Irish Association of Social Workers

Cumann na hÉireann um Oibrithe Sóisialta

Submission to Stakeholder Consultation on Continuing Professional Development: Standard and Requirements for social workers

Introduction

The Irish Association of Social Workers (IASW), founded in 1971, is the national organisation of professional social workers in the Republic of Ireland. This submission has been informed by the views of the Board of the Association and members. The IASW welcomes the CPD Framework and the statement that "CPD is an important component in the continued provision of safe and effective services for the benefit of service users".

Although the document is useful and clear, it has a number of deficits as a framework for social workers. It remains a general framework and is underdeveloped to respond to the needs of the profession in relation to a number of core professional needs. Specifically, those areas requiring further attention and development are

- Professional supervision. The social work profession takes the view that a supervisory relationship supports and strengthens reflective practice and is a core element of professional development.
- Ensuring minimum standards of professional development across a range of core areas. It is essential that social workers are required to develop knowledge and skills in specified core areas of social work practice. This requirement is not in the document and is a key omission.

1. Do you think the Social Workers Registration Board Standard and Requirements for Continuing Professional Development is clear and easy to understand?
Yes

2. All registrants are required to undertake CPD as a condition of their registration. The **CPD standard** will be set out in the Social Workers Registration Board Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics. Under this Code a social worker must:

Keep your professional knowledge and skills up to date.

Each registrant must:

   a) *Ensure that your knowledge, skills and performance are of a high quality, up to date and relevant to your practice;*

   b) *Participate in continuing professional development (CPD) on an on-going basis by identifying your learning needs, making a personal learning plan, implementing the plan and reflecting on the learning you gained from the CPD activities;*

   c) *Maintain clear and accurate records of your CPD and submit your records for audits of compliance when requested by the Social Workers Registration Board;*

   d) *Comply with the Social Workers Registration Board's CPD requirements.*

Is the **CPD standard** clear and easy to understand?

Yes

3. **& 4**. To comply with this CPD Standards the Social Workers Registration Board have outlined their proposed **CPD requirements** as follows:

    a) *A registrant must engage in a range of CPD activities on an on-going basis.*

    b) *A registrant must complete 60 CPD credits in each 24-month cycle.*

    c) *A registrant must demonstrate that their CPD activities are relevant to their professional role and mindful of current and future practice. CPD is based on a self-directed review of their knowledge, skills, performance and professional qualities in the context of their professional practice*

    d) *A registrant must maintain an up to date CPD portfolio. The CPD portfolio must include:*

        – *Description of current professional role and practice setting*
        – *Personal learning plan*
        – *Record of CPD activities*
        – *Reflections on a number of CPD activities*
        – *Evidence of undertaking CPD activities.*

    e) *A registrant must, upon request from the Social Workers Registration Board, submit their CPD portfolio (which must be their own work and supported by evidence) for periodic audits of compliance with the CPD standard and requirements.*

Are the CPD requirements clear and easy to understand?

Yes

What are you views on the proposed requirements for CPD?

Aspects of the CPD requirements need further development if they are to meet the needs of the profession.

The Framework should specify that registrants need accrue minimum points in a number of core areas of CPD to maintain the standards, ethics and performance of the profession. As it stands, the Framework does not ensure that social workers engage in continuous professional development across a number of core areas. We suggest that this can be achieved by categorising CPD activities, registrants required to acquire a minimum number of CPD points in each area. For example, the categories of CPD activities recognised by the IASW CPD policy are:

1. Supervision

2. Skill development and gaining new knowledge and information

3. Contributing to the development of professional social work knowledge and practice

The requirement could be redrafted to read: A registrant must engage in a range of CPD activities across a number of broad categories on an ongoing basis and acquire a minimum number of CPD points in each category as specified by their Registration Board. As currently structured, it is not made explicit that engagement in supervision is not an option – the Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics for Social Workers clearly states that "you should seek in and engage in supervision in professional practice on an on-going regular basis".

While self-directed review is important, equally important for the social work profession is review of professional development needs in relation to service user needs and in response to the organisational context in which the social worker operates. The plan needs to be formulated in conjunction with professional line management and signed off by same (where this structure exists).

