



---

**Guidance on the support of Mental Health Social Workers and Approved Mental Health Professionals (AMHPs) working in NHS, independent or integrated services**



Action list by groups

## 1. NHS Boards developing the culture for innovative workforce approaches and the contribution of social work

- Ensure senior social work professional leadership is represented at strategic levels promoting the value of diverse leadership.
- Boards should consider the value of appointing a non-executive director with social care experience.
- Support a multi-professional view of quality and understand the breadth of social work contribution, giving equivalence to social approaches as an area for evaluation and quality improvement.
- Encourage new ways of undertaking HR, workforce planning, CPD and leadership development to help deliver more holistic care.
- Hold a clear view of the required professional functions and how these are delivered in your service, with clear governance to identify any risks if these are not met.
- Ensure there is the right balance and skill mix of professional roles (spread of gradings, experiences and skills across roles) capacity and seniority to have oversight of the range of functions.
- Promote inclusive leadership practice, harnessing diverse contributions, modelling partnership behaviours and facilitating interpersonal learning contribution, as a direct employer and host to the social work workforce. The social and mental health impact of COVID-19 will require new responses to enable community resilience in the short and longer term.
- Senior system leaders and ICSs should develop a partnership approach, giving parity of esteem (with clinical and medical interventions) for social and public health approaches, showing how strategic partnerships can contribute to, and develop, community and social wellbeing.

## 2. Commissioners developing new services or redesigning systems

- involve local people, their families and carers, as well as health and social care providers, in planning workforce innovation and ensure they are informed about different roles and skill sets

[Reframing the conversation on the social determinants of health](#)

[Building healthier communities: the role of the NHS as an anchor institution](#)

[Service user experience in adult mental health: improving the experience of care for people using adult NHS mental health services](#)

- Support the good practice in this document with regard to senior professional social work leadership in the organisation who will provide advice on transformation and take responsibility for higher-level professional and strategic functions
- Create a culture for innovative approaches to HR, workforce and people to enable rethinking of skills sets and recruitment of social work expertise in teams.
- Involve professional staff in workforce changes and ensure social work leaders are consulted and engaged in redesign

### 3. HR leads

#### 1. Support professionalism organisationally

Have a clear view of the organisations responsibilities to support professionalism within different employment arrangements.

Ensure there is a clear strategic description of the social work role in a social work workforce strategy to inform how the role is organised, managed and recruited for, based upon a nationally-endorsed definition.

#### 2 Staff Wellbeing

1. Gather data on social workers' wellbeing and use to help identify systemic patterns on absence, job satisfaction, stress at work opportunities and discrimination. See

- NICE [Healthy workplaces: improving employee mental and physical health and wellbeing](#)
- [Bath Spa University study of social worker working conditions](#)
- Check that the work environment of the social work workforce is safe, effective, caring, responsive and well-led. [Use the LGA employer standards health check](#)
- Ensure social workers are informed about resources and support services. See NHS Employers' [Health and Wellbeing Framework](#) and [NICE guidance on workplace health management practices](#)
- Include group supervision, peer support and forums where social workers can articulate health and wellbeing concerns
- Ensure that induction processes cover a multi-professional context and welcome diverse professions, ethnicities and backgrounds and recognise the issues posed for cultural visibility by smaller professions and new roles
- Have systems for social workers to report inadequate resources or difficulties to raise issues about working practices that are inappropriate or unsafe, dealing with complaints, councillor and MP enquiries and Ombudsman investigations, including the behaviour of colleagues
- Have clear policies and procedures for lone working, reducing the risk of violence and managing violent incidents. See NICE social care guideline [Violence and aggression: short-term management in mental health, health and community settings](#); and quick guide [Reducing the risk of violent and aggressive behaviours](#),

#### 3. Performance management systems

- Simplify, align and integrate service performance metrics across health and social care.
- Treat social and community outcomes, wellbeing, human rights, inclusion and social value on a par with clinical ones and as core business.
- Foster a collaborative approach to performance management.
- Have clear agreements/policies on who will take the lead in disciplinary and fitness to practise issues in integrated arrangements

#### 4. Workforce planning

- establish information on safe levels of staffing in different settings and agree systems for accountability and alerting to risks

- Include the social work workforce in organisational workforce intelligence and planning.
- Undertake integrated workforce planning through integrated care systems. See [Skills for Care on workforce integration](#) and NICE resources.

