

# NSPCC Cymru/Wales

**Response to:**

**Consultation on the Qualification Framework for the  
Degree in Social Work in Wales**

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Registered charity number: 216401 and  
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**About us:**

**The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) aims to end cruelty to children in the UK by fighting for their rights, listening to them, helping them and making them safe.**

**We share our experience with governments and organisations working with children so together we improve the protection of children and we challenge those who will not learn and change. We campaign for better laws and we educate and inform the public to improve understanding about child abuse.**

**We provide national services such as ChildLine and our Helpline for concerned adults to provide support for all children. Our local services focus on the most acute forms of abuse and the most vulnerable, highest risk children working in areas such as sexual abuse or children under one so that we can bring help, advice and treatment to children at risk or those who have been abused.**

## Introduction

NSPCC Cymru/Wales welcomes the opportunity to comment on the proposed Qualification Framework for the Social Work Degree in Wales.

The NSPCC in Wales currently employs 25 qualified social workers. They deliver services to vulnerable children and young people in three Service Centres across Wales in Cardiff, Swansea and Prestatyn. The NSPCC Strategy to 2016 identifies seven priority themes, around which our services currently focus. The themes are:

- Sexual abuse
- Neglect
- Physical abuse in high risk families
- Children under one
- Looked after children
- Children from BME communities
- Disabled children

The NSPCC is an independent social work agency. The Children Act 1989 gives the NSPCC the power to make certain applications to the family court to safeguard the welfare of children at risk of significant harm. The NSPCC is the only charitable organisation with this power.

## 1. Introduction

### Does the Introduction describe the context for the social work degree effectively and appropriately?

NSPCC Cymru/Wales welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Consultation on the Qualification Framework for the Social Work Degree in Wales. We feel that the introduction appropriately describes the context for the social work degree in Wales.

*Sustainable Social Services for Wales: A Framework for Action* (Welsh Government, February 2011) sets out the expectations for the social care workforce in Wales: "Professional, competent, confident and safe social workers are essential to providing excellent front line social services in Wales".

We support the emphasis on the contribution made by front line staff to the delivery of social care services in Wales. This is echoed by the recent Continuing Professional Education and Learning (CPEL) proposals which seeks to create a career structure, which enables social workers who want to stay in frontline practice to progress. In our response to the recent consultation on these proposals, we welcomed the introduction of this new pathway which creates opportunities to retain experienced practitioners in the field of practice rather than having them move into management to secure career development. This should ensure that less frontline child protection posts are staffed by inexperienced workers and should lead to better protection for vulnerable children and young people.

We agree that robust and comprehensive training through the Social Work Degree is essential to secure a confident and competent frontline workforce which is able to fulfil the requirements set out in *Sustainable Social Services: A Framework for Action*.

There is greater potential to protect vulnerable children if there is an emphasis on professional analysis, judgment, responsibility, relationships and communication rather than on compliance with prescriptive processes and seeking pre-formulated solutions to complex situations. Excellent supervision of staff, manageable caseloads and political and professional leadership are also fundamental for building a well-respected profession which supports, motivates and retains skilled and experienced social workers.

While reforming social work with children and families is vital, effective child protection relies on all professionals working together, with the support, understanding and involvement of the public.

It is crucial therefore that child protection should be properly considered and prioritised in the arrangements for all agencies, not just in social care, especially in relation to multi-agency working, professional development, joint commissioning of children's services and clear structures of accountability for child protection.

**NSPCC Cymru/Wales supports the principles set for the social care workforce in Sustainable Social Services for Wales: A Framework for Action.**

**We support the emphasis on the contribution made by front line staff to the delivery of social care services in Wales.**

**Robust and comprehensive training through the Social Work Degree is essential to secure a confident and competent frontline workforce.**

**Effective child protection relies on all professionals working together, with the support, understanding and involvement of the public.**

### **Are the principles appropriate and complete?**

NSPCC Cymru/Wales feels that the principles underpinning the Social Work Degree in Wales are on the whole appropriate and complete.

We strongly support the concept of service user and carer involvement in the management and delivery of the Social Work Degree. This should ensure that the workforce is fully aware of participation issues when they come to practice. We would stress the particular importance of continuously involving children and young people in the management and delivery of the Social Work Degree. This should include work around children's rights and participation issues.

We would welcome further detail around the principle of flexible routes to qualification. For example, there should be provision for achieving the Degree on a part-time basis and through routes such as Approved Prior Experience of Learning (APEL).

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## 2. The Welsh Government requirements for an award of a degree in social work

### Are the Welsh Government Requirements an accurate and complete description of what a social worker needs to know and be able to do at the point of qualification?

NSPCC is seriously concerned at the lack of reference to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) under section (c) of the Requirements. The paragraph sets out a requirement to be able to integrate the Human Rights Act 1998 into social work practice but does not acknowledge the need for social workers to be aware of the children's rights framework and understand its impact on their work. This is a matter of significant concern, as policy relating to children in Wales is clearly underpinned by the UNCRC through the Seven Core Aims and the recent Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure. Practitioners in Wales should also be aware of and familiar with the National Standards for Children and Young People's Participation and be able to apply them to their work in order to develop best practice in involving children in service design and delivery. NSPCC Cymru/Wales urges the Care Council for Wales to address this and include the following wording under section (c) of the Requirements:

"(c) would be able to integrate Welsh, UK and European Union legislation (including the Human Rights Act 1998, *the National Standards for Children and Young People's Participation, the United Convention on the Rights of the Child*), best practice, theories and research-based evidence, related to social work, into his or her practice as a social worker."

