

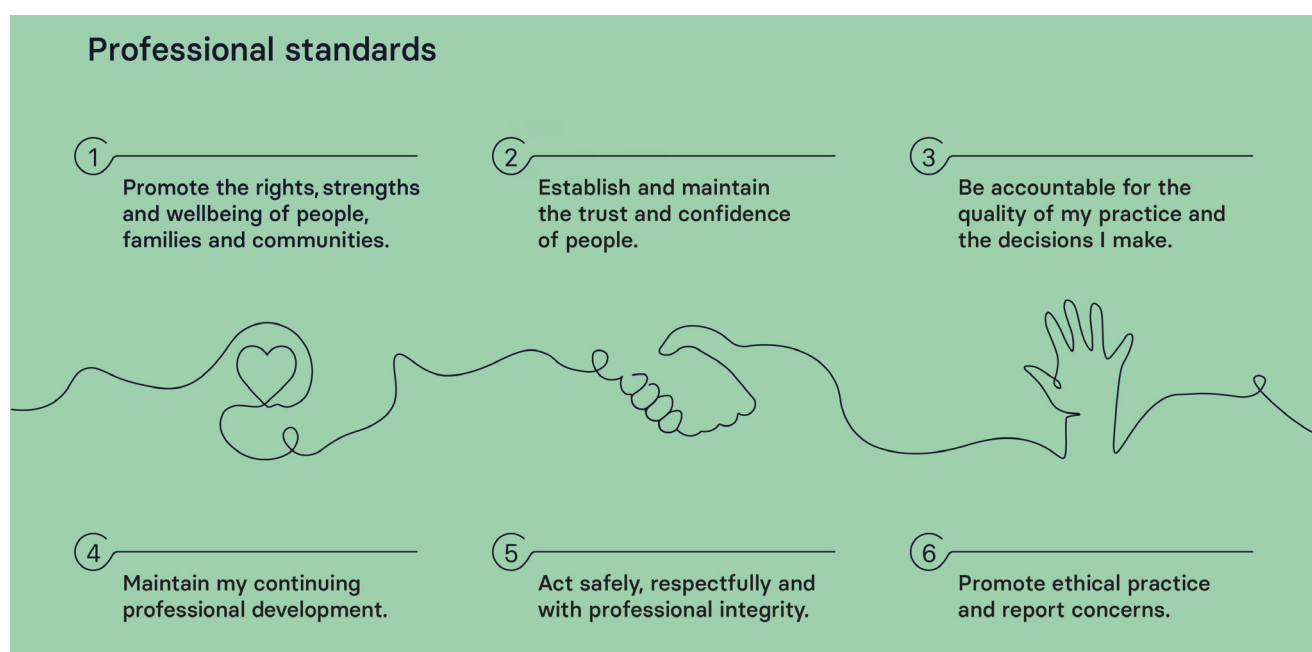


A guide to continuing professional development (CPD) for social workers

A history of CPD and social work regulation

Social workers were first regulated in 2001, by the General Social Care Council (GSCC). After a government review in 2010, the GSCC was dissolved. Subsequently, the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) became the regulator for social workers from 2012, which also regulates 15 other professions. Despite being a recognised profession for many years previously, 'social worker' only became a protected title in 2005 (Cromarty, 2018).

In 2017, under *The Children and Social Work Act 2017*, Social Work England was established as a non-departmental public body, operating at arm's length from the government. In December 2019, they took over regulation of social workers from the HCPC. Under this change, social workers were given their own profession specific standards, including the CPD standard. As a regulator, they are responsible for managing concerns about social workers' fitness to practise; setting standards for social work education, training and post-qualifying courses; and ensuring social workers undertake regular CPD. One of the purposes of regulation is to provide confidence and assurance that registered social workers maintain the necessary skills and knowledge to support people who need it throughout their lives.



(Image from [Social Work England](#), 2021)

What is CPD?

CPD is the reflection and learning activity that social workers undertake throughout their career to maintain and improve their practice. It is also required to maintain their registration under Social Work England's rules and regulations (YouGov, 2021, p.5).

