

Social Work and Continuing Professional Development

For Social Work England

May 2021



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Executive Summary

Background to this study

Social Work England was established under The Children and Social Work Act 2017 and is the specialist regulator for social workers in England. Social Work England officially took over from the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) on Monday 2nd December 2019. They are a non-departmental public body, operating at arm's length from Government.

Continuing professional development (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. As an organisation, Social Work England are committed to learning about social work and gathering data and intelligence about the profession and people's experiences. They aim to make a unique contribution to the evolution of regulation; to inform their work as the specialist regulator and provide a detailed picture of social work in England. To help fulfil this aim, YouGov was commissioned in November 2020 to conduct a quantitative and qualitative research study on the CPD practices of social workers in England.

Approach

YouGov took a comprehensive, multi-method approach to this study to ensure insight was gathered from different types of social workers and to provide an in-depth understanding of their experiences undertaking and recording CPD.

Firstly, a quantitative online survey was undertaken to evaluate the experiences and perceptions of CPD across the social work profession. Social workers were also asked about their experiences of recording CPD with Social Work England and engagement of their communications.

Following the quantitative research, a series of focus groups and in-depth interviews were run to deep dive into the social workers' attitudes and experiences of undertaking CPD. The focus groups and interviews explored their motivations for undertaking CPD, their views on the future of CPD and what role Social Work England plays in supporting social workers.

Finally, YouGov analysed a random sample of anonymised CPD records. These were the records that social workers have submitted to Social Work England to evidence their CPD in order to maintain their registration. The records were analysed to explore the types of CPD that social workers are undertaking in support of standard 4 of the professional standards, what issues the CPD addressed and how social workers reflect on the impact of the CPD on their practice.

Key findings

What does CPD mean to social workers?

- Overall, social workers hold positive attitudes towards CPD; around eight in ten see the value in it (83%) and feel it is vital to protect the integrity of the profession (77%).
- However, many do not have time to do CPD (41%) and a quarter think CPD is just a box-ticking exercise (27%).
- Social workers do see clear benefits to CPD, with the majority recognising that it keeps their practice up-to-date (76%) and develops their skills (69%). A few saw it as a way to improve morale (20%) or helped to retain social workers in the profession (24%).
- The qualitative research finds that there are increased feelings of 'box-ticking' since recording of CPD became a requirement by Social Work England.

What helps and hinders CPD?

- Social workers are motivated to undertake CPD in order to keep their knowledge fresh (66%), to comply with regulations/ inspections (62%), and to keep up with changes in policy (57%).
- Not having enough time in the working day is the main barrier that social workers face in undertaking CPD (60%).
- A fifth (18%) of social workers feel that their organisation does not provide any support for them to undertake CPD.
- The qualitative research notes that while many social workers say their supervisor suggests topics for CPD and their organisation offers courses and peer reflection sessions, some struggled with CPD not being valued by their organisation outside of the minimum requirements.

What kinds of CPD do social workers do?

- In December 2020, when the research was undertaken, half of social workers had done CPD in the last month (49%). On average, social workers spend six days per year doing CPD.
- Online learning was the most common form of CPD during 2020 (76%), with the most common topics being reflection on their own practice (63%), working with children/ vulnerable adults (57%), and understanding policies/ frameworks (52%).

- The majority of social workers say that the CPD they undertook in the last 12 months was accessible (71%), useful (69%), and relevant (67%).
- The qualitative research highlights that many social workers still think of CPD as formal training and courses until they reflect on Social Work England communications on what CPD can include; very few spontaneously mention informal or creative CPD such as watching a film or reading an article.
- In the qualitative research, social workers are happiest with CPD that is relevant to their day-to-day role and helps them to better support those with lived experiences. Experienced social workers are particularly dissatisfied when the CPD is of poor quality, not interactive or repetitive.

How do external events affect CPD?

- Around a fifth of social workers specifically undertook CPD to help them deal with the COVID-19 pandemic (19%), although a quarter said that pandemic-related challenges meant they did not have time to do CPD (23%).
- Half of social workers agree that undertaking CPD during the pandemic is more difficult than before (49%), but 40% say CPD has helped them reflect on their experiences during the pandemic and a third say it is key for them to deal with the challenges emerging (35%).
- Although the most common impact of COVID-19 is that in-person CPD got moved online (45%), many social workers report that CPD they had booked was cancelled at the start of the pandemic and not always replaced with an online equivalent.
- There are misgivings around the suitability of an online format for more sensitive and reflective CPD topics, although many also recognised the value of online CPD being more accessible and cost-efficient without the need for travel.
- Some qualitative respondents also spoke of CPD content changing in light of societal changes over the last year, including themes around COVID-19, Black Lives Matter, and Me Too.

Do social workers understand the requirement for CPD?

- Social workers understand that the requirement to record CPD is to demonstrate to the public that all social workers are fit to practise (70%), and to measure standards and skills within the profession (67%).
- The majority of social workers recognise that reflecting on their CPD helps them to be a better social worker (67%), that requiring CPD benefits the profession as a whole (61%), and that CPD gives them the skills to do their job properly (58%).
- Half say that communication from Social Work England about recording their CPD has been clear (55%) and they see how recording CPD benefits them (49%).
- The qualitative research highlights how a small number of social workers dislike the mandatory nature of the CPD requirement; feeling that Social Work England does not trust them and not seeing any value to them for completing the record. There are mixed views around the definition of CPD for the requirement; some need

reassurance and reminding that it can include informal learning, not just formal training.

How are social workers recording their CPD?

- In December 2020, the majority of social workers had recorded CPD in the three months prior (72%). Most appear to record it soon after completion; half (51%) of those who undertook CPD in the past month recorded it within the last month too.
- The vast majority are comfortable using their Social Work England online account (83%) and most social workers find recording CPD easy (19% very easy, 50% fairly easy).
- A small minority find recording CPD difficult (13%) and the most common reason for this is the amount of time it took to do (42%). A third of those who had difficulty mentioned a lack of clarity/ not enough instruction (35%) or technical difficulties (32%).
- The qualitative respondents echo these barriers and also mention frustration and worry if they do not get feedback regarding whether their CPD met the requirement's criteria.

How do social workers engage with Social Work England's CPD communications?

- Most social workers have received some form of communication from Social Work England around recording their CPD (93%), with email both the most common (84%) and most preferred (81%) form of communication.
- Many of the qualitative respondents comment on the reminders to complete the CPD requirement with a mix of views; some find it irritating, some think they are too frequent, and some think they are crucial. The tone is generally received as too formal and serious.
- The information that Social Work England includes on the website, including the short video, is considered clear and useful, but not all are aware of it.

What is the future of CPD?

- The qualitative research highlights a range of suggestions for how Social Work England can best support social worker's CPD, including keeping the format simple to minimise the demand on social workers.
- Throughout, participants reference a desire for more explicit examples and best practice examples, both of the types of CPD activities which can be recorded and how to complete the forms to a high standard.
- As social workers struggle to find the time to complete CPD, they would welcome Social Work England engaging with employers to formally set aside time to complete it.
- Additionally, some raise the suggestion that employers could submit evidence of CPD as many record participation with their employers already and this would avoid repetition.

Insights from social workers' CPD record submissions

- Online training/ learning is a core element of the CPD that social workers recorded, as well as participation in workshops or working groups. Many social workers also reflect on their supervision in the records, tying their CPD to on-the-job experiences.
- There is a good spread across the CPD standards evidenced; three-quarters reference either standard 4.4, demonstrating good subject knowledge of social work practice and current issues in society (76%), or standard 4.5, contributing to an open and creative learning culture (76%).
- Many social workers begin identifying their learning needs through discussion with their supervisor, recognising gaps in their practice or that new skills are needed. CPD can also be cyclical, building an increased desire to learn more in the future and also uncovering new learning needs.
- A clear impact, evident to social workers, is how undertaking CPD builds soft skills, including communication skills and confidence. Increased knowledge can improve the quality of their practice and make social workers more confident in their skills.
- CPD inherently builds an open and learning culture, with many undertaking CPD in a group or workshop format. Social workers are also keen to share learnings with their colleagues, with some referencing that this improved their own understanding.
- Social workers understand how CPD impacts their practice via direct feedback from their colleagues, supervisors, and managers. Some also received direct feedback from people with lived experience or saw how their improved practice impacted those that they were supporting.

Research objectives and method

Purpose, aims, and objectives

The objective of this study is to provide Social Work England with an understanding of the attitudes and sentiments around the CPD social workers have undertaken. It aims to evidence what types of CPD social workers are undertaking, why they undertake CPD, and thoughts on the future shape of the CPD requirement.

Key research questions

The study sought to answer the following key research questions:

- **What does CPD mean to social workers?** (What attitudes and perceptions do they hold of CPD in general?)
- **What CPD are social workers doing?** (What types? On what topics? What are the barriers to doing CPD? What support do they get from their workplace?)
- **How do national/ global events affect CPD?** (How has COVID-19 affected CPD? Do they consider social movements in their learning?)
- **What are their perceptions of the requirement for CPD?** (Do they understand why it is a requirement?)
- **How can Social Work England develop/ improve the approach to CPD?** (Do social workers engage with Social Work England around CPD? How do they want to communicate?)

Method

YouGov took a comprehensive, multi-method approach to this study to ensure insight was gathered from all types of social workers and to provide an in-depth understanding of their experiences undertaking and recording CPD.

Online survey

The sample for the quantitative survey was drawn from members of the YouGov panel of over 1.8 million individuals across the UK who have agreed to take part in surveys.

The fieldwork was carried out online between 3rd December 2020 and 4th January 2021. A final sample of 504 respondents was obtained. All respondents were social workers registered with Social Work England. Percentages have not been weighted and are not representative of the population. Full samples composition can be found in the annex.

Fieldwork was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated lockdowns. For many respondents this had an impact on their experience of practicing social work and undertaking CPD. This is discussed in detail within the report.

Qualitative approach

The qualitative sample was drawn from the respondents who completed the survey and who opted into either a focus group or interview. All were incentivised with online retail vouchers, which is in line with the MRS Code of Conduct.

Two online text-based focus groups were conducted with current social workers, split by years of experience (less than and more than 10 years' experience in the profession). The groups took place on the 20th of January 2021; they lasted 90 minutes and were with 9-10 social workers per group.

Additionally, 25 one on one in-depth interviews (30 – 45 minutes) via Zoom or telephone were conducted during late January and February 2021. Again, the sample was a 50/50 split of those who have less than and more than 10 years' experience in the profession.

Respondents in the qualitative phase represented a broad range of social workers including a mix of:

- Locations across England, including a broad rural/ urban mix
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Those working with children, families and adults
- Roles/ seniority
- Employer type e.g. Local Authority (LA), charity, agency
- Attitudes and experiences of CPD
- Attitudes towards CPD requirements and knowledge of Social Work England's role
- Confidence in using the CPD online account.

CPD record data analysis

Alongside the data collected through the online survey and qualitative methods YouGov also analysed a sample of the CPD records that social workers submit to Social Work England.

YouGov were provided with 750 anonymised CPD submissions in December 2020. The records were randomly selected by Social Work England from the CPD records submitted in the December 2019 to November 2020 cycle. The records provided responses to a number of closed and open questions about what CPD social workers have undertaken and the impact it has had on their professional role. Much of the information provided was in prose and the information was read and analysed in a qualitative thematic manner. The analysis identified key themes and narratives in the information that social workers recorded.

What does CPD mean to social workers?