This is particularly relevant as *Sustainable Social Services for Wales, A Framework for Action*, highlights the need for greater service user involvement and participation. The delivery of a child-centred social care service risks being hindered if children's rights issues are not embedded in the Social Work Degree in Wales.

We raised a similar issue in our response to the recent consultation on the CPEL Framework, and would urge the Care Council for Wales to address this gap to ensure that children's rights issues are embedded throughout social care training in Wales.

*Raising Standards*, the previous Qualification Framework for the Degree in Social Work in Wales (Welsh Government, 2001) specified Information Technology Skills as set out in the European Computer Driving License (ECDL) as a Requirement for social workers. This no longer features under the new Requirements, and we would welcome clarification of the intention behind this change.

Section j(iii) sets out a requirement to undertake at least one period of assessed practice learning which includes the experience of *statutory functions* of safeguarding and social welfare being undertaken. This is a change from the previous requirement to undertake at least one period of assessed practice learning within a *statutory placement with a local social services authority*. The current wording suggests that students could potentially qualify without having secured a practice learning opportunity within the statutory sector. NSPCC Cymru/Wales would welcome clarification of this point, and of what is meant by "statutory functions" as this can be interpreted widely when practice learning opportunities are scarce.

We are pleased that a new requirement has been added to demonstrate knowledge and skills to contribute appropriately to the safeguarding and protection of both children and vulnerable adults. However, we would like to see clear indication of how this will be facilitated over the 200 days of practice learning, with a breakdown of the different placements in each setting.

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**We would welcome clarification of why Information Technology skills as set out under the European Computer Driving License are no longer featured in the Requirements for the Social Work Degree.**

**We would welcome clarification of what is meant by "statutory functions" under section j(iii) as this can be interpreted widely when practice learning opportunities are scarce.**

**We are pleased that a new requirement has been added to demonstrate knowledge and skills to contribute appropriately to the safeguarding and protection of both children and vulnerable adults. However, we would like to see clear indication of how this will be facilitated over the 200 days of practice learning, with a breakdown of the different placements in each setting.**

### 3. The Approval and Visiting of degree courses in Social Work (Wales) Rules 2011

**Are the Care Council Rules set out in Parts I-IV appropriate for the effective approval, monitoring and quality assurance of the Social Work Degree?**

NSPCC Cymru/Wales would like to reiterate **the comments we made on the Requirements for the Social Work Degree** in relation to the Required Standard of Proficiency in Relevant Social Work.

**Does the Schedule contained in the Care Council Rules set out appropriate requirements for the approval of social work degree programmes?**

#### Partnership working

We note that there has been a change from "involving service users in the development and delivery of the degree" as outlined in previous guidance to a system where service users have "shared responsibility for the development and delivery of the degree". This means that **accountability and responsibility need to be defined and clarified.**

We would also welcome the **involvement of service users in the management** of the degree programme as well as its development and delivery. For example, there should be clear requirements to involve service users and carers in programme management committees.

#### Resource provision

We would welcome the **setting of standards around what constitutes adequate access to appropriate and current learning materials**, as we are aware this causes difficulty to many students we are in contact with.

#### Learning criteria

Again we would like to see **reference to children's rights and the UNCRC** under section 2 (d).

#### Assessment criteria

We welcome the reduction of the number of direct observations from 6 to 4. This will make the assessment task more manageable and focussed and minimises the impact on service users.

#### 4. The Wales Framework for assessment in the social work degree

**Does the assessment framework set out an appropriate basis for the assessment of students?**

Yes. However, we feel that there needs to be **clarification around the number of practice learning days required**. The Degree Requirements state that students must undertake at least 200 days of practice learning, and the Assessment Framework states that they must pass at least 180 days of assessed practice learning.

**Do you agree that requiring students to provide evidence against the 20 NOS rather than the more detailed Performance Criteria is likely to encourage a focus on overall professional development of social work competence?**

Yes. However, it is important to **clarify performance criteria examples** to assist in assessment disputes and with borderline student assessments. There has also been a major change in the structure and content of the NOS, which will necessitate **training and learning** for all involved.

**Is the mapping of the Quality Assurance Benchmark Statements to the NOS for Social Work helpful?**

Yes, but we would like to **see the benchmark statements included** rather than just numbers.

**The NOS have been clustered to indicate the competence likely to be developed at levels 2 and 3. Do you think we have got this right?**

Yes. However, we would make a comment of a technical nature: the way this is set relies on colour printing to differentiate the levels, which may not be available in certain settings. We would recommend that the **final layout be broken down into levels clearly and separately** so that assessors and students working on a particular level can print and focus on the sections that they need.

#### Conclusion

NSPCC Cymru/Wales welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation and would be happy to discuss any of the points we have raised if it is needed.

We would like to stress that getting the Requirements for the Social Work Degree in Wales right is essential to developing a confident and competent workforce as described in *Sustainable Social Services: A Framework for Action*.

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