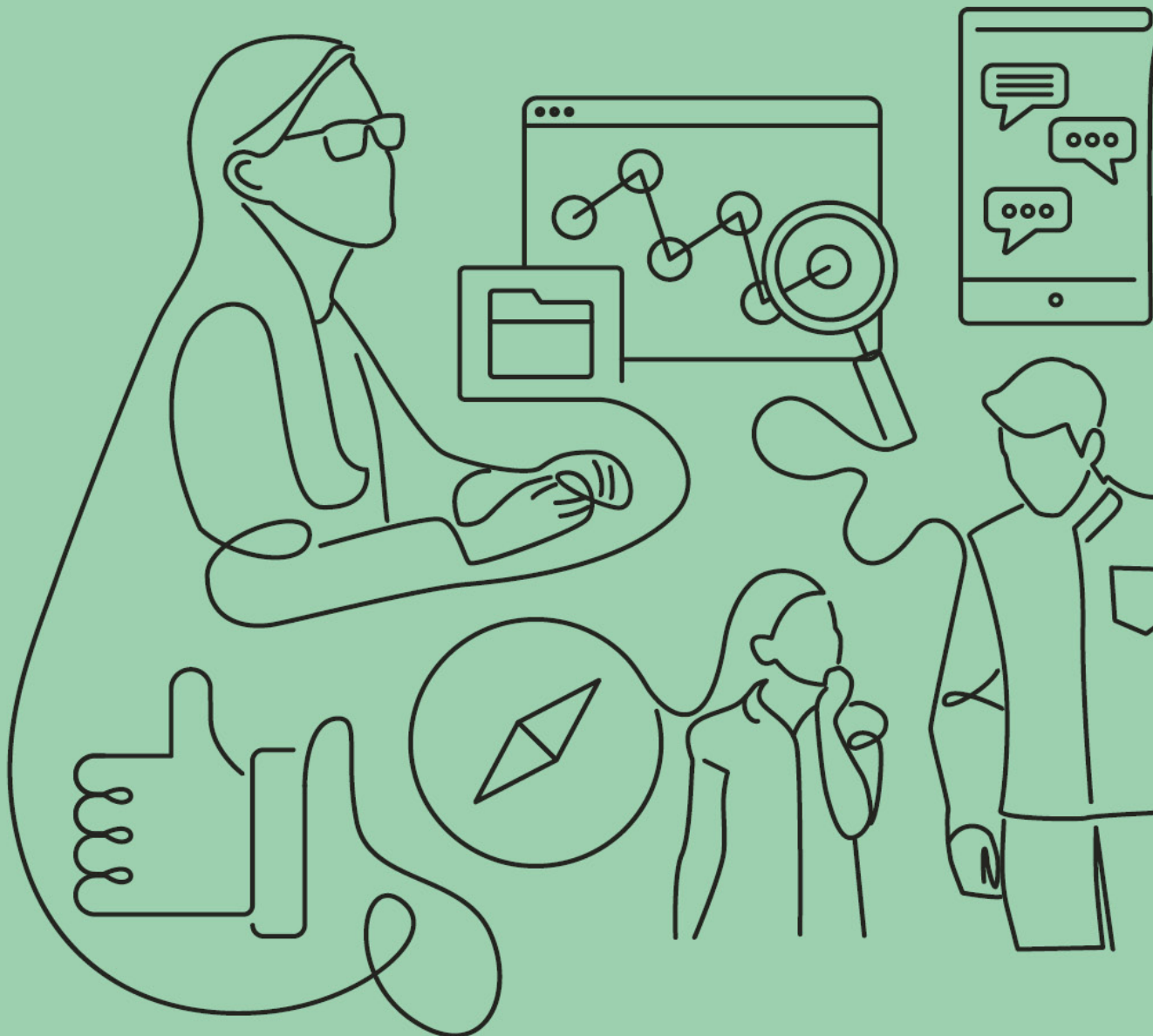


# Continuing professional development (CPD) consultation response

17 September 2021



# Introduction

As the specialist regulator for social workers in England, our purpose is to protect the public and set standards for social workers, so that people receive the best possible support whenever they might need it in life.

Continuing professional development (CPD) is the reflection and learning activity that social workers undertake to maintain and improve their practice. Our CPD requirements are an important part of our work to assure public confidence in the social work profession and uphold public protection.

Through our approach, we're keen to support a culture of regular reflective learning and recording, that has value to the social worker and is relevant to their individual, professional experience.

In May 2021 we launched a 12-week public consultation on our approach to CPD. The following is an overview of the consultation, including a summary of our activity, who responded and the feedback we received.

# How we consulted

We first discussed our thoughts on changes to our CPD process at 2 pre-consultation workshops in early 2021. These were attended by social workers, people with lived experience and representatives for national organisations.

The feedback from the workshops was broadly supportive of our proposals, and made clear that:

- reflection and impact on practice should remain the focus of CPD.
- a small increase in the amount of CPD required would be positive.
- the sector wants more direction on CPD from Social Work England, but social workers appreciate that CPD consists of a wide variety of activities.
- social workers are comfortable with the online CPD forms, but Social Work England should look at how to simplify them.
- peer discussions should be part of social workers' CPD reflections.
- social workers should be required to record more CPD if they do not meet our CPD requirements during review.