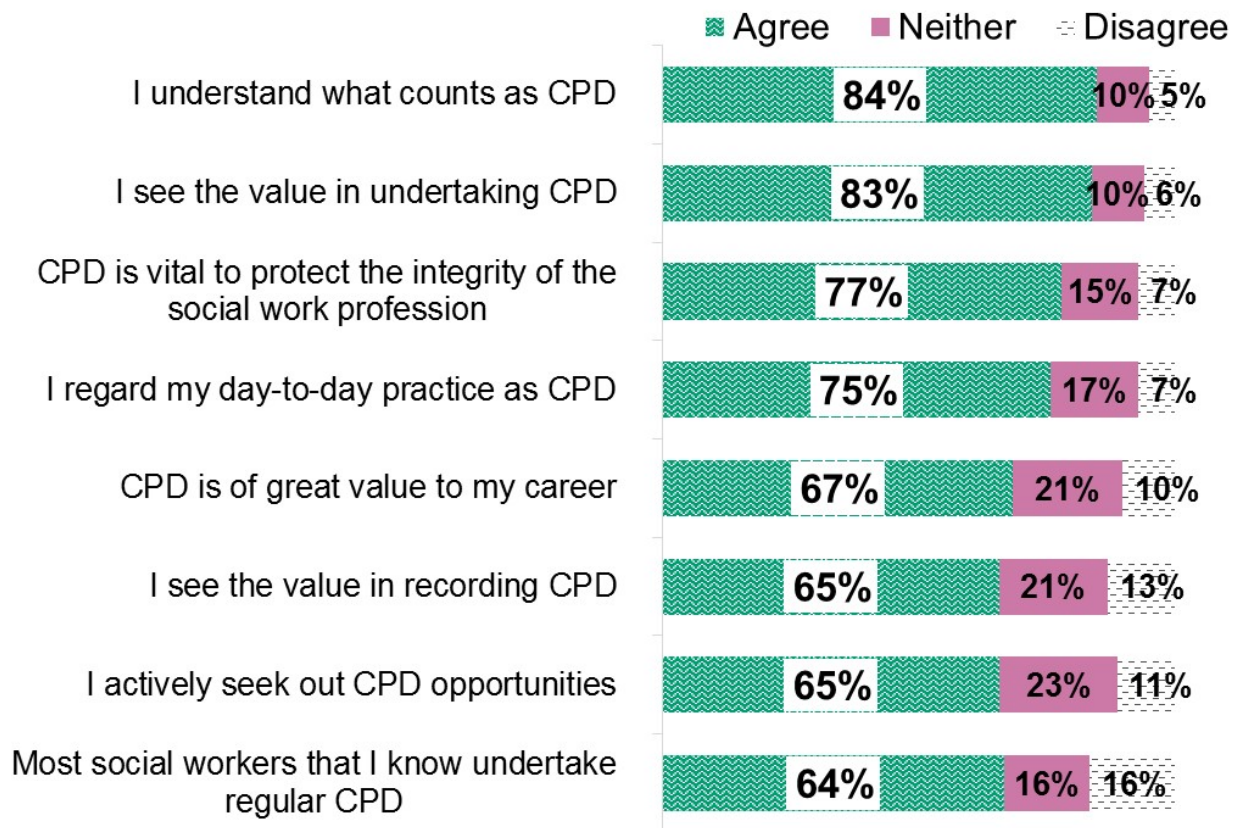
- Overall, social workers hold positive attitudes towards CPD; around eight in ten see the value in it (83%) and feel it is vital to protect the integrity of the profession (77%).
 - However, many do not have time to do CPD (41%) and a quarter think CPD is just a box-ticking exercise (27%).
 - Social workers do see clear benefits to CPD, with the majority recognising that it keeps their practice up-to-date (76%) and develops their skills (69%). A few saw it as a way to improve morale (20%) or helped to retain social workers in the profession (24%).
 - The qualitative research finds that there are increased feelings of 'box-ticking' since recording of CPD became a requirement by Social Work England.
-

Overall social workers hold some very positive attitudes towards CPD. Eight in ten social workers understand what counts as CPD (84%), see the value in CPD (83%) and feel that CPD is vital to protect the integrity of their profession (77%).

While still a strong majority, slightly lower proportions of social workers feel that CPD is of great value to their career (67%), that they see the value in recording CPD (65%), or that they actively seek out CPD opportunities (65%).

Younger social workers (aged 25 to 34) are less likely to see the value in recording CPD. A fifth (22%) of this age group disagree with the statement compared with 11% of those aged 45 to 54 and 7% of those aged 55+.

Figure 1. Positive attitudes towards CPD



All social workers (504)

The qualitative research finds that the most common positive associations with the term CPD include ‘self-development, on-going, staying up-to-date, improve, reflection, reflective practice, essential, learning and growth.’ CPD is viewed by most as important not only for social workers’ own development and career progression, but their team’s performance and for the quality of service they provide. CPD is perceived to be vital in ensuring social workers are up-to-date with ever changing policy, legislation, and best practice. It is useful for plugging knowledge gaps, as well as identifying weaknesses and areas to develop in.

“It’s about lifelong learning and growth, avoiding stagnation, encouraging diverse thinking - taking on new thoughts, processing and ways of working.” (Interview)

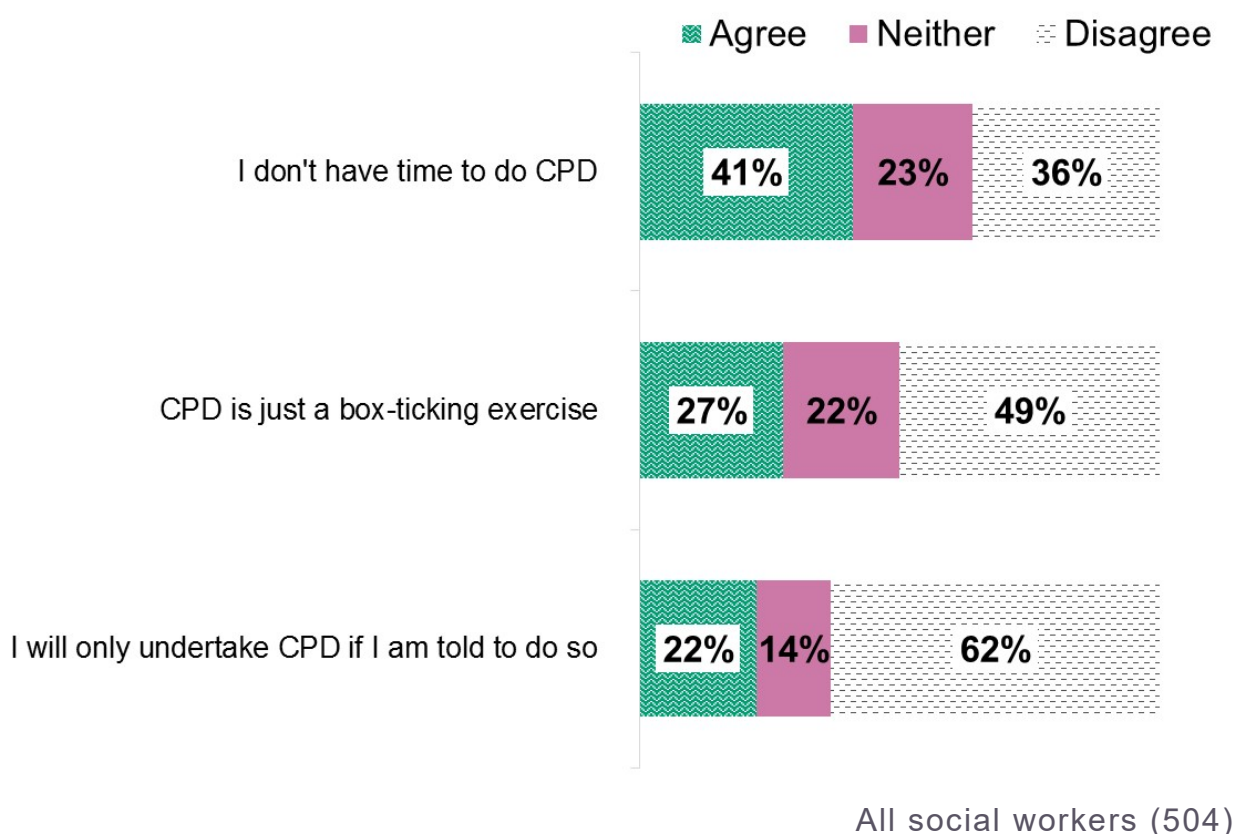
“It is brilliant to reflect on your strengths and weaknesses. CPD helps you outline what you need to work on.” (Interview)

“It is important to me personally in terms of career progression and being able to keep my knowledge up-to-date.” (Focus group)

In contrast to those positive perceptions, four in ten (41%) social workers agree they don't have time to do CPD and three in ten (27%) feel that CPD is just a box-ticking exercise. However, the majority of social workers (62%) disagree that they only undertake CPD if they are told to do so.

Younger social workers aged 25-34 are more likely than those aged 55+ to question the value of CPD and agree that CPD is just a box-ticking exercise (33% vs 22%).

Figure 2. Negative attitudes towards CPD



The feeling that CPD is 'just a box-ticking' exercise is mirrored by some in the qualitative research. This feeling is reported to have been magnified since recording of CPD became a requirement by Social Work England, with a small number describing it now being a 'chore', 'a hassle' and 'onerous'.

"It felt really onerous as it's been such a long time since I recorded it. I am out of the habit of recording my CPD – it is not part of my culture." (Interview)

"Logging it is a pain - most will say this. But I realise it is important but having to prove yourself is a drain and a pain. It doesn't feel like you're trusted." (Interview)

"I think 'oh here we go again - oh god'. I am already busy and then I have to do it. It is like a chore. It is a hassle. But it does keep you up [to] date as techniques change." (Interview)

“Occasionally feels like a bit of a chore just to meet regulatory demands.” (Focus group)

Many social workers in the qualitative research speak of the challenges of finding the time to undertake and record their CPD as their case loads are demanding. Some say that they can end up doing CPD outside of work hours or making up the time by not taking their time off in lieu (TOIL). A few report having to cancel their CPD last minute when a court case was scheduled for the same time as that takes priority. Trying to prioritise CPD is difficult for many, especially if a social worker's supervisor is not supportive or they work for an agency where CPD is their responsibility to manage. 2020 has been especially challenging as workloads have increased for many and some feel under greater pressure to do CPD due to Social Work England's recording requirement.

“The benefits are ensuring your knowledge, especially around legal stuff, is up-to-date. A downside/ challenge can be fitting it in alongside an already busy caseload.” (Focus group)

*“Under Social Work England CPD is tricky - it has been a hard year with crisis-based working and running to stand still. CPD has been a time-consuming distraction.”
(Interview)*

“It is time consuming as you are already busy. You have to squeeze it in if not be struck off [...] you have to do it as the law. It is intimidating but you have to do it.” (Interview)

Most social workers do see clear benefits to participating in CPD. The most commonly cited benefits are that CPD keeps their practice up-to-date (76%) and that CPD allows social workers to develop their skills (69%).

Social workers are less likely to relate undertaking CPD with benefits around staff retention in the profession (24%) or in improving morale among social workers (20%). Although interestingly, those with management responsibility are more likely than those without to feel that CPD benefits staff morale (28% vs 14%).

Female social workers are more likely than male social workers to feel that CPD benefits their own confidence, with 51% of female social workers stating that as a benefit compared with 40% of male social workers.

“It allows you to grow professionally, it also provides a useful space out from the rhythm of work to reflect on your practice.” (Focus group)

“I am a real fan of developing myself. My peers and users benefit from it as well. It is a win-win for them. You need to update yourself – you could be wrong if not.” (Interview)

“It helps me to learn and reflect, which helps with my cases. You see different ways of doing things.” (Interview)

Figure 3. Benefits of undertaking CPD



All social workers (504)

What helps and hinders undertaking CPD?

- Social workers are motivated to undertake CPD in order to keep their knowledge fresh (66%), to comply with regulations/ inspections (62%), and to keep up with changes in policy (57%).
 - Not having enough time in the working day is the main barrier that social workers face in undertaking CPD (60%).
 - A fifth (18%) of social workers feel that their organisation does not provide any support for them to undertake CPD.
 - The qualitative research notes that while many social workers say their supervisor suggests topics for CPD and their organisation offers courses and peer reflection sessions, some struggled with CPD not being valued by their organisation outside of the minimum requirements.
-

Motivations

Social workers are most commonly motivated to undertake CPD to keep their work knowledge fresh (66%), to comply with regulations and inspections (62%) and to keep up-to-date with changes in policy (57%). These findings are echoed in the qualitative research.

*“If you don’t refresh your knowledge, you lose it and your practice is out of date.”
(Interview)*

“[Motivations] knowing that I have to do it in order to continue as a social worker. The statutory requirement is in the back of your mind. It is also about making me better in my job, working with families and improving the service.” (Interview)

“To keep knowledge up-to-date, to refresh knowledge and keep abreast of any changes to legislation and policy etc. I know that if I make a mistake because my knowledge is lacking that’s my registration on the line.” (Focus group)

Less common motivations to undertake CPD are being able to network with others (23%) or in earning promotions/ pay increases (11%). While career progression is a motivation for a third (34%) of all social workers, this is more likely to be a motivation to undertake CPD for younger social workers aged 25 to 34 (51%) and 35 to 44 (45%) than it is for older social workers aged 45 to 54 (28%) and aged 55+ (17%).

The qualitative interviews found that those who manage others or who wish to become a practice educator are especially motivated to do CPD to grow themselves and develop others in their team.

“I may learn something new and useful; I can input that into the work of the team, how they operate and practice. I can share with them and suggest they apply.” (Interview)

“To ensure modelling of best practice to the team and for me to be up-to-date so that when I’m giving information to my team, they’re getting the most up-to-date best practice.” (Interview)

“Also, for my career progression e.g. to become a manager and a practice educator. You can then support those around you – so it benefits others. It affects everybody in your team.” (Interview)

Younger social workers (aged 25 to 34) are more likely to be motivated to undertake CPD than older social workers (aged 55+) by being the best they can for the people they support (61% vs 45%). Undertaking CPD to benefit people with lived experience was also a key theme in the qualitative research.

