

RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFT REVISED STANDARDS IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION IN SCOTLAND

January 2017

CEL CIS (Centre for excellence for looked after children in Scotland), based at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, is committed to making positive and lasting improvements in the wellbeing of Scotland's children living in and on the edges of care. Taking a multi-agency, collaborative approach towards making lasting change, CEL CIS works alongside leaders, managers and practitioners to break down barriers and forge new paths in order to change thinking and ways of working with everyone whose work touches the lives of vulnerable children and families. We welcome this opportunity to contribute to the consultation on the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) draft revised Standards in Social Work Education in Scotland (SiSWE). The learning standards in social work directly impact the workforce with whom we collaborate, and the children and young people we work on behalf of.

There are currently 1,782 social work students registered with the SSSC.^a These individuals are the workforce of the future, and it is crucial that the frameworks within which they learn, practice and are assessed are robust and up to date, so that service users are supported to the highest standards. There has been no formal review of the SiSWE since 2003, during which time there have been changes to policy, systems, service demand and demographics. It is noted that following their 2014 review, the Review of Social Work Education Group found that the SiSWE remain 'broadly fit for purpose' but needed to be revised to include an increased emphasis on:

- personal capabilities,
- the wellbeing and resilience of social workers,
- the role of social work in integrated settings, and

^a Information from search of the [SSSC register](#) on 17th January 2017

- supporting people to participate in decision-making processes.¹

We are pleased to provide a response to the consultation questions, based on our knowledge and understanding of the needs of children in and on the edges of care, care leavers, and the workforce which supports them.

Q – How well do the changes reflect current policy and practice developments?

Across a number of areas, the changes reflect current policy and practice developments well. Priorities identified by the Christie Commission as key to public service reform, such as designing services with individuals and communities, prevention, and early intervention are reflected within the new SiSWE.² For example, by emphasising practice in partnership with individuals, children, parents, families and extended families, carers, groups and communities, the new SiSWE articulates an expectation that students engage with a broader range of stakeholders than under the current standards. Similarly, the addition of the explicit language of early intervention and prevention, for example into Standard 2.1 is an important change.

A key message from the Christie Commission is the need for more effective joint working between public services. To address systemic defects, an overhaul of the relationships within and between public, third sector and private agencies responsible for designing and delivering public services is required. Whilst the new SiSWE effectively emphasises the need for partnership with service users, groups, communities and families, further emphasis on the importance of joined up services and partnership working with agencies would be a useful addition.

Standard 2.7 refers to promoting resilience to enhance wellbeing and reduce risks, which is closely aligned to the policy intentions of [Getting It Right For Every Child](#) (GIRFEC), the national approach to improving outcomes and supporting the wellbeing of children and young people in Scotland. In order to further align the SiSWE with GIRFEC, we would support further explicit reference to the concept of wellbeing.

Q – How clearly does the wording in the 'knowledge' column explain what students are expected to evidence?

Generally, the wording describes the knowledge expected of social work students clearly.

An area requiring more clarity is Standard 5.1, which requires students to have knowledge of 'the significance of digital literacy in planning and managing work programmes'. It would be helpful to clarify whether students are simply required to be aware of this fact, or to possess a particular standard of digital literacy.

Q – How clearly does the wording in the 'transferrable skills' column explain what students are expected to evidence?

The wording is clear in the majority of areas. The focus on interpersonal skills, and reflective and critical thinking throughout the SiSWE, including evaluating the effectiveness of one's own practice, is welcomed. This is particularly evident in the consideration of risk in Standard 3. Using reflection and critical thinking to balance rights and positive risk taking is a critical skill for students to develop. Given decision making and analysis of risk are some of the most complex and contentious areas of social work, reference to the use of supervision and reflection with a line manager would be an important addition here, as students and social workers should not work in isolation where there are concerns about risk.

There is a need for further clarity in some 'transferrable skills' areas. Standard 1.1 requires students use skills in gathering information from a wide range of sources, including 'social media'. This could raise significant ethical concerns if taken to mean accessing personal service user online profiles to gather information. Clarity is required regarding circumstances when social media might be used to gather information, and the purposes of doing so.