Whilst the majority of social workers have a positive attitude towards CPD and its role in the integrity of social work, many also stated not having enough time and a lack of support from their organisation as a barrier to undertaking CPD. The most frequently recorded CPD is in the form of training, with other areas being from reflection on practice, direct work, and understanding policies and frameworks. It can be a common misconception that CPD must be met by attending training, when in fact CPD is anything that has supported your development and practice as a social worker (YouGov, 2021).



(Image from Social Work England, 2021)

CPD can have a number of benefits for social workers, including increased job satisfaction, improved practice, stress management and prevention of burnout, recognition and responsiveness to sector changes, self-awareness, improved partnership working, and career development (Maclean & Lloyd, 2013).

Examples of CPD include:

- > listening to podcasts
- > supporting peer review of research or social work resources, such as a Research in Practice publication
- > reading relevant **articles and research**
- > shadowing other people's practice or new experiences
- > discussion with or **supporting colleagues**
- > attending training, a webinar or an event
- > **reflecting** on your practice - this is mandatory for all aspects of CPD
- > responding to **feedback**
- > using **supervision** discussions to develop practice
- > developing **knowledge of current issues and policy** including **case law**
- > recording your learning
- > reflecting on **values and ethics** that influence your practice.

(Social Work England, 2021)

Standard 4: Maintain my CPD

The Social Work England CPD standard requires you to:

- > 4.1 Incorporate feedback from a range of sources, including from people with lived experience of your social work practice.
- > 4.2 Use supervision and feedback to critically reflect on, and identify your learning needs, including how you use research and evidence to inform your practice.
- > 4.3 Keep your practice up to date and record how you use research, theories and frameworks to inform your practice and your professional judgement.
- > 4.4 Demonstrate good subject knowledge on key aspects of social work practice and develop knowledge of current issues in society and social policies impacting on social work.
- > 4.5 Contribute to an open and creative learning culture in the workplace to discuss, reflect on and share best practice.
- > 4.6 Reflect on your learning activities and evidence what impact continuing professional development has on the quality of your practice.
- > 4.7 Record your learning and reflection on a regular basis and in accordance with Social Work England's guidance on continuing professional development.
- > 4.8 Reflect on your own values and challenge the impact they have on your practice.

By recording reflective CPD, you meet 4.6 and 4.7 of the CPD standard.

The Social Work England CPD Standard

How do I record CPD?

Social workers are required to record at least two pieces of CPD, however it is recommended that CPD is recorded around four times a year. At least one of these pieces of CPD needs to include **peer reflection**. Any CPD reflections should be anonymised if they could identify other people.

The deadline each year is 30 November for social workers to submit their CPD record. If this is not done, it is highly likely you will be removed from the register. You will not be able to practise as a social worker and will have to apply to be restored to the register if you wish to continue your practice.

Social Work England sends tailored emails which provide guidance as to which steps you need to follow.

If you are joining the register (rather than renewing) you may want to listen to our podcast: [CPD and registration: Joining the Social Work England Register](#).

When recording your CPD, you must include the following information:

- > Type of CPD - choose from a range of options to describe the type of CPD completed, for example 'on the job learning', 'supervision' or 'feedback from a person with lived experience or colleague.'
- > Short description: describe the activity and its relevance in one sentence
- > Date of CPD - the reflection or CPD must have been completed within the renewal year (1 December to 30 November).
- > What did you learn? Describe what you learnt from this activity in 250-500 words. You can refer to the CPD standards.
- > Reflecting on this example, how did it impact on the quality of your practice? This is key to recording CPD with Social Work England.

Peer reflection

At least one of the pieces of CPD should include peer reflection. Social workers need to describe what they have learnt from discussing the CPD activity described in the rest of the form with **another professional**. Many social workers will already be having these conversations in different ways, for example:

- > informal conversations with colleagues in the office
- > supervision with a manager
- > group supervision
- > reflective team meetings
- > discussion groups as part of an event.

When writing peer reflection, you should include what you have learnt and the impact that this conversation has had on your practice. All peer reflections should be anonymised; you should not record the name of the person you reflected with. However, you should include the person's professional role and a short description of how they interact with your role.

Recording CPD with Research in Practice

Once you have set up an account with Research in Practice, you can record your CPD using the '**Your CPD**' function. This allows you to keep an ongoing record of any resources or learning materials that have supported your professional development, with reflective comments. This can then be used within your CPD record for Social Work England.