“It gives you the tools to do work better, to work with children and families, to better understand poverty and deprivation – to see what can be put in place to help the kids.” (Interview)

“It gives you more information on changes in legislation e.g. domestic violence and revenge porn. These things are coming up in referrals as things that are affecting families.” (Interview)

“It’s important we keep developing ourselves as practitioners – strive to be the best you can be. Learn about new developments that support your work and the people you work with.” (Focus group)

Figure 4. Motivations to undertake CPD



All social workers (504)

There are also differences by gender in motivations to undertake CPD. Female social workers are more likely than male social workers to be motivated to undertake CPD by the following:

- Learning from others (50% vs 34%)
- Motivating them to be a better social worker (41% vs 27%)

Barriers

Time stands out as the main barrier that social workers face in undertaking CPD, with six in ten (60%) stating not enough time during working hours is a barrier for them. Lack of time is also identified as the main barrier to undertaking CPD in the qualitative research; some spoke of CPD eating into their TOIL days and personal life especially if the CPD lasts more than a few hours. A few reported that sometimes they or their managers cancel CPD at the last minute as other tasks need to take priority.

“The time pressures of your case load mean sometimes you feel you can't afford to take the time for training and still have work/life balance.” (Focus group)

“Huge caseloads can lead to tired staff. Too exhausted to really reflect or analyse how they are working.” (Focus group)

*“Some managers undervalue the importance of CPD as they see it as a tick-box exercise.”
(Interview)*

Other barriers to undertaking CPD relate to lack of funding (28%), not enough appropriate content (26%) or a lack of online/ distance learning (23%). Additionally, a couple of independent social workers interviewed said that the cost of CPD can be a barrier as they must pay for their own CPD if it is not mandatory. A few in the qualitative research mention having a poor internet connection and old technology as specific barriers related to CPD moving online during the pandemic.

“I have to pay myself as independent. Some courses are expensive, so I look for free ones. Good courses charge a lot.” (Interview)

“A barrier is the price of external courses. Many face to face courses are in London, which is too far from me.” (Interview)

“Tech issues – I have had to pay for faster Wi-Fi.” (Interview)

Figure 5. Barriers to undertaking CPD



All social workers (504)

Support

In terms of what support is available within their organisation to undertake CPD, this is most commonly in the form of discussions with the social worker's manager (46%). A third (32%) report they have time off to undertake CPD. The qualitative research found that organisational support for social workers' CPD means being offered time off or TOIL back to undertake CPD, being signposted to relevant CPD by their organisation, having free internal and regular CPD opportunities, being offered reflection time in supervision sessions and having a supportive manager who values CPD and encourages staff to do it even when busy.

Several social workers in the qualitative research reported that their supervisor recommends topic areas and types of CPD to undertake, which they find helpful. Dedicated training/ HR teams in local authorities tend to email around upcoming internal and external training opportunities. Furthermore, some local authority social workers said that their organisation regularly holds drop-in sessions on topical issues, as well as peer reflection sessions.

"We are a learning organisation; we will promote people going to university and we fund training and resources. If someone took time to work on something that would be supported by the manager. It is accepted that you need study time." (Interview)

"They email around ideas and we have a training huddle [...] On the whole, I feel supported as I am released to attend, I am able to take on a student and reflect in my supervision." (Interview)

"As an independent social worker, I have the luxury of making all choices and decisions! Over the years I have been very fortunate in working with departments that really supported training and development, likewise managers who saw the importance." (Focus group)

However, roughly a fifth (18%) of social workers feel that their organisations do not provide any support to them to undertake CPD. These social workers tend to be slightly older, with a quarter (25%) of those aged 55+ reporting that no support is available. This finding is mirrored in the qualitative research, with a few sharing their frustrations of not being given time back for undertaking CPD after-hours and their manager appearing to not value CPD outside of the mandatory requirements. Social workers who work outside of a local authority setting are more likely than those who work for a local authority to feel that their organisation does not provide any support to undertake CPD (24% vs 15%).

"It is just box ticking; they just do what they need to do to make sure they cover all the bases. They say they offer opportunities, but I haven't seen that." (Interview)

*“Some managers undervalue the importance of CPD – they see it as a tick-box exercise.”
(Interview)*

“[TOIL] is a bit of a myth in social work as far as I am aware...” (Focus group)

“I wouldn’t be supported in my LA to do further systemic training, family therapy training – I would have to move to an LA that is known to be supportive of this.” (Focus group)

Figure 6. Organisation support available to undertake CPD



In the focus groups social workers said they would like more of the following support around CPD:

- Time off in lieu if CPD is undertaken outside of working hours
- Dedicated / ring-fenced amount of time for CPD within work hours
- More funding for external courses
- Greater flexibility to undertake CPD on topics outside of their day-to-day role/ tasks
- High quality supervision where reflective practice occurs
- Support with caseload when undertaking CPD
- Managers who value CPD.

What kinds of CPD do social workers do?

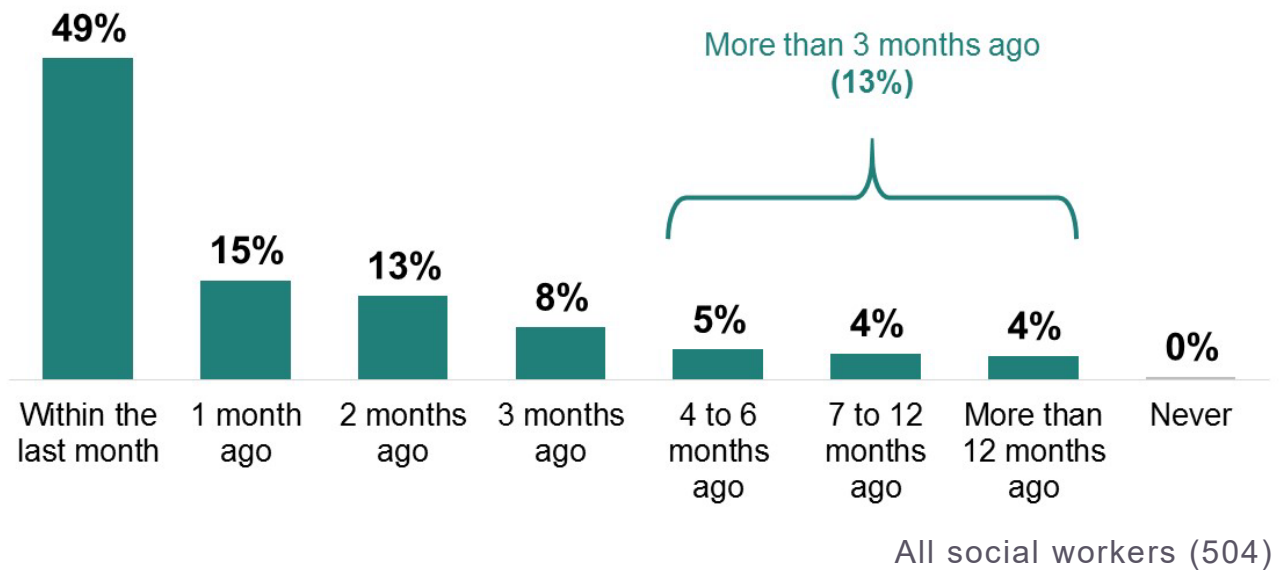
- In December 2020, when the research was undertaken, half of social workers had done CPD in the last month (49%). On average, social workers spend six days per year doing CPD.
 - Online learning was the most common form of CPD during 2020 (76%), with the most common topics being reflection on their own practice (63%), working with children/ vulnerable adults (57%), and understanding policies/ frameworks (52%).
 - The majority of social workers say that the CPD they undertook in the last 12 months was accessible (71%), useful (69%), and relevant (67%).
 - The qualitative research highlights that many social workers still think of CPD as formal training and courses until they reflect on Social Work England communications on what CPD can include; very few spontaneously mention informal or creative CPD such as watching a film or reading an article.
 - In the qualitative research, social workers are happiest with CPD that is relevant to their day-to-day role and helps them to better support those with lived experiences. Experienced social workers are particularly dissatisfied when the CPD is of poor quality, not interactive or repetitive.
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Frequency and duration

At the time of fieldwork, half (49%) of social workers surveyed had done something that they class as CPD within the last month. Only a small minority (13%) of social workers surveyed have undertaken CPD more than three months ago.

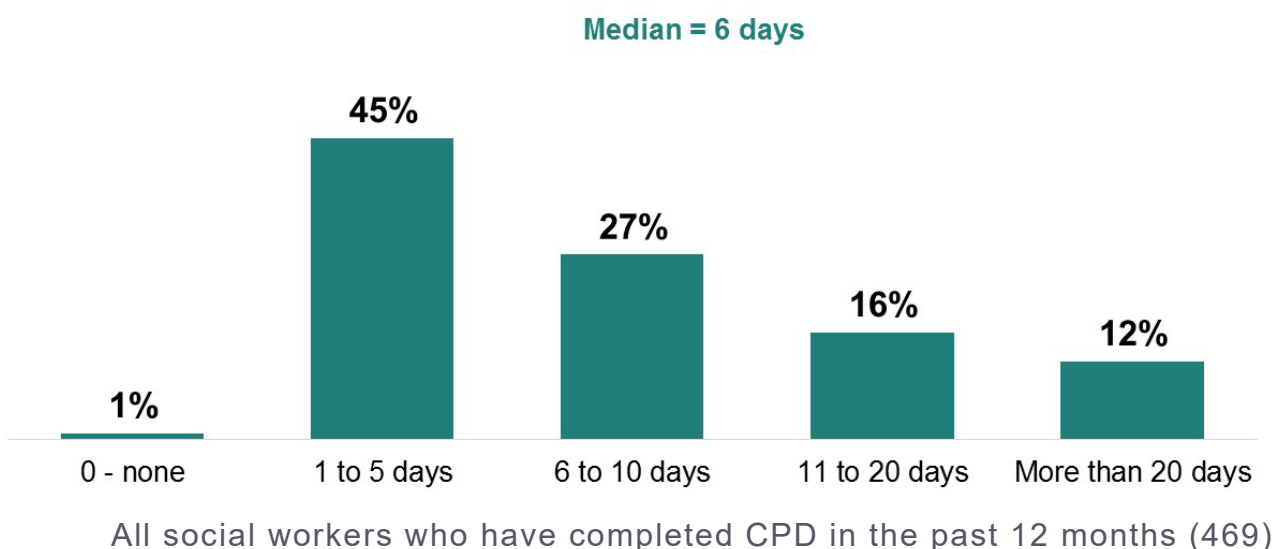
This is a broadly consistent picture among different types of social workers, although those who work in a local authority setting were much more likely than those who work in other types of organisations to have undertaken CPD within the past month (56% vs 37%). As discussed later, when thinking of CPD, informal types such as self-reflection are often not immediately identified as CPD and it is possible that the 4% who undertook CPD more than 12 months ago are thinking specifically of formal sessions.

Figure 7. When last undertaken CPD



On average, social workers spent a total of six days taking part in CPD activities in the past year, although most commonly (73%) social workers reported spending up to 10 days a year undertaking CPD.

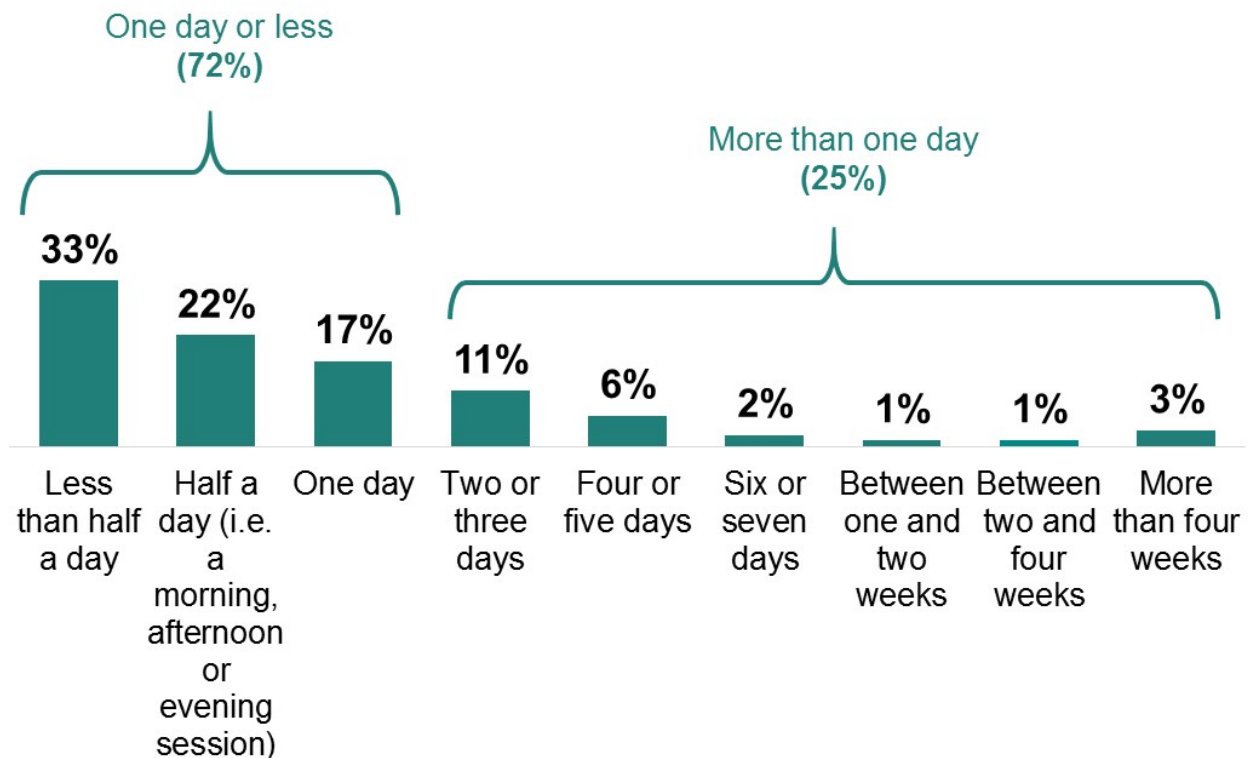
Figure 8. Number of days spent undertaking CPD in the past year



Almost three quarters of social workers (72%) report that the most recent piece of CPD they completed took a day or less to complete – 17% said it took one day, 22% said half a

day (e.g. a morning, afternoon or evening session), and 33% said their most recent piece of CPD took less than half a day to complete.

