

Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) Codes of Practice Review Social Work Scotland Response

Social Work Scotland (SWS) welcomes the opportunity to be involved in the Strategic Group on the review of the codes of practice, and to engage in the initial engagement phase of the work.

In collating our comments, the review of the codes has been considered at a meeting of SWS Chief Social Work Officers and at by the SWS Organisational Development Standing Committee.

I trust the following comments are helpful in informing the next stage of the work:-

1. In the present format, the codes are generally considered to be accessible, easy to read and understand. In revising the codes, this strength requires to be recognised and built into any revision.
2. It is suggested that the revised code is central to the Post Registration Training and Learning Plan (PRTL), and should be further promoted as a self-assessment and continuous practice improvement tool. SWS would welcome an opportunity to develop a joint approach to this following the approval of the revised codes.
3. In revising the workforce code, there is a need to reflect on the person within the role – people are human first and workers second. This includes:
 - the importance of relationship based practice, in which staff have an enabling and empowering role;
 - the importance of building human and community capacity – facilitating people in taking control of their lives is central to the work of social work and social care, and must be at the heart of the code;
 - there is a particular opportunity here to be aspirational – reflecting high standards;
 - workers need to consider their own leadership style - building hope and possibilities with people;
 - to ensure that workers appreciate the positive and negative power which they hold, and need to use responsibly;
 - to ensure that workers are using reflection to ensure that they are self-aware, and that self-regulation is a key part of their practice - recognising that this is a requirement in respect of “use of self” in their practice.
 - to ensure that staff pay attention to their own resilience in their practice;

- to ensure that staff are responsible for updating their own knowledge, including evidence informed practice and research (there is a particular requirement for qualified social workers to recognise this).
4. There is also a need to recognise the complexity of the work, particularly in respect of risk. The current code reads as if workers should follow procedures to manage risk, and does not sufficiently recognise the risk assessment, analysis and management involved, which informs decision making. While the code cannot be prescriptive on these matters, the tone could be more reflective of the reality of practice.
 5. There is some concern that the existing code is primarily used in respect of misconduct issues, and therefore it is not viewed as positively as it should be in promoting good standards of practice. The need for an asset based approach to regulation is evident, and will assist to promote a positive public understanding of social work and social care across Scotland.
 6. The timing of the review is to be welcomed as it dovetails with the proposed shift to a “fitness to practice” model, which would be a more enabling framework within which to promote the codes. It is recognised that any revision of the codes needs to be made “hand in hand” with other changes which tend to detract from the promotion of good standards, for example, the timescales associated with investigations and the information made publicly available on alleged misconduct issues. While it is noted that the SSSC requires to work within the framework of existing statutory, regulatory and policy guidance, it will be critical to cultural change that the SSSC communicates the reasons for existing practice, and the action being taken to review and improve existing arrangements. This mirroring of continuous learning and improvement will be central to shared culture change and development across the sector.
 7. The review of the codes offers an opportunity to rebalance the nature of relationships between the SSSC, employers and the workforce. As a consequence of the perception of the codes as a tool at times of misconduct, relationships tend to be framed in terms of power and control (parent/child) as opposed to enabling and encouraging (adult/adult). If holistically and meaningfully supported, this culture change could enable organisations and people to grow and develop to be the best they can be, within a framework of professional accountability.
 8. If adopted in this way, and assuming that the SSSC can gain approval to improve existing misconduct processes, it is envisaged that the SSSC would have greater evidence and scope for early decision making on matters of conduct. This would assist to develop an organisational learning culture within the SSSC and across the sector.
 9. It is suggested that the SSSC may wish to consider the development of a code which outlines the role and responsibilities of itself, as regulator, particularly in supporting and resourcing the workforce. This would include the commitment and standards to be expected when engaging with registrants in respect of professional conduct matters.
 10. Workers who are not subject to registration with the SSSC are expected to work to the same standards as set out in the Code of Practice. The review of the code will assist to promote this issue, and employers may find that it gives an opportunity to refresh this expectation with staff.

11. If the code for employers is to be revised, there is a need to be clear about the definition of employer. This particularly reflects the organisational change required to adapt to new models of care and support, including SDS.
12. The code should promote the importance of individual responsibility for reflective practice - this is core to the social work and social care task.
13. The Codes should be informed by a human rights perspective.
14. There is concern that the Code for Employers requires more consideration than a revision. The code is over prescriptive in places and has no enforceable status. There is a lack of clarity in respect of the interface between the role of the Chief Social Work Officer in Care Governance and the SSSC as registration body. Also the interface between the Care Inspectorate, the SSSC and employers needs to be clarified. It is suggested that further work is required which could inform the necessity for such a code.
15. The codes should have stronger role in promoting the value and contribution of social work and social care services.
16. There require to be clearer connections between the National Care Standards and the Codes of Practice.
17. The language requires to be reviewed e.g. we should be speaking of “people” as opposed to “service users”.
18. It would be helpful to recognise in the code that the workforce is located across a range of sectors, including integrated settings. This requires staff to evidence competence and confidence, and to promote / represent their profession in a positive way.
19. There would be value in ensuring a connection to the practice Governance Frameworks for Chief Social Work Officers and Qualified Social Workers.