You can use the comments that you have written to answer the questions on the Social Work England forms. You can use these comments as reminders of the CPD work that you have done, and you can also copy and paste them directly into the Social Work England form.

If you have additional reflections in '**Your CPD**' record which you did not include in the Social Work England forms, you can also download 'Your CPD' record and attach it to your CPD record on Social Work England's website. **For this to meet Social Work England requirements, you must also answer the questions on the Social Work England forms.**



Video on **recording your continuing professional development (CPD) on the Research in Practice website and uploading it to Social Work England.**

In the past, 2.5 per cent of social workers were randomly selected, after the registration window, to have their CPD reviewed by independent assessors. However, this is **currently suspended** while Social Work England review their approach to CPD. They will still complete routine checks to confirm compliance with requirements and ensure CPD records are unique.

Non-case holding social workers

As not all social work roles are in a frontline role or working directly with people who access services, CPD can still be achieved by:

- > reflecting on practice and how life experience impacts your work
- > keeping knowledge up-to-date
- > asking for feedback from workers who you support
- > engaging in peer or reflective supervision.



Read more from Social Work England

Social workers on extended leave

Social workers who have been on any **extended leave**, including unpaid, maternity, paternity, adoption or sick leave, still need to complete CPD to demonstrate your skills are up to date and you are prepared for returning to work. The examples given in this guide may support workers in this instance, through using and reflecting upon Research in Practice resources.

What can be used to support CPD?

There are a range of resources on the Research in Practice website that will support your practice and enable you to continue meeting the CPD standards above. We have not mapped each of our resources against each part of the standard – any of them could be relevant to meeting the standard depending on:

- > the context in which you used them to inform your practice
- > what you did more of / less of / differently based on your learning from the resource
- > the impact that it had on your practice, your organisation, or the children, families or adults you support.

The following are examples of the types of resource that could be used to support you to meet each area of Standard 4.

4.1 Incorporate feedback from a range of sources, including from people with lived experience of my social work practice.

All of our resources regularly incorporate the voice of children, families and adults with lived experience, as well as feedback from practitioners and other professionals and experts about what works in social care practice. Many of our video and audio resources provide insight into people's lives and stories. For example, **reflections on accessing social work records**, a **podcast about multi-generational co-housing** and a **podcast about young people's participation in services and research**. You can visit our **involving people** or **voice of the child** topics to access a range of resources to help you ensure you incorporate the voice of those you are working to support. In addition, our open access **Reflective supervision: Learning Hub** examines the role of practice supervisors in supporting direct practice skills. It includes sections on putting reflection at the heart of supervision, supporting critical analysis and emotional resilience and containment.

4.2 Use supervision and feedback to critically reflect on, and identify my learning needs, including how I use research and evidence to inform my practice.

We have a range of tools that you can use to help you do this, for example, the practitioner self-audit and learning needs analysis from the:

- > [Good assessment handbook](#) (Nosowska, 2022)
- > [Reflective supervision resource pack](#) (Earle et al., 2017)
- > [Analysis and critical thinking in assessment handbook](#) (Brown et al., 2014)
- > [Good decision-making in adult social care](#) (2025)
- > [Critical reflection and analysis: Learning pathway](#) (2025)

and a wide range of reflective questions and exercises within all our topic focused resources. In addition, our resource, [Using research - Tools to support evidence-informed practice](#) contains practice tools designed to support practitioners, managers and organisations to embed the use of research in policy and practice.



4.3 Keep my practice up to date and record how I use research, theories, and frameworks to inform my practice and my professional judgement.

In this [podcast](#), Dez Holmes, Director of Research in Practice, explains what evidence-informed practice is, why it's of particular relevance to the social care sector and what it means for practice and leadership.

For examples of how to keep your practice up to date, you could explore our [Case Law and Legal Summaries](#) which provide up-to-date information on recent judgements and the implications these have for practice.

4.4 Demonstrate good subject knowledge on key aspects of social work practice and develop knowledge of current issues in society and social policies impacting on social work.

Our resources are [structured by topic](#) to support your subject knowledge on key aspects of social care practice. They come in different formats, for example, events, webinars, publications and Practice Tools with varying levels of detail on the topic. Our [news and views section](#) will also support development of knowledge of current issues and social policies. Our [Learning Pathways](#) guide you through a key topic, supporting self-directed learning and linking a number of resources and reflective questions to support practice development.