We used this feedback to develop proposals for changes to our CPD process. These proposed changes then formed the basis for our CPD consultation.

We offered a number of ways for people to feedback on our proposals. We:

- asked targeted questions in an online survey,
- encouraged feedback by email and post,
- held 10 public online events with people from across the country, including one for children and young people, and one for people with lived experience of adult social work,
- held 2 workshops with professional regulators, and
- consulted with our regional engagement leads.

## Consultation methodology

We received 618 responses to the consultation, 29 of which were from organisations. We counted, read and analysed every response we received.

In the online survey, we asked people to what extent they agreed with our proposals. Respondents could rank their level of agreement on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5

(strongly agree). The scale helped us to understand the extent to which people supported our proposals.

The survey also had space for respondents to write the reason for their scores and any additional comments.

As well as the survey, we collated and analysed feedback received from workshops, events, and by email. All of the consultation feedback was considered and formed the basis for our decision-making.

# Who responded?

Most individual respondents described themselves as coming from an adult or children's social care background. Most responses from organisations came from employers.

Individual respondents by role in social work:

- Adult social care - social worker: 216
- Children's social care - social worker: 145
- Other or not stated: 84
- Mental health services: 41
- Children's social care - other: 31
- Higher education institution/academia: 29
- Charity or non-governmental organisation: 16
- Adult social care - other: 13
- Local authority: 7
- Prefer not to say: 4
- Social Work Student: 2
- Person with lived experience: 1

# What you said

## CPD requirements

### Increasing the CPD requirement from one to 2 pieces

Respondents generally approved of our proposal to increase the required amount of CPD to 2 pieces recorded per year. The average approval rating was 3.32 out of 5.0.

We explored this further at our consultation events, where most attendees felt the increase was reasonable. This was echoed by the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS). Of those who disagreed, many did so because they thought it was too small an increase.

The British Association of Social Work (BASW) and UNISON disagreed with the increase, feeling it wasn't the right time, due to the pandemic.

Attendees at the event for children and young people felt that the current requirement of one piece per year was too low.

### Setting a theme for one piece of CPD

There were mixed views about the proposal to set a theme for one of the 2 pieces, with an average approval rating of 2.54 out of 5.0.

Some felt CPD should be unique to, and determined by the individual, whilst others felt that social work practice is too broad to set a meaningful theme for all.

Some thought a theme was a good way to address social worker requests for more guidance on what CPD to do, and to help improve practice where needed.

These views were echoed at the consultation events and by BASW and UNISON, with concern from UNISON that being prescriptive could discourage individual learning and development.

The Professional Standards Authority (PSA) supported the proposal, saying it will "enable CPD to be targeted at the areas of risk, in a way that is agile and proportionate".

Some attendees at the consultation events agreed they could see the benefits of setting a theme for a piece of CPD, though some felt this was more relevant for those early in their careers.

However, attendees at the event for adults with lived experience of social work said they found that experienced social workers could be more process-driven, and less focused on person-centred and relationship-based practice.

## Introducing a requirement for peer reflection

A third (32%) of respondents agreed with the proposed requirement for social workers to confirm they have discussed the impact of their learning with a social work peer or manager.

The most common theme amongst those who agreed was that peer reflection is helpful and adds value to the CPD process.

Generally, respondents agreed with the principle of peer reflection, stating that good practitioners already do this. However, they questioned the proposal to make it mandatory for every CPD record. Feedback from the events, survey and UNISON was that social workers can benefit from private reflection and may be less likely to record CPD if peer discussion was made mandatory for every record.

The PSA and ADCS supported the proposal, believing engagement with colleagues and managers on professional development is beneficial.

Though some BASW and UNISON respondents supported the proposal, most disagreed with the requirement, raising concerns about the impact it could have on busy social workers and their managers or peers, as well as the lack of training opportunities to facilitate peer reflection.

Nearly half (48.8%) of survey respondents agreed with the definition of a peer (a UK registered social worker). However, the most common concern was that social workers often work in environments where they are the only social worker and would therefore find it difficult to meet the requirement.

To address this issue, some respondents suggested that the definition of a peer could be extended to include other professions.

Overall BASW agreed that the peer should be a social worker, although their individual members provided a range of responses.

Some questioned why the definition didn't include 'interprofessional colleagues'.

## CPD recording

### Replacing the 2 online CPD forms with an improved single form

Currently, social workers can record their CPD using either a structured form, or an unstructured form, in their online account.

Respondents generally approved of the proposal to replace the 2 recording forms with a single form, with an average approval rating of 3.51 out of 5.0.

While some respondents felt content with the current approach, many found the proposed template simpler and easier to understand.

Others responded that the new form facilitates better recording of reflection and provides better guidance. This was supported by feedback at the consultation events.

UNISON supported the new form, finding it clear, simple and user-friendly.