#### 4. Social Work professional leaders in the NHS.

(Head of Social Care, AMHP lead, senior practitioners or consultant social work roles, NHS managers with a social work background, Principal Social Workers, practice educators, practice supervisors)

- Hold a clear view of the required professional functions and enable access to advice and support from a registered social worker. See [The practice supervisor role](#) [Professional standards guidance](#) [Continuing Professional Development Guidance](#)
- Ensure the right balance of professional roles and enough experience, capacity and seniority to have oversight of the range of functions
- Support the middle management role in [inclusive leadership practice](#), especially its role in harnessing diverse contributions and partnership behaviours
- promote effective career progression for social work and ensure the NHS recognises social work in recruitment.
- Establish a support plan for how these roles are enabled to maintain purpose and impact.
- Audit and review skills and inform CPD to ensure appropriate supervision of social workers. See [Post-qualifying standards for social work supervisors](#) and ensure capacity so all social workers have access to supervision regardless of who employs them.
- develop a local multi-professional leadership strategy.
- The senior role reports to the Board
- Ensure 'critical mass' of senior and practice leaders with scope to form a virtual team
- Support the middle management role. See the [NHS People Plan](#) and [local authorities workforce plan](#).
- Ensure a clear description of the social work role
- Support the conditions for continuing registration of employees with a social work background
- Support trainees and early career social workers working through partnerships to access advice and sharing of resources
- Ensure supervision for other social worker roles is protected, building on the robust arrangement for AMHPs
- Enable recording and evaluation of supervision arrangement
- Encourage social workers to plan, reflect on and record learning activity, using recording tools such as an e-portfolio. Include feedback from people they are supporting showing to inform their practice.
  - See
    - Social Work England [CPD guidance](#).
    - Skills for Care [CPD for social workers](#)
    - Health and Care Professions Council [Standards of proficiency for social workers in England](#)

- Enable recording and evaluation of supervision arrangements

## 5. Team managers

- gain direct knowledge from professional leaders about social work and its specific offer and accountabilities and promote insights into team members individuality, diversity and strengths
- have an informed vision for how distinct professional skills contribute to team outcomes and what good looks like
- encourage social work practice leadership, for instance in advocacy and enablement, diversity practice and social inequality, safeguarding
- ensure that skills are deployed in a way that is congruent with the role
- establish meaningful team-based case management measures
- develop recruitment and retention strategies that support an effective skill mix
- ensure regular reflection about roles within the team
- advocate the value and parity of esteem for social and community interventions
- undertake audits of team skills, role and skill utilisation
- promote effective career progression for social work
- recognise the health risks of social work in management and professional supervision, including in the AMHP role, and minimise

## 6. Local authorities working in integrated partnerships with the NHS

- Ensure a clear description of social work roles which recognises the complementary but distinct contributions of NHS and Council employed social workers based upon a nationally-endorsed definitions.
- Self assess Council employed social workers employment standards using the LGA standards for employers and the Considerations in this guidance
- Ensure mechanisms and resources to support social workers to play a full part in multi-disciplinary teams and embed the skill set in workforce and CPD.
- Support the conditions for continuing registration
- Ensure that professional supervision and appropriate forms of CPD are available for all registered social workers (irrespective of who employs them)
- Ensure managers are aware of the quality indicators of good supervision for social work and its role in professional regulation. See Research in Practice
- Ensure managers identify development needs using appropriate professional and core skills frameworks.  
Post-qualifying standard: knowledge and skills statement for child and family practitioners

[Knowledge and skills framework for social workers in adult services.](#)

- Establish role clarity between line managers and professional leaders. Have a three-way supervision agreement between line managers and professional supervisors to establish clear boundaries.
- Develop effective links with local universities and social work training initiatives to support trainees and early career social workers
- Ensure supervision for other social worker roles is protected, such as AMHPs, who require specific supervision.
- Identify in the workforce plan the number of AMHPs required from within the social work and wider workforce and ensure this is delivered and reflected in succession planning. Adopt best practice in recruitment and retention of AMHPs and embed the service standards for AMHPs.  
See [The AMHP Service Standards and Evaluation and Mapping Tool](#)

The LGA and the Social Care Institute for Excellence have produced an [accessible and practical resource](#) that supports local systems in fulfilling their ambition of integration.

## 7. HEIs and teaching partnerships

### **Integrated workforce planning**

- Gaining a shared view on what the future workforce needs to look like to deliver place-based care
- Reviewing skill mix to ensure workforce profiles are fit for purpose
- Considering the potential for developing or expanding new types of role and using existing staff more effectively.
- Key activities can involve upskilling, releasing or enhancing capabilities and developing new ways of working that support enablement and independence.
- Plan for open career pathways across adult social care, the voluntary sector and the NHS through integrated workforce planning, shadowing and mentoring, joint roles, and new forms of leadership development and learning that break down silos for management and leader development.