4.5 Contribute to an open and creative learning culture in the workplace to discuss, reflect on and share best practice.

Using a range of the resources to support individual and team CPD and to promote being a learning organisation would help meet this part of the standard. Some of our resources include a facilitator guide, to support group training and development which include all the information you would need to run sessions for practitioners in your organisation. Topics for this include [defensible decision making](#), [working with trauma-experienced parents in children's social care](#), the learning organisation section in the [Social Work Organisational Resilience Diagnostic workbook](#) and [supervising practice](#). Using our resources, such as [Reflective supervision: Resource Pack \(2017\)](#) and [Organisational Audit for Evidence-informed Practice: Practice Tool \(2020\)](#) could help to evaluate and develop learning culture. You can use the resources to support peer supervision, action learning, journal clubs, reading groups, group supervision and peer mentoring. You could also attend a [Knowledge Exchange Workshop](#) to support the learning of others.

4.6 Reflect on my learning activities and evidence what impact continuing professional development has on the quality of my practice.

This is met by recording your reflection, and thinking about the impact of the CPD on your current or future practice. The 'Your CPD' entry on the Research in Practice site allows you to add comments and reflect upon the impact of the resource you have used. Many of our resources include reflective questions to support you to consider the impact on your practice, for example this [video](#) on strengths-based practice, this [Practice Tool](#) about life story work and this [podcast](#) about the perspective of a family with lived experience of homelessness, housing and social care.

4.7 Record my learning and reflection on a regular basis and in accordance with Social Work England's guidance on continuing professional development.

This is met by recording your reflection, and thinking about the impact of the CPD on your current or future practice. The 'Your CPD' entry on the Research in Practice website allows you to add comments and reflect upon the impact of the resource you have used. You can also expand the size of this box by clicking and dragging on the bottom right-hand corner.

4.8 Reflect on my own values and challenge the impact they have on my practice.

We have several tools to support this. Try the Values and ethics module in our [Critical reflection and analysis Learning Pathway](#) which supports reflection on how our values influence how we see and make sense of a child/family or adult's situation. Many of our resources also support you to explore equity in social care work, for example, video learning resources on [promoting anti-racism in children's social care](#) and on [Intersectionality and older people](#).

Know your CPD style

Every social worker will have a different style and approach to how they complete and record CPD. By continuing to practice and respond to the needs of those with lived experience, you are likely to be completing CPD as you naturally develop in your role. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, every social worker had to respond to new guidance, policies, and different ways of working such as undertaking remote visits, attending virtual or hybrid court hearings, completing shorter home visits with PPE, and managing workload and self-care when working from home.

Some social workers reported that they undertook CPD to help them to deal with the pandemic and others that CPD had helped them reflect on their experiences and respond to the challenges. As well as the pandemic, social workers reflected upon societal matters such as Black Lives Matter and Me Too (YouGov, 2021). These changes, personal development and reflections can also be used as **evidence of your CPD**. It can be difficult to take the time to recognise, reflect and record this as CPD, so it is important that you find your own ways to regularly consider what CPD you have undertaken.

Top tips for recording CPD

- > Try to record one piece of CPD every payday.
- > Have a page in a notebook/diary/phone note to have a reminder of training, research, peer support or reflections you have undertaken.
- > Look back over your diary at training you have attended or work you have undertaken and the impact this had on your practice.
- > Set recurring calendar reminders.
- > Set aside protected CPD time to read a resource or watch a webinar, etc.
- > Record the CPD straight after completing it.
- > Use the prompts from Social Work England and Research in Practice, through emails/bulletins or follow on social media for reminders and guidance on CPD.
- > When you have made a change to your practice, make time to reflect on why you did this and what the impact has been.
- > Use case, reflective and group supervision where you have thought about positive practice moments, challenges or learning.
- > Use a team meeting, lunch time learning session or staff event as time for peer reflection, to share new research and discuss practice learning.
- > If you are a manager, do you support your staff to have protected time to undertake and record CPD or have it as part of regular supervision discussions?
- > Sign up to bulletin emails for short, digestible information on new research and themes in social work. To subscribe to the Research in Practice bulletin, **login to your account** and select 'Contact preferences' on your account page.
- > Have a CPD file with any certificates from training, feedback from people you have worked with or use the '**Your CPD**' function with your Research in Practice account to keep a record and reflections of resources that have supported your development.