We are concerned that some of the wording in this column may encourage students to make value judgements in relation to service users' lives. For example, Standard 1.3 requires students to 'see how the lives of people could be better'. This could be more appropriately worded in terms of understanding the needs and wishes of service users, and understanding their own role in supporting them to achieve positive changes.

The requirement for demonstration of 'leadership' is an addition across a number of the SiSWE (2.5, 4.3, 4.4, 5.2), both in terms of challenging practice, and in terms of contributing to the development of other's practice. There should be further clarity about what is meant by displaying leadership in these skill areas. This would be a useful additional area of knowledge to include, so students are clear, for example, what the difference would be between *contributing* to the development of other's practice, and *demonstrating leadership* in doing so.

Q – How clearly does the wording in the 'competence demonstrated' column explain what students are expected to evidence?

Generally the wording is very clear throughout.

Some wording in Standard 1.2 could be improved; social work students are required to show competence in partnership working to 'negotiate' with service users their rights, entitlements and responsibilities. This wording portrays a sense of the student having a position of power in the giving of rights and entitlements. Clearer wording could reflect the need for students to support service users to understand and fully realise their rights, entitlements and responsibilities.

Q – To what extent do you think the revised SiSWE will equip qualifying social workers with the knowledge, skills and values needed for current practice?

To a large extent the revised SiSWE will equip qualifying social workers with the knowledge, skills and values needed for current practice. There could be additional clarity in some areas noted in this response, but in our view, the revised SiSWE reflect current policy and practice needs well. "Social work values" are explicitly mentioned a number of times within the SiSWE, and it is noted they appear as an over-arching concept in the values statement. There is a robust value base integrated into the SiSWE, however a clear articulation of what constitutes "social work values" would enable a clear, shared understanding to be held by students and practice assessors.

Q – Is there anything you think should be in the revised SiSWE which is not included?

We welcome the focus in Standard 2.3 on knowledge of theories of development and considering the impact of developmental delay, trauma and resilience across the lifespan. This is a critical area to practice with vulnerable children and their families,³ and rather than being solely contained within one section of the SiSWE, we consider this understanding to be overarching, and should be considered across all six Standards.

The importance of reflection and use of interpersonal skills are positive changes. In order for students to fully develop these skills, robust support and supervision are required. The use of supervision is crucial in the development of confidence and competence, critical reflection, analysis, and accountability. Although referred to in Standard 5.1, there should be regular reference to use of supervision throughout the SiSWE, in particular Standards 3, 4, 5 and 6. It should also be emphasised and reflected in the SiSWE that use of supervision is not only a 'competence', but also an important skill for development.

In addition to the updated wording within Standard 6, for example to take account of migration and asylum status, this Standard could usefully refer to the social, political and economic context. Social services are not provided in a political and economic vacuum. Students must develop critical reflection and skills to support to service users with the balance of rights, needs, wishes and possibilities within the prevailing economic context.

Finally, we feel the update to the SiSWE presents an opportunity to add depth to Standard 3, which has not been fully realised. As previously noted, decision making and analysis of risk are complex and contentious areas of social work. In 2006, the introduction of the [Key Capabilities in Child Care and Protection](#) placed an additional requirement for students to evidence their practice and understanding in relation to risks for children and child protection. The SiSWE recognises risk as inevitable at all stages of the lifespan, yet there is limited additional detail around what is required, in relation to either children or adults. This is an opportunity to streamline requirements for knowledge, skills and practice in relation to assessing and managing risk, and any relationship between the SiSWE and the Key Capabilities should be clearly articulated at this stage.

Thank you for providing us with this opportunity to respond. We hope the feedback is helpful; we would be happy to discuss any aspect in further detail.

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¹ SSSC (2016) [Review of Social Work Education Statement on progress 2015-2016](#), Dundee: SSSC

² Christie, C (2011) [Commission on the future delivery of public services](#), Edinburgh: Scottish Government

³ Furnival, J (2014) [Trauma sensitive practice with children in care](#), IRISS Insights:27, IRISS: Glasgow