Overall BASW took a neutral stance however their individual respondents provided mixed feedback, some preferring the flexibility to write their own reflection, others preferring the shorter form.

## CPD review

### Sampling method

Respondents generally approved of our proposal to take a more intelligent approach to selecting a sample for review. The average approval rating was 3.02 out of 5.0.

Most people preferred to keep the CPD review process as it is, as they felt it was fairer. Some respondents felt there may be a risk of indirect discrimination by introducing a more targeted sampling approach.

In some cases, respondents said they didn't understand the purpose of the proposal and asked for more detail on how the sample would be selected. These views were echoed in the feedback from UNISON and BASW.

Some survey respondents felt that a more systematic method of selection could be beneficial in targeting poor areas of practice, identifying common issues and training needs.

The PSA also supported targeted sampling, as they felt it would enable us to target groups of social workers based on evidence of risk.

### Outcomes for social workers given advice

We proposed that social workers who receive the outcome 'advice given' during CPD review should be asked to submit a new piece of CPD within 2 months.

Respondents generally approved, with an average rating of 3.44 out of 5.0.

Many respondents felt this was a fair and robust process and agreed that procedures need to be in place to address concerns over CPD. UNISON agreed with this, providing there was some flexibility for individual circumstances.



However, some respondents across the consultation were worried that it may add to the existing pressures in the profession. Some suggested a longer period, such as 3 months, would be more supportive and reasonable.

If the new piece of CPD does not meet our requirements, or no further CPD is submitted within the 2 month window, we proposed 2 options:

1. a social worker's CPD is assessed during the following renewal period and if it does not meet our requirements, the social worker may be given conditional registration; or,
2. the social worker is automatically included in the CPD review at the end of that registration renewal.

When asked which option they preferred, 53% of respondents preferred option 1, with many respondents saying it would create greater accountability, raise the level of professionalism in social work, and allow us to address issues sooner.

This was echoed by BASW and the PSA, with the latter feeling conditional registration is a robust, proportionate, and transparent tool to address non-compliance with CPD.

However, some respondents, including UNISON, felt option 2 was simpler, fairer, and less stressful, offering more time for social workers to complete CPD. Others opted for option 2 because they were concerned that option 1 would add to the pressures on social workers.

# What we will do

We have listened to, and carefully considered, all of the feedback, and will be implementing some of the proposed changes to CPD.

## Increasing the CPD requirement from one to 2 pieces, from December 2021

We were pleased to hear that many respondents felt the increase to 2 pieces of CPD was reasonable, and that many social workers are already recording more than the minimum requirement.

We will increase the CPD requirement to 2 pieces per year from 1 December 2021 but encourage social workers to record CPD once a quarter as good practice.

## Setting a theme for one piece of CPD, from December 2022

We will not set a theme for one of the pieces of CPD from 1 December 2021 but will look to introduce this requirement from 1 December 2022.

We feel the adoption of themes is worthwhile but want to take more time to gather additional intelligence. Further awareness of emerging concerns and areas for improvement in the sector, will inform our thinking on what themes to set.

Delaying this change until December 2022 gives social workers more time to adjust to the changes to the CPD process and is in line with our promise to take an incremental approach.

## Introducing a requirement for peer reflection, from December 2021

We listened to feedback on how CPD can be private. From 1 December 2021, we will introduce peer reflection, but instead of making it mandatory for all pieces of CPD recorded, it will be required for at least one piece.

Social workers will be required to confirm they have discussed, with a peer or manager, the impact that learning has had on their practice when recording CPD.

We will publish a list of accepted professionals who may act as the peer. This will be a comprehensive list that reflects the diverse and multi-professional landscape that many social workers operate in.

## Replacing the 2 online CPD forms with an improved single form, from December 2021

We were pleased to hear feedback that the proposed form was simpler and easier to understand and would facilitate better recording of reflection.

We will update the online account and provide a single CPD form. This new form will merge the features of the 2 current forms and retain the option to upload attachments.

This will allow a social worker to record:

- the type of CPD they have carried out,
- their reflection on learning,
- the impact on their practice,
- whether they carried out a peer reflection as part of that piece of CPD, and
- an overview of their peer reflection discussion if applicable.

### CPD review

For the proposed changes to CPD review, we want to take more time to consider the operation, details and impact of these changes before making a decision.

We will update the sector about this in due course.

# What happens next?

The consultation closed on 11 August 2021, but we are committed to ongoing conversation and collaboration with everyone who has an interest in social work.

We've carefully considered the feedback we received and made changes to the CPD process, which will come into effect from 1 December 2021. We'll publish amended guidance to support social workers through the process.

We'll continue to work with social workers, employers, people with lived experience and others with an interest in social work to develop and refine our standards, CPD process and approach.

This will allow us to make intelligence-led improvements so that CPD supports our work to raise standards of social work practice.

For more information, view the [CPD section on our website](#).

If you have any questions about the process, please contact us, [cpd.enquiries@socialworkengland.org.uk](mailto:cpd.enquiries@socialworkengland.org.uk).