Recognising the impact

It is essential that you reflect on the impact of any learning and CPD on your practice, including those you work with. While these positive changes and learning experiences may be through formal learning, development in your practice may occur through reflection and recognition of changes you can make to your self-care that have a positive impact on your practice.

The **Social Work Organisational Resilience Diagnostic (SWORD)** provides senior leaders with an accessible, research-informed diagnostic tool and workbook to understand, build and sustain resilience in their organisations. This includes 'quick wins' and more in-depth strategies to create a workplace climate that builds capacity for resilience and wellbeing.

At an individual level, the **Supporting practitioner wellbeing: Practice Guide** aims to support wellbeing in social care practice. Drawing on up-to-date research and resources, this guide will help you develop an action plan and assemble a personalised toolbox of strategies that will support your physical, mental and social wellbeing. This includes tips and tools for improving work-life balance:

How to improve your work-life balance

- > Have regular breaks away from your desk: this will get you into the habit of switching off.
- > Get up and move around throughout the day: this will improve your focus and avoid musculoskeletal problems.
- > Get outside in the daylight: if possible, adjust your working hours so you can take a daily walk.
- > Have an unwinding ritual: for the last 30 minutes, only start jobs that you can complete easily; spend the time on digital housekeeping, or clearing your desk.
- > Write a daily 'exit' list: jotting down your tasks for the next day will help clear your mind and provide a sense of resolution. Reviewing the list the next day will mentally prepare you for the tasks ahead.
- > Find a 'corridor' between work and home: people who do emotionally demanding work need to 'decompress' physically and mentally before moving into their personal life.
- > Consider how you can transition between work and home: change your clothes, have a shower, cook a meal, or go for a run. Mindful walking can be a good way to switch off (see above).
- > Be mindful: when you are at work, focus on work, but when you are at home and with family and friends, be fully present mentally as well as physically.
- > Find a restorative place: spend 15 to 20 minutes somewhere you feel happy and relaxed. This could be a favourite chair or a place in the garden. Alternatively, try guided imagery, which is a type of focused relaxation or meditation where you concentrate on a specific scene, event, or object using your five senses (see Scott, 2020) or progressive muscle relaxation, a technique that involves tensing and relaxing each muscle group in turn in order to release tension (Cuncic, 2020).
- > Disconnect from technology: this will help you switch off and recoup your energy.
- > Use your diary to schedule activities that you enjoy: planning your leisure time well in advance will ensure you have opportunities to switch off.

Kinman, 2022, p. 16

Responding to feedback

Standard 4.1 asks that you incorporate feedback from a range of sources, including from people with lived experience of your social work practice. This could be in the form of formal feedback that you have asked for, audits, comments in an official complaint or compliment, or direct feedback in the moment from someone you are working with.



See the **guidance on feedback from Social Work England**.

Supporting CPD as a manager

Feedback from social workers has indicated that many would like more support with their CPD (YouGov, 2021). Promoting reflective learning and ensuring this is happening in practice, not just theory, supports workers in critically exploring their practice (SWORD, 2022). Providing opportunities for this reflective learning supports a learning culture, avoids blame and scapegoating, and learns from mistakes or poor outcomes. Not only does this support organisational practice and wellbeing, but this can be an important contribution to the CPD of staff.

CPD to support retention

Research (Cook et al., 2022) shows that experienced staff supporting the development of colleagues can support worker retention and wellbeing. This supports the experienced worker to also build their own skill base and sense of purpose, which sustains them during challenging moments in their careers.

Retaining experienced social workers: **Video learning resources**.