Figure 9. How long the most recent piece of CPD took to complete



All social workers who have completed CPD in the past 12 months (469)

Type of CPD

In the qualitative research, when asked what comes to mind when they think of CPD, formal training and courses (including mandatory and bespoke / ad-hoc training on topics that relate to social workers day to day role and tasks) are the most commonly mentioned types of CPD. For those who are newly qualified, the ASYE year is frequently mentioned. Additionally, many social workers think of peer reflection, everyday reflective practice and supervision as CPD. However, very few spontaneously mention more informal and creative CPD, such as reading an article or watching a relevant film, until prompted or until thinking of Social Work England's communications around what CPD can include.

"I keep talking about training, but I know it is more like supervision – I forget you can include it [in recording of CPD]. You just see it as part of the job and think more of formal training" (Interview)

“CPD is not just about attending training courses, it can be any activity you feel would improve your practice.” (Focus group)

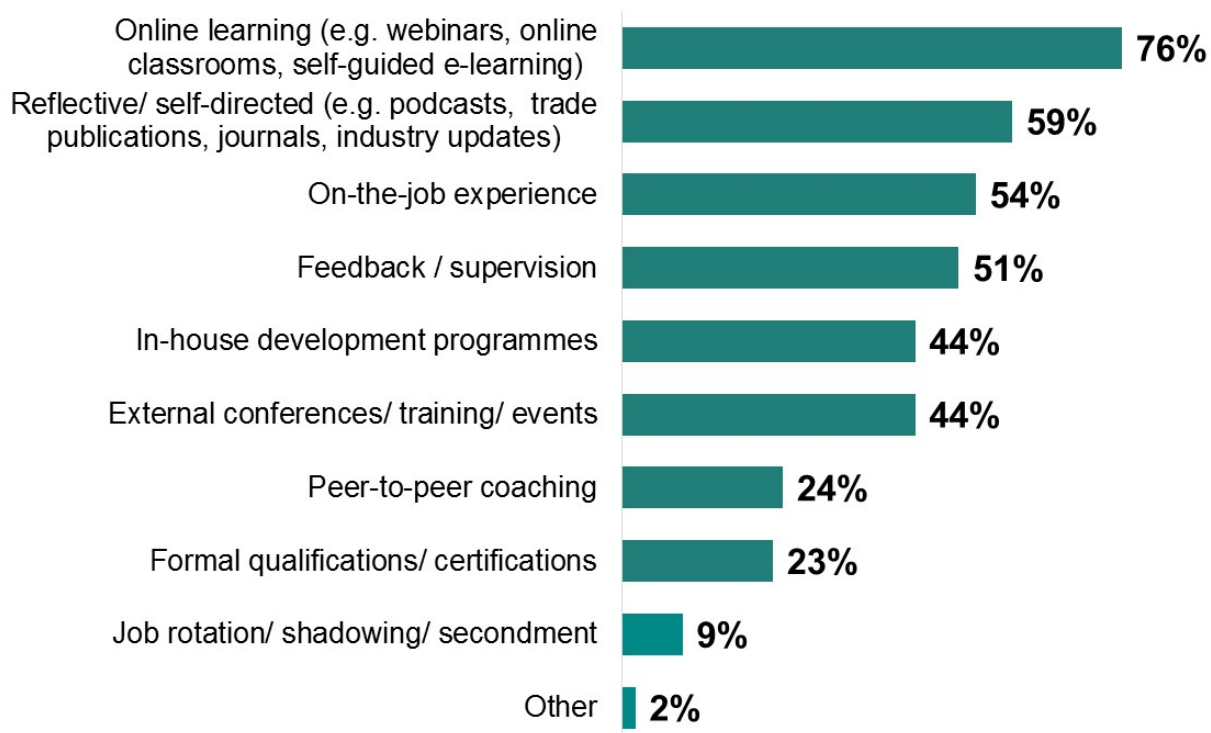
“I think this is now about changing our narrative. Rather than formal training it’s about reading, or supervision or being able to reflect upon a work experience, it’s a different mind-set than ‘I attend x amount of training days’.” (Focus group)

Given the restrictions in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic, most social workers (76%) undertook CPD through online learning in the past 12 months. However, there is a wide range of different types of CPD that social workers undertake. Six in ten (59%) social workers undertook reflective or self-directed CPD and five in ten said their CPD was either on-the-job experience (54%) or delivered through feedback/ supervision (51%).

Younger social workers aged 25-34 who are starting out in their careers are more likely than older social workers to have undertaken CPD in the form of formal qualifications/ certifications (36%).

Children and families social workers (50%) are more likely than adult social workers (40%) to have attended conferences/ events as part of CPD. In-house development programmes are much more common for social workers who work in local authorities (51%) than those who work for other types of organisations (33%).

Figure 10. Types of CPD undertaken in the past 12 months



All social workers who have completed CPD in the past 12 months (469)

Social workers have covered a range of different topics in the CPD that they have undertaken in the past 12 months. The most common topics covered were reflection on own practice (63%), working with children/ vulnerable adults (57%) and the understanding of policies and frameworks (52%).

Figure 11. CPD topics undertaken in the past 12 months



All social workers who have completed CPD in the past 12 months (469)

Close to half (48%) of social workers undertook CPD related to equality, diversity and inclusion and two-fifths (41%) covered topics related to emotional resilience/ mental health at work.

The qualitative research found that CPD on new and emerging trends, issues and techniques related to the social worker's specific target audience is popular. For example updates on teenagers' choice of drugs, county lines, exploitation techniques, gambling behaviours and new techniques for working with complex families, diverse audiences and moving elderly patients.

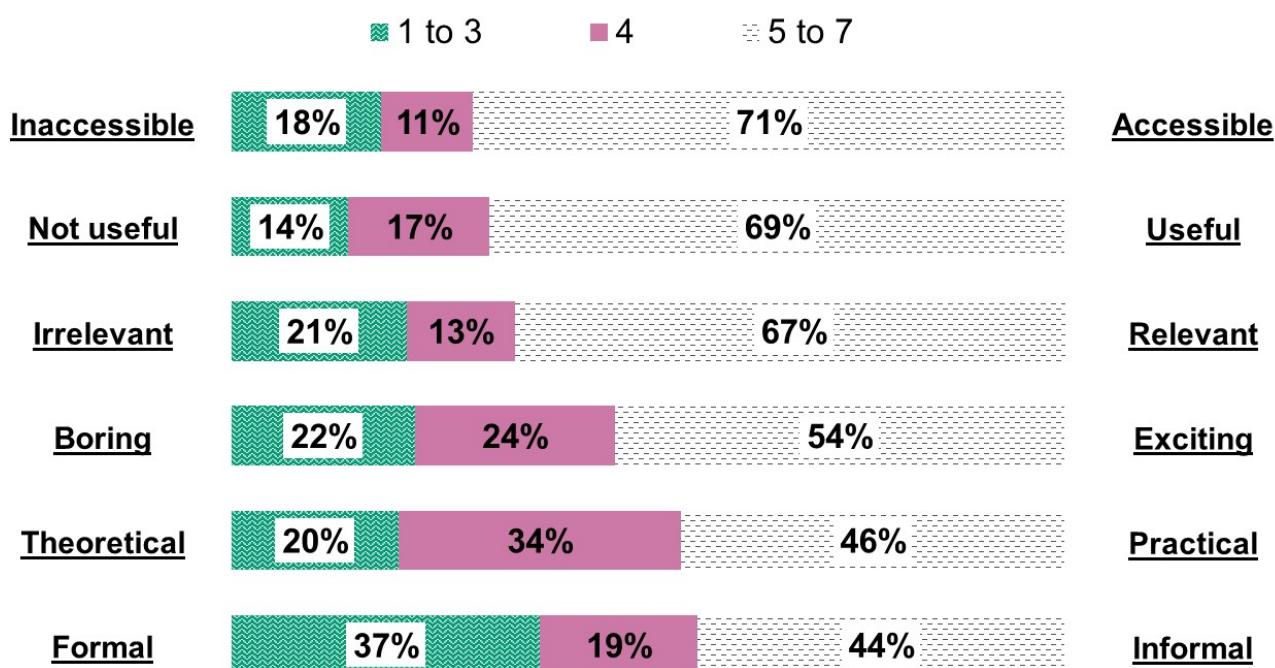
Social workers with management responsibility were much more likely than those without to cover topics around managing staff (32% vs 3%) or managing conflict (27% vs 19%). In the qualitative research a few said that they were training to be a practice educator.

Experience of undertaking CPD

Social workers most commonly feel that the CPD that they have undertaken in the past 12 months was accessible (71%), useful (69%) and relevant (67%). Positively, social workers are more likely to consider the CPD they undertook as exciting (54%) than boring (22%).

There was a mix of social workers undertaking CPD that they considered informal (37%) or formal (44%) in nature.

Figure 12. Perceptions about CPD undertaken in the past 12 months



All social workers who have completed CPD in the past 12 months (469)

Social workers with no management responsibility are more likely than those with management responsibility to feel that the most recent CPD they undertook was irrelevant (24% vs 16%).

The qualitative research found that many believe CPD has become more accessible in the last 12 months as it has (for the majority) moved online, meaning no travel requirements or need for overnight stays. Some spoke of the large amount of free and low-cost CPD now available.

“I can go to more conferences now they are online” (Interview)

“Online is convenient and cuts out the travel” (Focus group)

CPD is viewed to be most useful when it is relevant to social workers' day-to-day role and tasks, whether it is new techniques, insights into people with lived experience or legislation and policy updates. Many spoke of practical and reflective CPD being most useful, as well as hearing from those with lived experience and external organisations e.g. police, charities, and psychologists.

“Sessions with our psychologist are useful – they really deep dive into cases. She brings in the theory and teaches you how to frame things.” (Interview)

“There is good availability and a range. It is easy to access, to apply as management are supportive [...] it equips me with the right knowledge e.g. parenting advice and psychology. You can directly quote from it and directly apply it. It's all relevant; practical tips and resources.” (Interview)

“I like CPD on mental health, teen development, assessment skills, the practice educator award, cultural differences, abuse, trafficking, and drugs. It is useful to keep in touch with young people's activities and gain insight from the police. CPD co-produced with young people is useful.” (Interview)

“The CPD I most enjoy are the bi-monthly AMHP meetings where we discuss case issues and judgements.” (Focus group)

The qualitative research found a number of social workers, especially those with more than ten years' experience, who are dissatisfied with formal training they had undertaken. There are a range of reasons for this, most often including:

- Poor quality trainers or speakers (e.g. unengaging or did not tailor the content well enough)
- Too theoretical and not practical enough
- Outdated content
- Often aimed at newly qualified social workers and not always relevant for experienced social workers
- Can feel like a 'tick box' exercise
- Lack of variability/ repetitive courses.

“Much of it seems to be quite basic and repetitive; there is other more advanced training out there, but it can be expensive and not always easy to find / get access to.” (Focus group)

“Problems are there is not enough quality training for experienced social workers – it is often tokenistic.” (Focus group)

"I feel the quality from my own organisation varies widely – been to a trauma informed training recently that was really good and a parental mental health one that felt like it was based in the 70s." (Focus group)

"One of the challenges is that there's no benchmarking in the quality of training - no formal standards that training is supposed to meet. Training is only as good as the person delivering it." (Interview)

How do external events affect CPD?

