workers will need to confirm that they have met the professional standard for CPD. This is part of renewing their registration.

At the close of the registration renewal period, we'll check their online account to make sure they've recorded CPD during the year. At this point, they may be selected for validation. If they're selected, we'll look at their CPD activities in more detail. For our first year of regulation we won't be assessing the quality of CPD. Instead, we'll check whether the CPD shows how the activity has impacted on practice.

Consultation responses

Through our consultation, we asked respondents if they thought our proposed CPD process would have a positive, neutral or negative impact on people in different protected characteristics groups, and in what way. The responses have helped us to understand which groups respondents thought would be most impacted and consider areas for change and improvement.

What people said

Respondents mostly said there'd be a positive or neutral impact on groups with protected characteristics, often stating that all people will benefit from social workers meeting the required standard and recording their CPD.

Age and disability were the characteristics most frequently selected as being positively affected. Reasons included that having an online recording system may make it easier for disabled people to use assistive software to record their CPD and in a flexible format.

Some respondents thought the non-prescriptive approach to CPD activities would make it easier for people on extended periods of absence to maintain their registration, whilst others felt that those on maternity leave could struggle to demonstrate that they've met the CPD standard.

A few respondents voiced concerns relating to age, suggesting some social workers may need more support to use the new online account. However, others suggested that this should not be an issue in a profession that requires its workers to be able to use a computer effectively for their role.

Equality impact assessment

We're committed to monitoring and promoting equality across our organisation. We've reflected on the feedback from our consultation to assess both the positive and negative impacts that may arise as a result of our proposals.

As part of the equality impact assessment we found that social workers from some protected characteristic groups could be impacted negatively. These impacts related to:

The effect that maternity and disability may have on a social worker's ability to demonstrate that they meet the CPD standard and the potential effect this has on registration renewal.

The potential barriers to using our online account recording system for some groups.

These areas are set out below, along with the action we will take.

Registration renewal

Social workers with protected characteristics relating to maternity, pregnancy or disability may feel that they are negatively affected during registration renewal by having to demonstrate that they meet our requirement to undertake and record CPD.

Our approach to CPD is not prescriptive. We don't give guidance on what or how much CPD social workers should do. Instead, we ask social workers to demonstrate the professional standard relating to CPD (standard 4) in a way that suits them, their practice and their learning needs. We do expect to see how social workers have reflected on any learning they've undertaken and describe to us the impact this has had on their practice.

Our guidance on CPD makes clear that if a social worker thinks that over the course of the registration year, they won't be able to meet the CPD requirement, they should contact us so we can discuss their circumstances and options. As part of the discussion, we may ask the social worker to provide evidence of their personal circumstances. We'll review the information provided, let them know the outcome, and tell them what, if anything, they need to do.

At the close of the registration period, we will provide 21 additional days for CPD records to be updated. We extended this period from 7 days as a result of consultation feedback. Where no CPD has been recorded at the end of the 21day period, we'll contact the social worker to understand why this might be the case. While conditions on practice and removal from the register are available to us as the regulator, these would only apply as a last resort option when the social worker has not sufficiently explained why they have not met the CPD standard or an agreed condition relating to meeting the CPD standard.

If a social worker's personal circumstances mean they'll be away from practice for a significant period of time, meaning that they may not be able to demonstrate the CPD

standard, they may want to consider voluntarily removing themselves from the register. When they are ready to come back onto the register, they can contact us to discuss their circumstances and we may choose to waive the restoration fee in accordance with our rules.

Online recording system

Social workers with protected characteristics relating to age or disability may feel that they are negatively affected by having to record their CPD in our online account to demonstrate that they meet our requirement to undertake and record CPD.

Our registration rules set out that social workers must maintain an up to date record of their CPD to demonstrate that they're eligible to renew their registration each year. This should be recorded in our online account, which we believe is the easiest way for social workers to ensure that they can demonstrate that they meet the CPD standard.

We are committed to making our website accessible in accordance with our obligations¹. We want to improve the accessibility of our website and have already included many features to support access. We continue to look at making the website text as simple as possible to understand and we're working to optimise the accessibility of our website. If anyone needs information in alternative formats, we encourage them to get in touch.

Our guidance on CPD provides details on how to use the online account and makes it clear that if a social worker feels they are unable to record their CPD in this way, they should contact us as soon as possible to discuss their concerns

¹ Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018

Sign off

This equality impact assessment has been undertaken and signed off in accordance with Social Work England's responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty, as set out in the Equality Act 2010.

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