This **Strategic Briefing** supports organisations to promote CPD opportunities tailored to the needs of experienced social workers, supporting career development:

Strengthening the workforce - Retention in social work: Strategic Briefing (2024)

Recommendations for support include:

- > time off in lieu is allowed where CPD is undertaken outside of working hours
- > protected time is given for CPD
- > funding is provided for external courses
- > flexibility to undertake CPD outside of the day-to-day role
- > high quality reflective supervision
- > caseload support when undertaking CPD
- > managers valuing CPD. (YouGov, 2021)

The SWORD tool (2022) suggests recognising ‘sparkling moments’ in practice, supporting workers resilience. Exercises such as these support CPD learning and reflection, as well as being used in a team and supporting the learning and development of others. Social workers could use this to structure peer reflection and write about it in their CPD record. SWORD (2022) also promotes the sharing of success stories to celebrate achievements and embed learning, this helps workers feel valued, but can also be important for their own development and to reflect upon for their CPD.

The **Reflective supervision: Learning Hub** has a wide range of open access resources to support supervisors across both children’s and adults’ social care.

The **Supervisor Development Programme** has a range of resources to support supervisors in adult social care, for example:

- > **Tools** to support practice supervisors to explore and reflect on different areas of practice.
- > A **guide** to provide a structured way to use the resources to develop as a practice supervisor.

Box 2.5: Celebrating success: The sparkling moments technique

One person (A) asks the other person (B) a series of questions:

- > What did you do when you were you ‘at your best’?
- > What skills, knowledge and attributes did you use?
- > How did you feel?

Person A listens carefully and notes down the skills, knowledge and attributes that Person B describes, as well as any key themes or behaviours that emerge from their description.

When Person B has finished speaking, Person A should provide feedback on the specific skills and attributes that have emerged. They then ask Person B:

- > What have you learnt about your key skills?
- > How could you use these to manage a problem you are experiencing right now?
- > What steps could you take to maximise the opportunity for more experiences like this?

Participants then swap roles, and Person B asks the same questions of Person A.



CPD reflective questions

- > What have been the most challenging and rewarding moments in your role in the past year? What did you learn from these experiences?
- > When you reflect on these, is there anything that you have or could change from this experience? For example, if there was a piece of work which you felt proud of, have you made a conscious effort to ensure this is embedded in your practice? Or have you changed your practice in response to feedback or a difficult moment?
- > Think about some feedback you have received professionally in the last year. This may have been formal, from a colleague or supervision, or more informal through a discussion with someone you are working with. What was your response to this? Did you reflect on this and do anything differently as a result?
- > Have you supported a colleague with their own practice? This may have been giving support and advice to a student or member of staff who you mentor, or shared some learning from research or your own practice with a colleague when they have found something difficult.
- > How has supervision supported your development? Have you had a conversation which challenged your way of thinking or learning that you have put into practice?
- > What resources, research or news have you read that you have considered in relation to your social work practice? Have you attended any training or watched a video that has influenced your practice?
- > How do you respond to stress and difficult situations? Have you had to make changes in your approach to this to support your self-care? This may have been setting yourself boundaries of what time you will check emails or manage your working hours, how you let your supervisor know when your workload is becoming unmanageable, or how you respond and provide self-care when you have had a challenging day.
- > If you are in a management role, do you support your team or organisation to have protected time to undertake and record CPD? What do you do to keep your own skills up-to-date?

Key message and learning

- > Reflection on the impact of the CPD on your practice is essential. What have you done, or what will you do differently in response to the CPD?
- > Focus on quality over quantity – guidance on the form suggests 250-500 words for each of the main responses.
- > Think about what has influenced your practice other than training – this may be a peer discussion, feedback from someone you work with or something interesting you have read.
- > Attachments and ‘proof’ of CPD are not required, they can be added, but this is to support rather than replace the required reflection.
- > Try to complete and record CPD four times a year or every three months.
- > Work out what supports you to complete and record your CPD, including completing CPD that you **learn from and enjoy best**.
- > Ensure your CPD record for each renewal period only includes examples of CPD undertaken in the current renewal period, which runs from 1 December to 30 November.
- > Anything outside of this time scale will not count. However, if you attended training outside of this timeframe, but reflected and implemented learning from this during the current renewal period, so long as you use this date, this can be used.

(YouGov, 2021)



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Supporting resources

Videos

CPD recording, registration and regulation: resources and guidance

CPD - It's more than just training

How to record your CPD with Research in Practice

Podcasts

A CPD conversation with Social Work England: Reflecting on learning (2023)

CPD and registration: Joining the Social Work England register (2024)

Social Work England

What counts as CPD

CPD examples

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