- Around a fifth of social workers specifically undertook CPD to help them deal with the COVID-19 pandemic (19%), although a quarter said that pandemic-related challenges meant they did not have time to do CPD (23%).
 - Half of social workers agree that undertaking CPD during the pandemic is more difficult than before (49%), but 40% say CPD has helped them reflect on their experiences during the pandemic and a third say it is key for them to deal with the challenges emerging (35%).
 - Although the most common impact of COVID-19 is that in-person CPD got moved online (45%), many social workers report that CPD they had booked was cancelled at the start of the pandemic and not always replaced with an online equivalent.
 - There are misgivings around the suitability of an online format for more sensitive and reflective CPD topics, although many also recognised the value of online CPD being more accessible and cost-efficient without the need for travel.
 - Some qualitative respondents also spoke of CPD content changing in light of societal changes over the last year, including themes around COVID-19, Black Lives Matter, and Me Too.
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Availability of CPD

Most social workers (84%) undertook CPD during the COVID-19 pandemic and eight in ten social workers (82%) said the pandemic has affected their experience of undertaking or recording CPD.

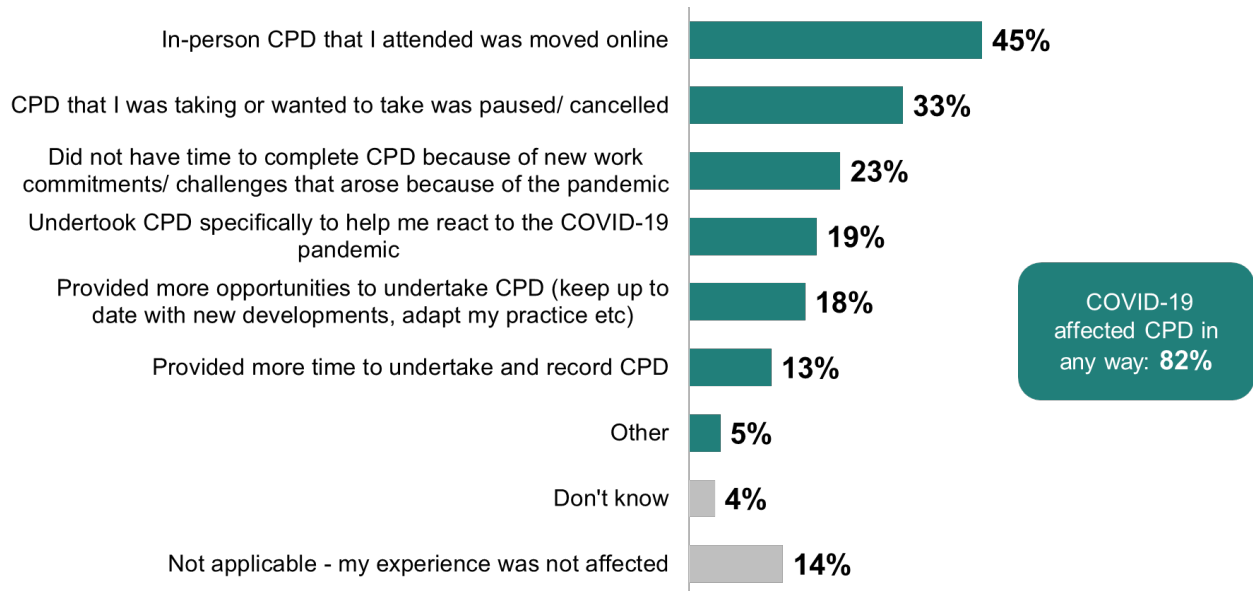
The most common impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had is moving in-person CPD online (45%). A third of social workers report that their CPD has been paused/ cancelled (33%) and around a quarter said that they did not have time to complete CPD due to new challenges posed by the pandemic (23%).

In total, 19% specifically undertook CPD in order to help them react to the pandemic and 18% say that the pandemic provided them with more opportunities to undertake CPD. A smaller proportion (13%) say that the pandemic actually gave them more time to undertake and record CPD.

Adult social workers are particularly likely to cite a lack of time for CPD due to other pandemic-related commitments, more so than children and families social workers (26% vs 18%). Social workers with management responsibility are more likely than those without to note that they did not have time to complete CPD due to other challenges (28% vs

19%), that they undertook CPD in response to the pandemic (27% vs 14%), and that it provided more opportunities to undertake CPD (25% vs 12%).

Figure 13. Impact of COVID-19 on undertaking/ recording CPD

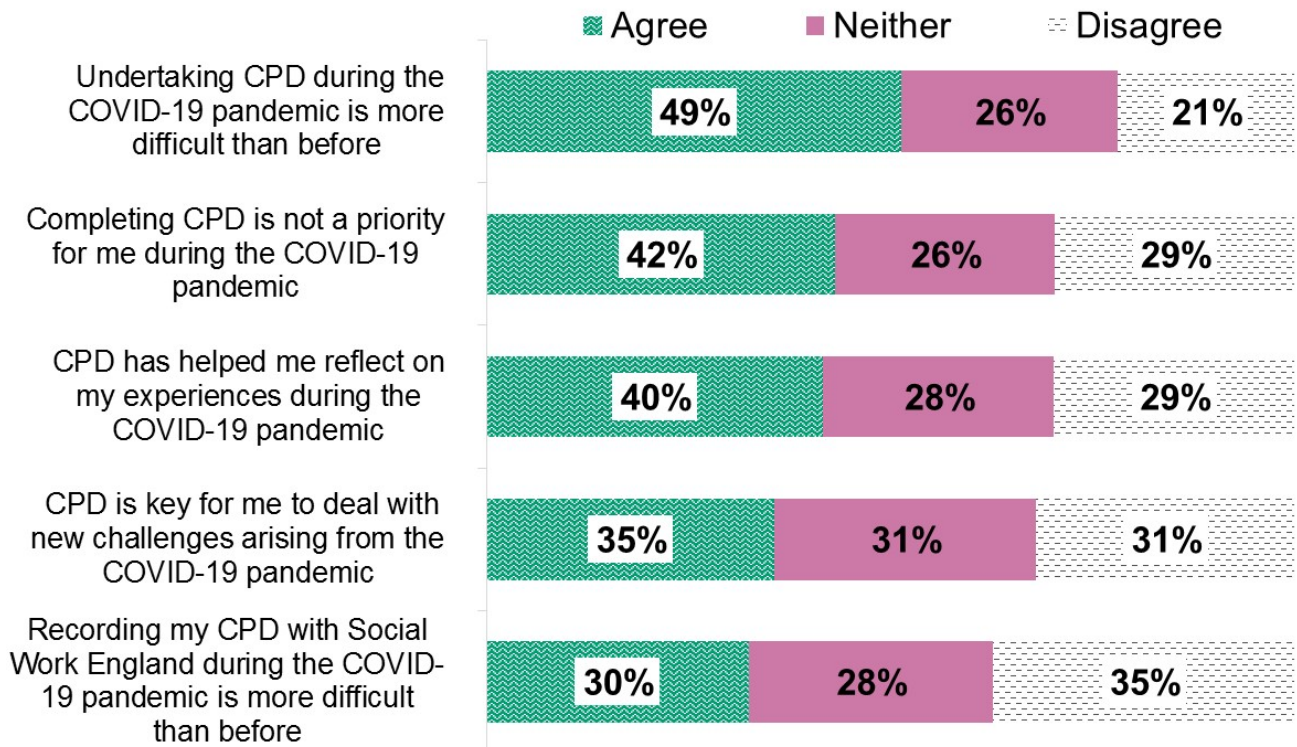


All social workers (504)

Overall, half of social workers (49%) agree that undertaking CPD during the COVID-19 pandemic is more difficult than before and two-fifths (42%) say that completing CPD is not a priority during the pandemic. However, a similar proportion (40%) do note that CPD has helped them reflect on their experiences during the pandemic and a third (35%) think CPD is key for them to deal with the new challenges arising from COVID-19. Three in ten agree that recording their CPD with Social Work England is more difficult than before the COVID-19 pandemic (30%), although more disagree (35%).

The difficulties around completing CPD during the pandemic are consistent across different types of social workers – but those with management responsibility are more aware of the benefits. They are more likely to recognise that CPD has helped them reflect on their experiences during the pandemic (51% vs 33% no management responsibility) and acknowledge that CPD is key to dealing with the new challenges appearing (45% vs 27% no management responsibility). CPD has also been particularly valuable for newer social workers – 46% of those who have less than three years' experience said CPD was key to dealing with new challenges due to COVID-19, compared to just a third (33%) of those with more experience.

Figure 14. Agreement around CPD during COVID-19



All social workers (504)

Type of CPD

Those who recognise that undertaking CPD during the pandemic is more difficult than before overwhelmingly mention time as a factor – when dealing with pandemic-related crises, whether supporting those with lived experience or self-isolating colleagues, setting time aside for CPD is often deprioritised.

In the qualitative research, several respondents had experienced CPD being cancelled at the start of the pandemic and not being replaced by an online equivalent, meaning time which had been earmarked for CPD was no longer being used.

“Initially training was cancelled due to [COVID-19], but now it has all moved online which is easier to attend.” (Focus group)

“Continuing to work with patients/ service users during the pandemic has been stressful and this means that CPD has not been a priority.” (Focus group)

“[COVID-19] has changed things – the scope has been limited even with online stuff. We had no training for 5-6 months from last March.” (Interview)

There are also misgivings around the suitability of online training for CPD. Some have general reservations over the lower quality or lower level of engagement online compared to in-person training where they could discuss and contribute more informally. However, others have concerns around CPD which involves sensitive subjects or where a degree of confidentiality is required – with online participation often taking place at home, social workers are aware that not everyone has appropriate places to participate without being overheard by other members of the household.

Figure 15. Reasons why doing CPD during COVID-19 pandemic is more difficult



In the qualitative focus groups and interviews many spoke of the increasing reliance on online CPD via Zoom, Microsoft Teams and such like due to the pandemic. The main perceived benefit of online CPD is that travel is not required meaning that CPD is more cost and time efficient for busy social workers. Those who work in rural areas or far from London (where often large conferences take place) especially feel they have had greater access to CPD and well-known speakers during the pandemic. A few also mention that online CPD now tends to be recorded, which is useful for time poor social workers as they can access the content at a later stage.

"It can also be revisited at a more convenient time. For example, I've been watching seminars on working with clients affected by [COVID-19] after they were recorded." (Focus group)

"Online training also saves travelling time. For that reason alone - convenience - I like it." (Focus group)

“[COVID-19] hasn’t given me more time over all but attending training online from home has contributed to a better work life balance which is positive.” (Focus group)

However, a common downside reported was ‘Zoom’ fatigue; where social workers can find themselves zoning out during online training and being distracted by their work emails and personal life. Many report it being harder to do peer reflection and role play activities online, however a few have seen improvements over 2020 in how trainers use break-out rooms to help generate small group discussions.

“Online training does not really engage me, and the temptation is to sit there and actually do work.” (Focus group)

“Online – it is harder to take information in.” (Focus group)

“They should make you keep cameras on as if not people drift off [...] You can have tech issues and can be distracted by family at home and work emails. It is hard to get the headspace - I do feel stressed, so hard to do CPD.” (Interview)

A small minority of the qualitative respondents spoke of the content as well as the method of their CPD changing in the last year due to large and impactful societal changes, including COVID-19, Black Lives Matter (BLM) and the Me Too Movement.

“I think the last year has highlighted many inequalities which has impacted on our profession and we have been discussing this much more.” (Focus group)

“Part of the practice groups I support, we have looked at current issues like BLM, [COVID-19], Brexit and how to talk to families about these issues.” (Focus group)

“[COVID-19] and BLM is added into our CPD content now e.g. how you work with families and use the new tools.” (Interview)

“CPD has changed to meet the changes in society e.g. county lines and exploitation.” (Interview)

Do social workers understand the requirement for CPD?

- Social workers understand that the requirement to record CPD is to demonstrate to the public that all social workers are fit to practise (70%), and to measure standards and skills within the profession (67%)
 - The majority of social workers recognise that reflecting on their CPD helps them to be a better social worker (67%), that requiring CPD benefits the profession as a whole (61%), and that CPD gives them the skills to do their job properly (58%).
 - Half say that communication from Social Work England about recording their CPD has been clear (55%) and they see how recording CPD benefits them (49%).
 - The qualitative research highlights how a small number of social workers dislike the mandatory nature of the CPD requirement; feeling that Social Work England does not trust them and not seeing any value to them for completing the record. There are mixed views around the definition of CPD for the requirement; some need reassurance and reminding that it can include informal learning, not just formal training.
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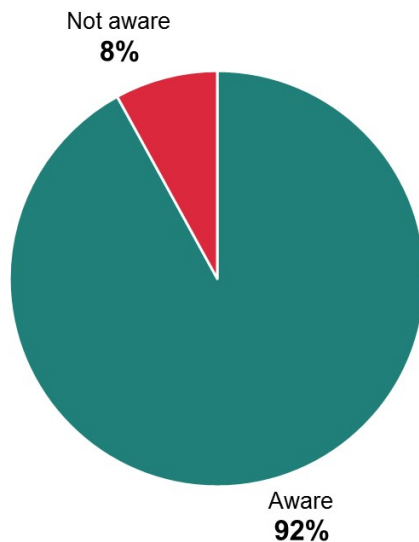
Requiring CPD

The vast majority of social workers (92%) are aware that they are required to record CPD with Social Work England in order to renew their registration, with awareness highest amongst social workers employed by a local authority (97%).