Although registration is an individual responsibility, some responsibility in relation to supporting registrants to meet the requirements of CPD should be with social work employers and this principle needs to be reflected in the Framework document. Most social workers work in state agencies and many social work duties involve carrying out the statutory functions of those agencies as delegated by the employer.

The IASW are of the view that the requirements for CPD in this section need additional clarification and specification.

5. Is the explanation of the stages of the **CPD process** clear and easy to understand? **Yes.**

The stages of the CPD Process are clear and easy to understand although there is room for increasing clarity in relation to a number of points.

As stated above, the Framework should specify that registrants need accrue minimum points in a number of core areas of CPD to maintain the standards, ethics and performance of the profession. We suggest that this can be achieved by categorising CPD activities into a number of areas, registrants required to acquire a minimum number of CPD points in each area.

It would be useful to specify that the eight reflective practice reports required as an element of the CPD portfolio are categorised into the three core areas with a minimum number of reflective practice reports in each area.

    1. Supervision

    2. Skill development and gaining new knowledge and information

    3. Contributing to the development of professional social work knowledge and practice

4. The proposed process for registrants when undertaking their CPD is set out in a number of stages with r*eflection an integral component to each stage:*

> i.   *Review*
> ii. *Plan*
> iii. *Implement*
> iv. *Demonstrate (planned activities and unplanned activities)*

Are each of these requirements clear and easy to understand?

	Yes	**No**	Comment
i. Review	*		
ii. Plan	*		
iii. Implement	*		
iv. Demonstrate	*		

The IASW welcomes the reference in the reviewing and planning stages (1 and 2) on organisational context and the focus on consulting with an employer, manager, supervisor or colleagues. However, an increased emphasis on the role of managers/supervisors in supporting professional social work practice is essential.

The section on review lacks explicit reference to the importance of considering and referencing the knowledge and skills base as well as the theoretical frameworks underpinning the profession. For example, assessment and implementation of recovery-oriented care plans, motivational interviewing, strengths-based perspective, crisis intervention skills. Also absent from the documents suggested useful to review, are inquiries and reviews in the individual's field of work and those findings specific to the social work profession. It is crucial that documents relevant to professional practice are included in the list of documents suggested as useful to refer to.

Stage 4 details the reflection stage in the learning cycle and from the perspective of the IASW, has one major omission, which is professional supervision from a person of the same profession. The IASW consider it essential that professional supervision is included in this section. Professional supervision an essential component of CPD, it is an essential component for the social work profession.

Professional supervision refers to the arrangement for the review of work and the development of knowledge and skills which meet professional development needs and

accountability requirements which ensure safe, quality and effective services are delivered.

5. The **CPD portfolio** is the means by which a registrant will maintain a record of their CPD throughout each 24 month cycle. The portfolio has five elements:

   1. *Professional Practice and Practice Setting*
   2. *Personal Learning Plan*
   3. *Record of CPD Activities*
   4. *Reflections on CPD Activities*
   5. *Evidence of CPD Activities.*

Are the requirements for the portfolio clear and easy to understand?

	Yes	No	Comment, if necessary
1. Professional Practice and Practice Setting	*		
2. Personal Learning Plan	*		
3. Record of CPD Activities	*		
4. Reflections on CPD Activities	*		
5. Evidence of CPD Activities.	*		

6. Do you think the CPD portfolio, as proposed, is an appropriate way for registrants to maintain their CPD records on an ongoing basis and document their compliance with the CPD requirements? **Yes**

1. Professional Practice and Practice Setting

The stated purpose of this section is to enable CPD assessors appreciate the professional setting and role of the registrant so as to enable them assess how the CPD activities selected and undertaken are linked to the registrant's professional role and work. The IASW is of the view that increasing the role of the line manager (where in place) will decrease the need for practice setting details and make it easier for CPD assessors to establish the relevance of CPD activities undertaken.

For example, line managers could be requested to sign off on each CPD activity to verify that the activity is appropriate to the individual registrant's professional development needs. Such involvement by line managers would also increase awareness among line managers of the need to support employees who are registered professionals to engage in relevant CPD activities in terms of supervision, time off, funding and expenses. A key concern expressed by our members is the lack of employer support, particularly with regard to granting time off to engage in training, attend conferences, workshops and courses or to engage in research.