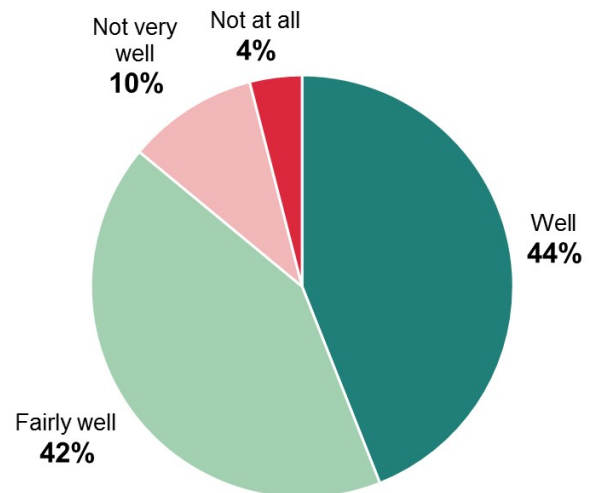
Understanding of why the requirement exists is also high – overall, 86% understand why Social Work England requires social workers to record CPD. However, the understanding does vary somewhat, with 44% saying they understand the requirement well, and a similar proportion (42%) saying they understand it fairly well. Half of social workers in a local authority understand the requirement well (49%), compared to 37% of those employed by other organisations.

Figure 16. Awareness and understanding of CPD requirement

Awareness of CPD requirement



Understanding of CPD requirement



All social workers (504)

The most common reason for the requirement of CPD is to demonstrate to the public that all social workers are fit to practise, identified by 70% of social workers. This is closely followed by measuring standards and skills within the profession (67%) and ensuring minimum standards (63%). Less common reasons include helping social workers deal with difficult cases (24%), improving social workers' confidence (24%), and retaining people in the profession (21%). A small minority said the requirement for recording CPD is to improve morale among social work (13%).

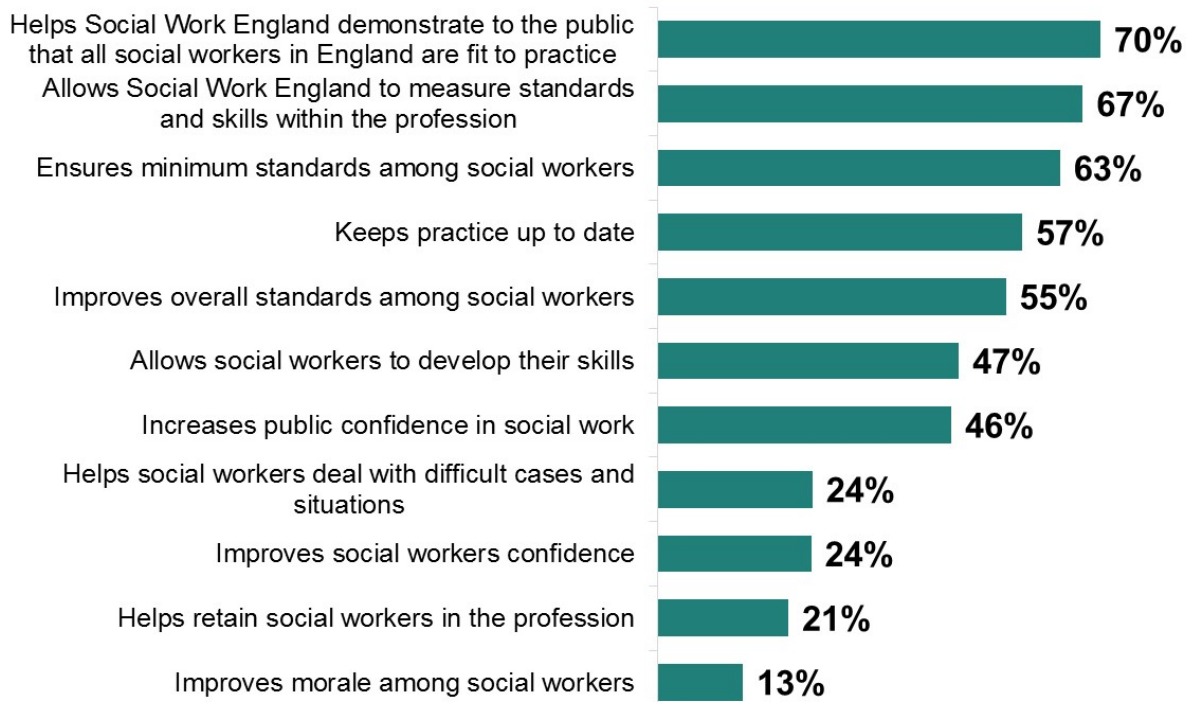
The common reasons outlined above are mirrored in the qualitative findings; most said that the purpose of the CPD requirement is to maintain and improve social work practice and to keep a record of professionals' learning to ensure they are up-to-date and safe to practise. Furthermore, some mention that the requirement encourages social workers to reflect on their learning, any knowledge gaps they have and to keep them up-to-date on the latest policy updates and other changes within the sector.

“Social Work England are doing this to keep social workers monitored - making sure they're staying up-to-date with everything and adhering to rules and regulations.”
(Interview)

“This will improve the overall quality of what we do and service to the community.”
(Interview)

“[To] enable social workers to reflect on their learning needs.” (Focus group)

Figure 17. Reasons Social Work England requires social workers to record CPD



All social workers (504)

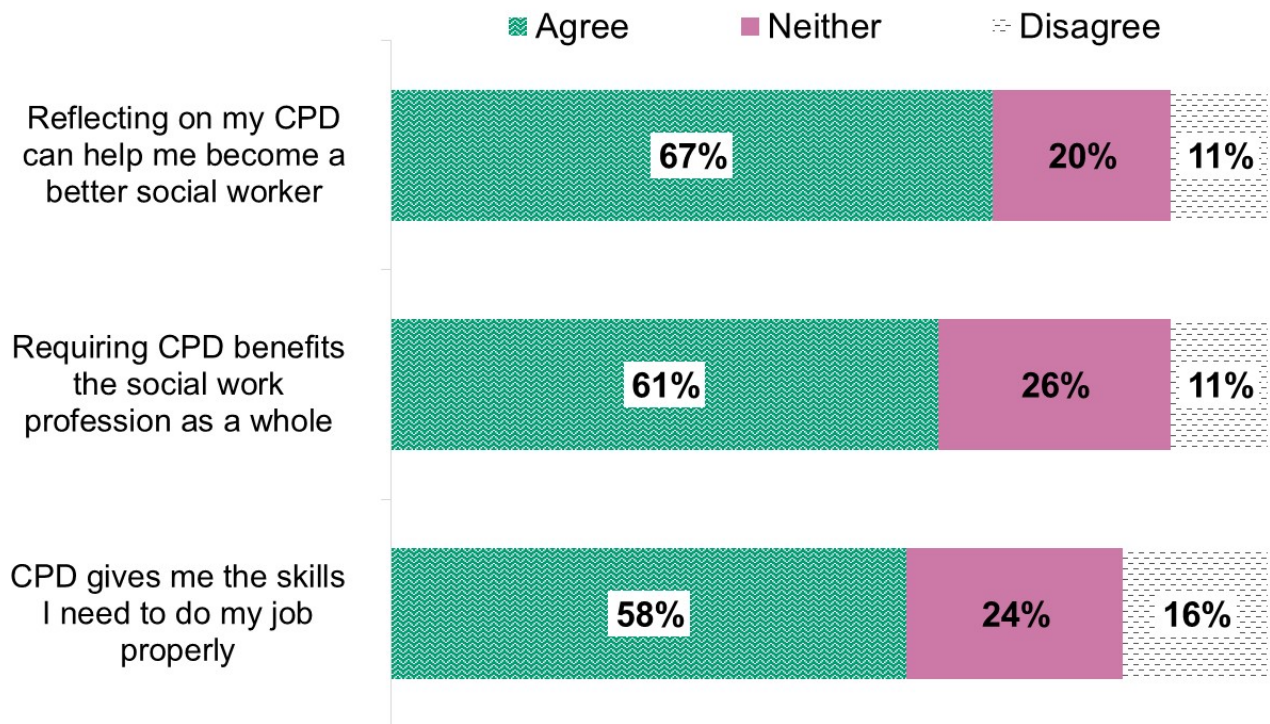
The case for ongoing improvement is clear to adult social workers – they are more likely than children and families social workers to recognise that the requirement to record CPD keeps their practice up-to-date (64% vs 52% children and families) and that the requirement improves overall standards (61% vs 50% children and families). Local authority social workers are also more convinced of the need to ensure minimum standards are met (68% vs 56% non-local authority).

“It does make sense as we are a registered profession with a protected title.” (Focus group)

“[Social Work England] want you do the minimum at least.” (Interview)

Generally, social workers are also positive about the process of recording CPD, with two-thirds (67%) recognising that reflecting on their CPD can help them become a better social worker. Three-fifths understand that requiring CPD benefits the profession (61%) and that doing CPD gives them skills to do their job properly (58%). Social workers with management responsibility are particularly conscious of the benefits to the profession (68% vs 56% no management responsibility) as well as the skills it provides (65% vs 52% no management responsibility).

Figure 18. Agreement around CPD requirement



All social workers (504)

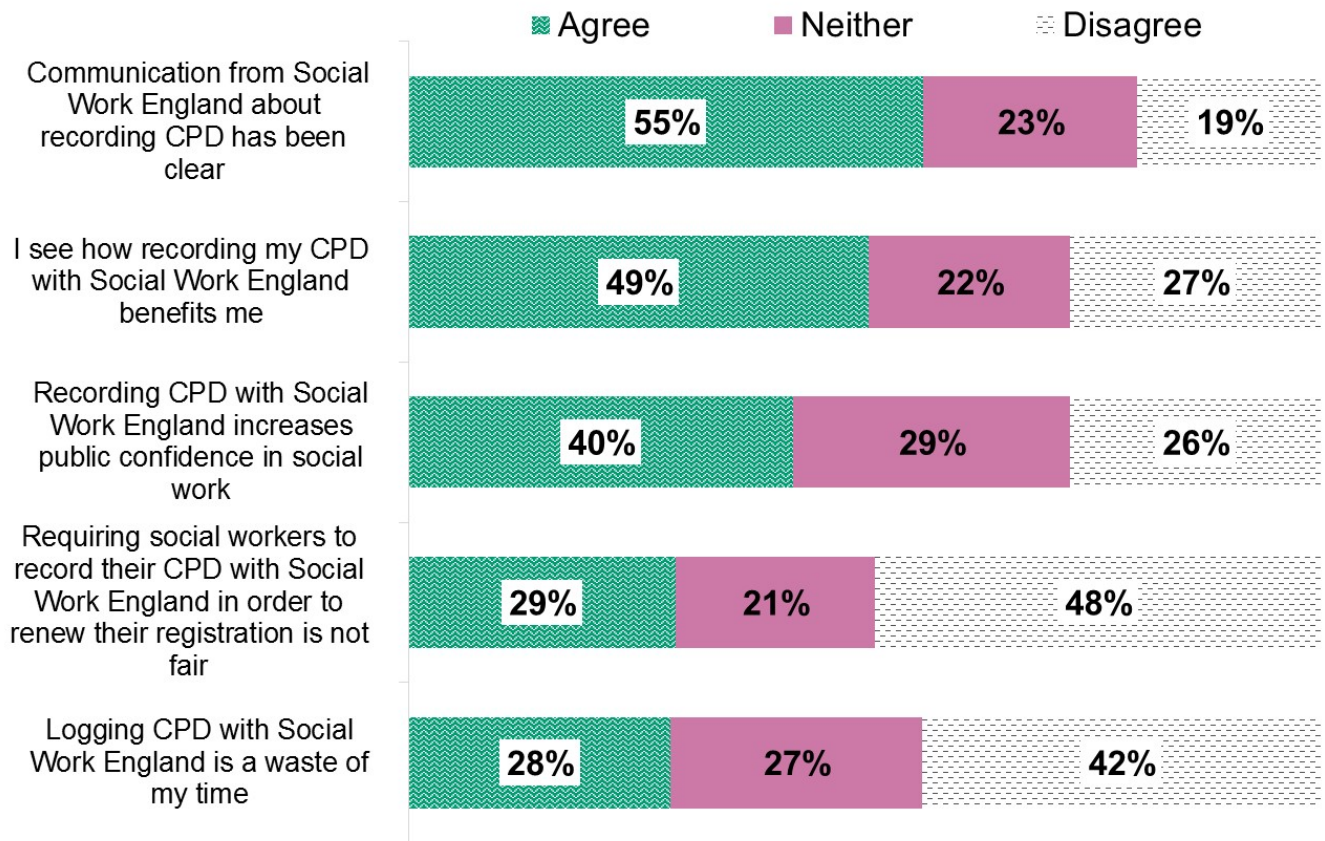
Recording CPD

In terms of their interactions with Social Work England when recording their CPD, half of social workers say communication has been clear (55%) and they see how recording CPD benefits them (49%).