2. Personal Learning Plan
It may be more accurate to rename Professional Development Plan.

4. Reflections on CPD Activities
As per our previous point, would be useful to specify that the eight reflective practice reports required as an element of the CPD portfolio are categorised into the three core areas with a minimum number of reflective practice reports in each area.
  1. Supervision
  2. Skill development and gaining new knowledge and information
  3. Contributing to the development of professional social work knowledge and practice

7. To monitor compliance with the scheme a random selection of registrants from each profession will be required to submit their portfolio for audit at the end of each 24-month cycle. Are the stages of the proposed audit process clearly presented and easily understood? **Yes**

8. The criteria that will be used by the assessors when they are assessing CPD portfolios are set out in the document. Do you think the assessment criteria will act as a useful prompt for registrants on how to ensure their CPD portfolio meets the CPD requirements? **Yes**

Some of our members requested further clarity on how substantial core activities in social work education, especially practice teaching, are recognised. Some CPD does not easily lend itself to being measured in hours and represents a specific block of CPD activity.

9. Appendix 1 presents a list of CPD activities and gives examples of appropriate supporting documentation for each activity. This list, whilst not exhaustive, is intended to guide and assist registrants when planning and undertaking CPD. Do you think this list is useful in helping you complete your CPD? **Yes/No Please elaborate on your answer in the space below**

The appendix needs further expansion and development particularly with regard to supervision and practice teaching. It would be useful to increase examples of CPD activities which involve supervision, both in terms of providing and receiving professional supervision and consultation as well as peer consultation between managers/principal social workers.

The IASW also request that the examples given be organised under the three categories of CPD already suggested.

In relation the category of mandatory training, it is important that mandatory training considered CPD is relevant to the skills needed to be competent to work in a particular setting and/or relevant to social work practice.

10. In relation to Appendix 1 please list, using the box below, the activities you feel we may have missed**.**

- Receiving regular, ongoing professional supervision
- Receiving professional social work consultation
- Providing professional social work consultation/supervision
- Peer consultation between managers/principal social workers
- Group supervision facilitated by a social work line manager or senior social worker
- Practice based research projects
- Practice teaching placement for social work students
- Social work tutor to students

11. Appendix 2 presents templates for each of the five elements of the CPD portfolio. These templates are designed to aid and guide the registrant in the process of building and maintaining their CPD portfolio. A registrant can choose to use these templates or if there is an alternative template available from their professional body, employer or other representative body this may also suffice. Templates are provided for:
1. Professional Practice and Practice Setting
2. Personal Learning Plan
3. Record of CPD Activities
4. Reflections on CPD Activities
5. Evidence of CPD Activities.

Do you think the templates provide a useful resource for registrants undertaking CPD?
Yes

We welcome the templates as non-prescriptive – they are useful as guides. As the Framework allows registrants to use other templates that are already in existence, such as those developed by their professional bodies, this allows the Framework to be flexible enough to respond to registrants needs.

12. The document facilitates the registrant maintaining their CPD records in hard copy or electronically, and to use the templates provided or alternatives provided by professional bodies, employers or other relevant bodies. Have you any comment on this flexibility regarding CPD records?

The provision of hard copy and electronic records will facilitate social workers to use whichever format best suits them.

13. The Social Workers Registration Board endeavours to support its registrants as much as possible throughout the implementation of CPD. Below is a list of suggested support mechanisms that may be beneficial.

Please rate on a scale of 1-5 each of the options below on how beneficial you think each of the activities would be in helping registrants understand their CPD responsibilities.

- **Information workshops**

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all beneficial	Somewhat beneficial	Neither beneficial or not beneficial	Moderately beneficial	Extremely beneficial

- **Guidance videos**

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all beneficial	Somewhat beneficial	Neither beneficial or not beneficial	Moderately beneficial	Extremely beneficial

- **Dedicated CORU point of contact for CPD queries**

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all beneficial	Somewhat beneficial	Neither beneficial or not beneficial	Moderately beneficial	Extremely beneficial

- **Printed guidance booklets**

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all beneficial	Somewhat beneficial	Neither beneficial or not beneficial	Moderately beneficial	Extremely beneficial

21. What other supporting document could CORU provide?

A completed sample portfolio would be useful

22. Have you any other comments you would like to make?

The definition of professional supervision needs to be amended to specify that ideally supervisors need also be registered social workers.