Adult social workers are considerably more likely than children and families social workers to see the benefit of recording the CPD they do with Social Work England (53% vs 43%). Similarly, those with management responsibility are more likely than those without to recognise the benefit of recording CPD (58% vs 43%).

A minority view the requirement of recording CPD in order to renew their registration as unfair (29%) and think that logging their CPD with Social Work England is a waste of their time (28%). However, just as children and families social workers are less likely to see the benefit in recording CPD, they are more likely to think that logging it with Social Work England is a waste of time (32% vs 21% adult social workers). Newly qualified social workers with up to three years of practice are more likely than those with more experience to think that the requirement for CPD to maintain their registration is unfair (40% vs 27%).

Figure 19. Agreement around recording CPD with Social Work England



All social workers (504)

Similarly, the qualitative research found that a small number of social workers struggle to see the benefits of recording their CPD with Social Work England and dislike that it is mandatory; to them it feels like Social Work England does not trust social workers and they are being 'audited' and 'checked up on'. Additionally, some would like to understand why it is important for social workers to record their CPD with Social Work England, rather than just with their employers, and how it is going to be used by Social Work England to improve the profession.

"They haven't made themselves popular by saying it's mandatory for registration. We are doing it anyway, but it was a faff to complete the form." (Focus group)

"They're [Social Work England] saying we trust you, but we still audit you." (Interview)

"The definition of how they benefit social workers is definitely not clear." (Focus group)

There are mixed views about the Social Work England's definition of CPD; some think it is flexible, allowing a range of different CPD activities to be recorded, including those which are part of social workers' daily work, whilst others see the definition as vague and worry it may be interpreted in multiple ways.

"I think it's all a bit open to interpretation which doesn't help." (Focus group)

"Definition makes sense. It tries to not sound too prescriptive; this is positive for me as I've been in job for a long time [...] I am self-motivating and know CPD is a range of things [...] But newer team members need support to record and do it." (Interview)

"Why record it when we do it all the time? [The definition] needs examples of less formal CPD – I didn't know you could talk about films etc." (Interview)

John (case study below) believes it is important for Social Work England to monitor social workers' CPD but he is unsure if the definition of CPD provided by Social Work England is widely understood.



John – Social worker for over 20 years

John is a manager. He works with adults

Views and experience of CPD:

- John thinks that CPD is essential for social workers to perform to required standards and keep up-to-date with any changes within the profession
- He does not think that there is enough budget for CPD and training is not always high quality; he finds online training less effective.

Understanding and experience of recording CPD with Social Work England:

- Despite some controversies around the CPD requirement by his peers, he thinks that it is important to have a body monitoring and maintaining standards to prevent bad practice
- John is unsure if the broad definition of CPD provided by Social Work England is well understood by social workers.

Social Work England's communication around CPD:

- He thinks that the emails sent by Social Work England are generally good but he would like more detail and clarification about what CPD can include.

The future of CPD and Social Work England's role around it:

- John would like Social Work England to support the idea that CPD is covered in supervision sessions
- He would like them to continue simplifying the requirement e.g. by shortening the forms.

“[CPD] is useful when adapting to change, to be efficient and effective. [...] It can be stimulating and good for activities to be in different learning settings.”

“There are two ways of doing it [and] Social Work England could do a bit more to ensure people's understanding of that choice.”

“Social Work England need to address the level of CPD someone could get away with, what is the minimum?”

How are social workers recording their CPD?

- In December 2020, the majority of social workers had recorded CPD in the three months prior (72%). Most appear to record it soon after completion; half (51%) of those who undertook CPD in the past month recorded it within the last month too.
 - The vast majority are comfortable using their Social Work England online account (83%) and most social workers find recording CPD easy (19% very easy, 50% fairly easy).
 - A small minority find recording CPD difficult (13%) and the most common reason for this is the amount of time it took to do (42%). A third of those who had difficulty mentioned a lack of clarity/ not enough instruction (35%) or technical difficulties (32%).
 - The qualitative respondents echo these barriers and also mention frustration and worry if they do not get feedback regarding whether their CPD met the requirement's criteria.
-

Ease of recording CPD

The data collection for this project took place between December 2020 and January 2021, and most social workers had recorded CPD in the three months prior to taking the survey. In total, 72% had recorded CPD in the past three months with 31% having done so in the past month. Most appear to record their CPD shortly after completing it, with half (51%) of those who undertook CPD in the last month recording it within the last month as well.

The qualitative findings also found that some social workers record their CPD activities with Social Work England on an ongoing and regular basis, but that many leave it to 'the last minute'; often when prompted by reminder emails from Social Work England. The timing of when social workers record their CPD is determined by their availability, with many feeling too busy to do it straight after completing the CPD, as well as their attitudes towards logging their CPD for Social Work England. For example, a few who do not agree they should have to log their CPD, deprioritised the task and needed to be reminded a couple of times by their peers and Social Work England's emails.

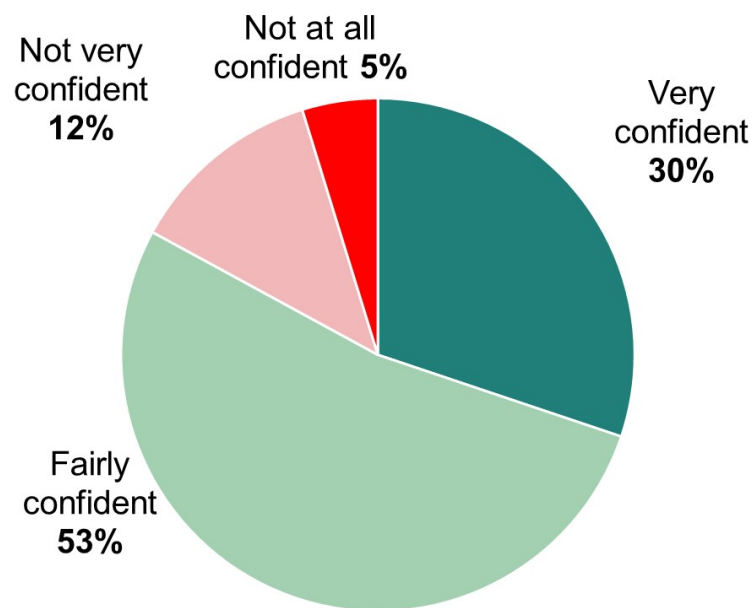
"I started about two months prior and then uploaded a month before the deadline." (Focus group)

"I try to do it as I go along, at least I can't forget that way!" (Focus group)

"Very rushed and last minute." (Interview)

Most social workers are either very confident (30%) or fairly confident (53%) using their Social Work England online account; just over one-tenth (12%) are not very confident and only a few (5%) are not confident at all. Confidence in using the online account is linked to a good awareness of the CPD requirement and a good understanding of what is involved. Those who understand the requirement well are more likely to say that they are confident (88%) in what is required of them than those who do not understand the requirement well (54%). This suggests that those who are not confident are less sure of the whole procedure rather than struggling with using the online account specifically.

Figure 20. Confidence in using their Social Work England online account



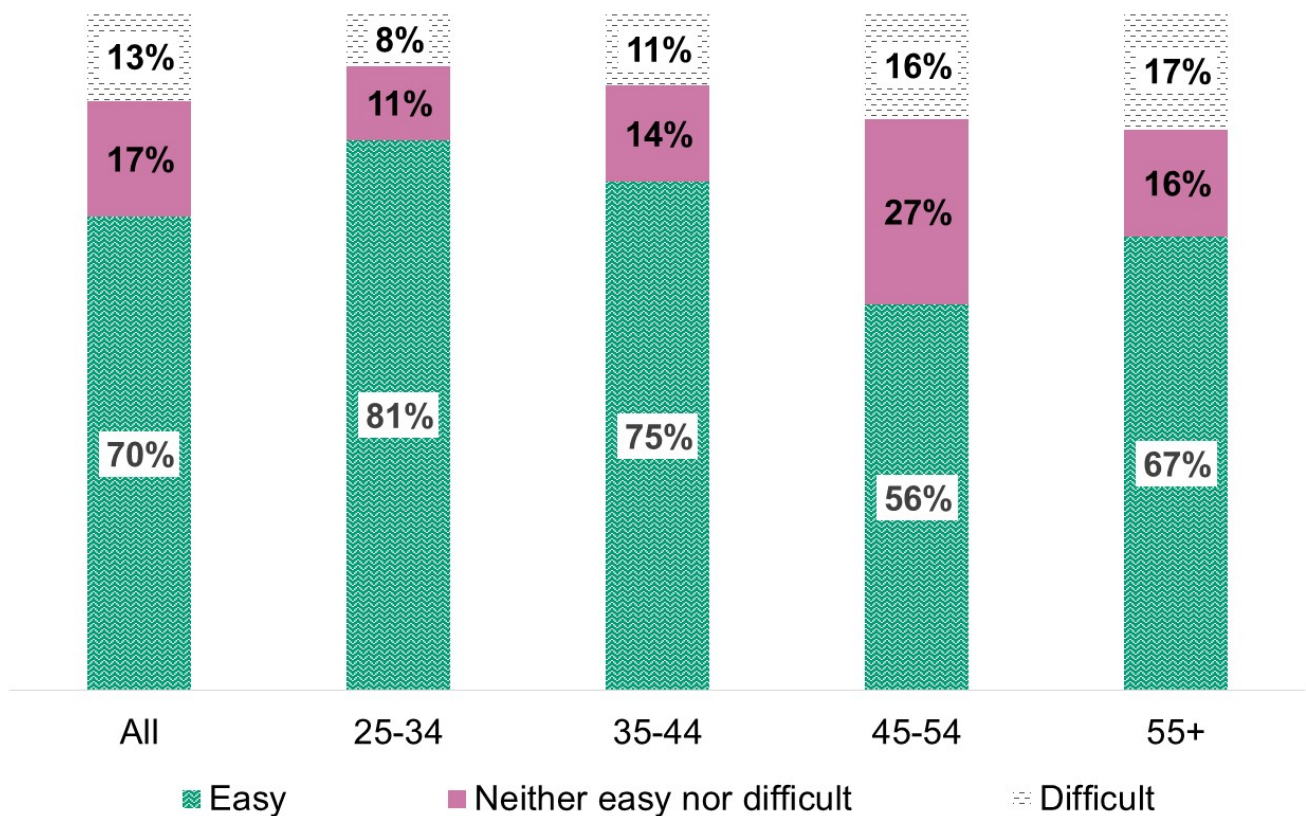
All social workers (504)

For most, recording CPD with Social Work England is not a difficult task. Only 2% found it very difficult with slightly more (11%) finding it fairly difficult; in contrast, one-fifth (19%) found it very easy and half (50%) found it fairly easy. Again, those who found it difficult are more likely to report that they do not fully understand what is required of them (28% vs 11% of those who found it easy) and are not confident in using their online account (54% vs 7% of those who found it easy). These results suggest that there is a group who found the whole process of recording CPD difficult.

This group are more likely to report that they don't fully understand the requirements, are not confident in using their online account, and found recording to be difficult.

Ease of recording CPD is split by age with younger age groups more likely to have found it easy than their older counterparts. Four-fifths (81%) of those aged 25-34 found it easy compared to 56% of those aged 45-54 and 67% of those aged 55 and above. Around one-sixth (17%) of those aged 55 and above found it difficult.

Figure 21. Ease of recording CPD by age group



All social workers who recorded CPD (468). 'Don't know' responses not shown

A similar picture was found in the qualitative research; where many said that the process of recording their CPD with Social Work England was simple and straightforward once they had reviewed both forms.

"I know a lot of people panicked but I thought it was straightforward." (Interview)

"It was quite easy in the end. I wrote it in "Word" then uploaded it." (Focus group)

"It seems to be organised and efficient." (Interview)

Some like that there are two different forms they can choose from to record their CPD activities. Those with more working experience, often prefer the free style form which allows them to include more reflections on their practice and learning.

“I had quite a good experience, there are two different forms (freeform and structured) [...] the structured one is helpful as it helps you to think about what you've done, the process of learning [...] the format is good.” (Interview)

“I found the unstructured form easier as more free flow. I knew what to include.” (Interview)

Across both focus groups and interviews, most said that they did not need help recording their CPD activities; only a small number needed help from colleagues or directly from Social Work England. A few had attended a briefing session from their Social Work England regional engagement lead, which they found extremely useful and a few others attended internal team meetings where they shared tips with each other.

“There were a few events put on by Social Work England that I attended.” (Focus group)

“There was a lady from Social Work England [...] I went to a training course, taught us how to log the CPD.” (Interview)

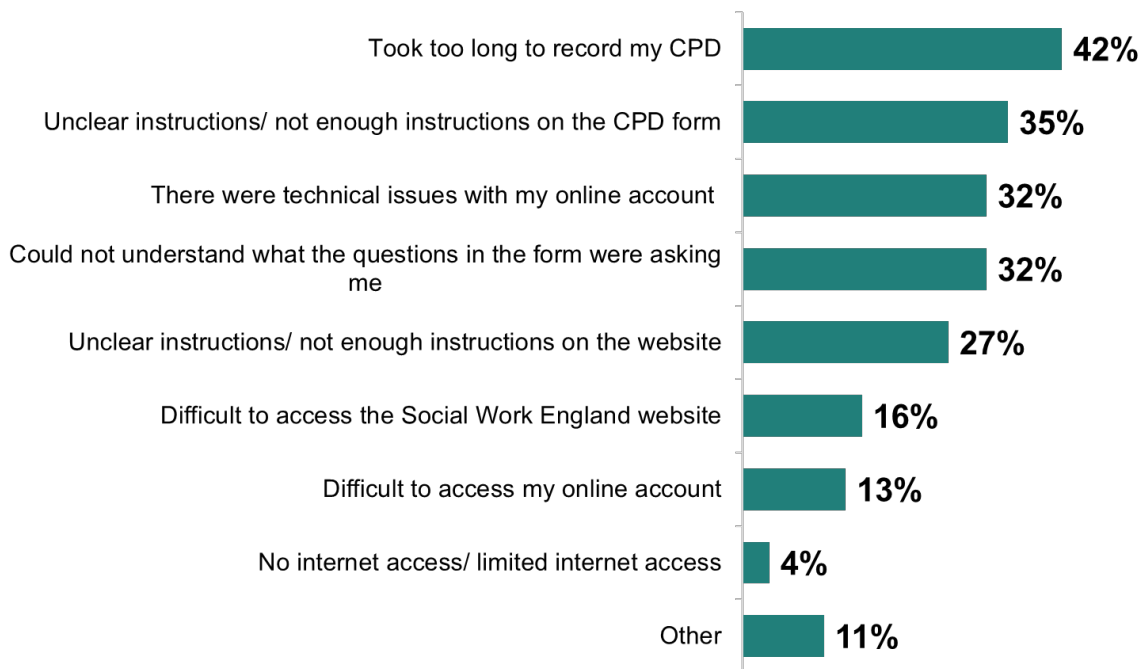
“I attended a virtual training run by my council which had someone from Social Work England to answer questions, go through a presentation.” (Focus group)

“Our social work training team trained the newly qualified social workers how to do it and they taught the rest of us.” (Focus group)

Difficulties recording CPD

When asked in the survey why some found it difficult to record their CPD, the most common answer given was that it took too long to record the information in their account (42%). Comprehension was also a prevalent issue with 35% of those who found recording their CPD difficult finding the instructions on the form to be unclear and 32% not understanding what the questions were asking. Technical issues affected around a third (32%) of those who found it difficult, with some also finding it difficult to access the website (16%) or their online account (13%). Very few reported not having internet access to be an issue (4%).

Figure 22. Reasons for finding it difficult to record their CPD



Base: all who found it difficult to record their CPD (141)

The qualitative research showed a similar picture along with some additional barriers experienced by social workers:

Takes too long to complete

Some said that recording their CPD with Social Work England took them longer than expected but reflected it may be quicker this year and once they get into a 'routine'. A few felt like they were being examined, that they needed to include a lot of information and to log more than one example to feel assured that their log complied with Social Work England's expectations.

"[I] was overwhelmed as took longer than expected." (Interview)

"I had to keep coming back to it, as [it was] a lot. You had to link in theories, I had to go back to my school books and Google it. You have to reflect on it all, now and in future. It was a bit much, like being at school." (Interview)

"The form is long, and the gain isn't clear. Too many boxes." (Focus group)

"One [form] is more reflective, but it seems like a long piece of work. The other form is one paragraph and you upload your certificate. The reflective form has 10 boxes to fill in." (Interview)

Unclear instructions

Some thought that the instructions inside the forms and on the website did not give detailed enough information on what and how much should be recorded per example. A few were confused by what exactly they should include in some of the sections and whether all sections needed to be filled in; as previously mentioned some found the forms 'long, tick boxy, vague and repetitive'. This led to them feeling anxious about whether they had recorded their CPD correctly and whether it was to the satisfaction of Social Work England.

"It was not clear whether or not all of the competency domains needed to be completed for each item of CPD." (Focus group)

"Even after a session run by Social Work England to help I was still confused and again struggled to see what the point was of what I had to write." (Focus group)

"I found it hard to understand what they were asking of me." (Interview)

"I was anxious about the need to do a few to meet the criteria." (Interview)

"I did the text box form as I wanted structure and direction [...] as I felt anxious that I may do it wrong." (Interview)

Technical issues

Some were surprised to discover that there was a timer on the website and if they did not save or complete their record within a certain time, they lost it. This led some to write their notes in a Word document or Notepad first and then either copy and paste the content into the website form or upload their document onto the site, adding additional time to the task. This issue has since been resolved by Social Work England.

"[I] logged in first, started doing it and it didn't save, I lost all of it. Why is it even timed? It's not an exam." (Interview)

"It was an absolute nightmare - trying to record it, it wouldn't save what I'd recorded. I went back to it and it had disappeared." (Interview)

"Only thing I found frustrating was the fact that you couldn't do some and go back to it later as you'd lose the work, which was frustrating [...] it is a long document so I didn't want to complete it in one sitting." (Interview)

No confirmation of successful recording

A few pointed out that they did not get confirmation of completing the task which made them feel anxious; they would like to see a clear button confirming successful completion/ uploading. Social Work England has now resolved this issue.

“There was never a problem with uploading but there's nothing to say you've uploaded anything.” (Interview)

“It says it's been submitted (on the website) [...] didn't know that was there, [it] needs to be more obvious.” (Interview)

Lack of feedback

Many would like to receive at least a notification from Social Work England confirming that what they have submitted meets the criteria and to know that someone has looked at what they have recorded. This would reassure those who are nervous about the requirement and make it feel less like another administrative task to fulfil.

“It is a very unrewarding task, in terms of energy spent, to have to complete the form and bend individual experiences to pre-conceived competency categories.” (Focus group)

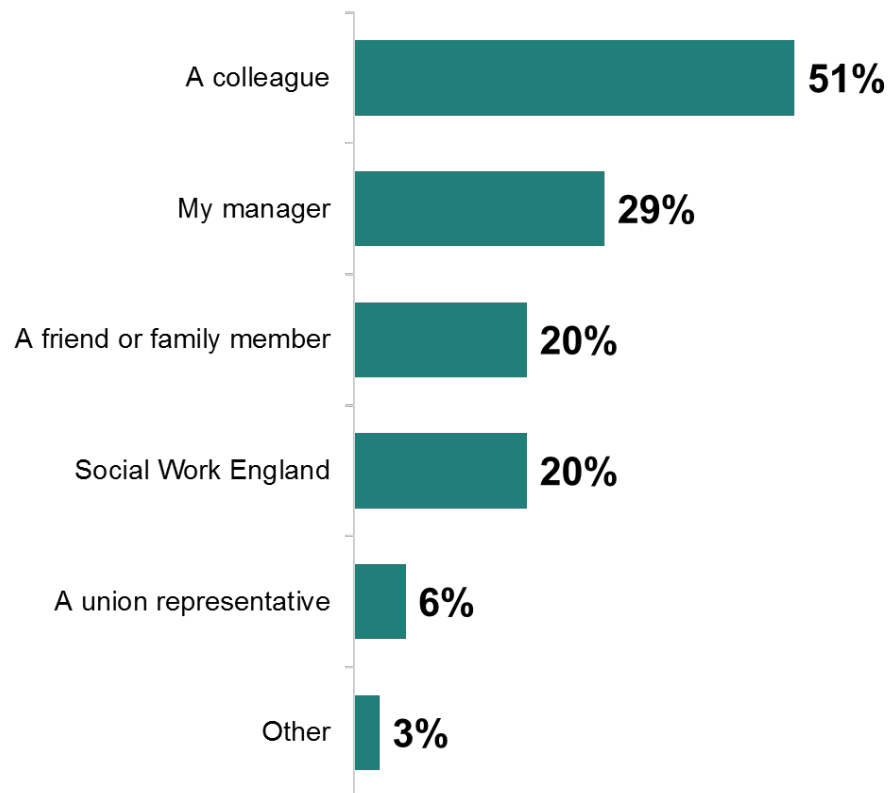
“It was easy to add CPD, but I did not like not knowing if the CPD had passed/ failed before my revalidation date!” (Focus group)

“We are told to do two at least to keep them off your back [...] there is a fear and it worries me, what if I am chosen?” (Interview)

One-fifth (21%) asked for help recording their CPD. Most commonly this came from a colleague (51%), likely because they will have had to record CPD themselves and so are familiar with the process. Others received help from their manager (29%) or a friend or family member (20%) but only a few (6%) from a union representative. One-fifth (20%) of those who needed help contacted Social Work England.

Those who sought help are unsurprisingly more likely to have struggled with the process; two-fifths (40%) of this group lack confidence in using their online account.

Figure 23. Who social workers contacted for help with CPD



All who sought help (100)

A couple interviewed mentioned contacting Social Work England directly for clarification and they found them to be helpful and friendly.

“You can ring them; they are very helpful.” (Interview)

“When I had the problem they responded fairly quickly, straightforward and easy to talk to, give you the answers and information you want efficiently” (Interview)

Mehraj (case study below) called Social Work England as she found the forms to be confusing. She found the call to be helpful and she welcomes Social Work England holding regional workshops on the requirement.



“I get excited about CPD [...] My peers say I push and challenge myself. It gives me the opportunity to learn more so I can move around the service.”

“It is not always easily understandable how to complete the boxes – it is jargon to me. It took me a while [...] I didn’t know what they wanted.”

“I am starting to learn you can include active learning / peer to peer on the portal. My colleague told me to log an article I had read.”

Mehraj – Qualified 12 years ago

Mehraj is an emergency duty social worker

Views and experience of CPD:

- Mehraj ‘loves’ doing CPD; she likes to learn new skills and keep her knowledge fresh
- She prefers face to face and smaller group training as she thinks it is easier to learn from peers.

Understanding and experience of recording CPD with Social Work England:

- Mehraj views Social Work England to be the ‘gatekeepers of the profession’ but she understands why they want to check that social workers are doing enough CPD
- She is nervous if she is recording enough and she does find the forms confusing
- She now understands from her colleague that she can include informal CPD, such as peer reflection and reading articles.

Social Work England’s communication around CPD:

- Mehraj rang Social Work England as she wasn’t clear how to record her CPD using the forms; the call was helpful
- She thinks Social Work England’s website is useful for learning about the requirement
- She is positive towards Social Work England holding workshops on the requirement.

The future of CPD and Social Work England’s role around it:

- She would like more emails from Social Work England on what type of CPD to include and updates on legislation changes and training opportunities.

How do social workers engage with Social Work England's CPD communications?

- Most social workers have received some form of communication from Social Work England around recording their CPD (93%), with email both the most common (84%) and most preferred (81%) form of communication.
 - Many of the qualitative respondents comment on the reminders to complete the CPD requirement with a mix of views; some find it irritating, some think they are too frequent, and some think they are crucial. The tone is generally received as too formal and serious.
 - The information that Social Work England includes on the website, including the short video, is considered clear and useful, but not all are aware of it.
-

Experience of communication

As part of its role as the regulator of the social work profession, Social Work England provides information to social workers regarding their CPD. The vast majority (93%) have received some form of communication from Social Work England about their CPD, with email (84%) the most common by far. A much smaller proportion had received communication in the post (15%) or via social media (7%) while only a few (4%) had been contacted by phone. Younger social workers are more likely to have been communicated with over social media (12% of 25 to 34), likely a result of higher levels of usage among this age group.

One-tenth (10%) had attended an event such as a webinar or a conference from Social Work England. Female social workers are much more likely to have done so than male social workers (15% vs 8%) but there are no significant differences by age group or type of social work undertaken (children and families, adults etc.).

Figure 24. How has Social Work England communicated about CPD

Email: 84%



Post: 15%



Events: 10%



Social media: 7%



Text message / SMS: 6%



Phone call: 4%

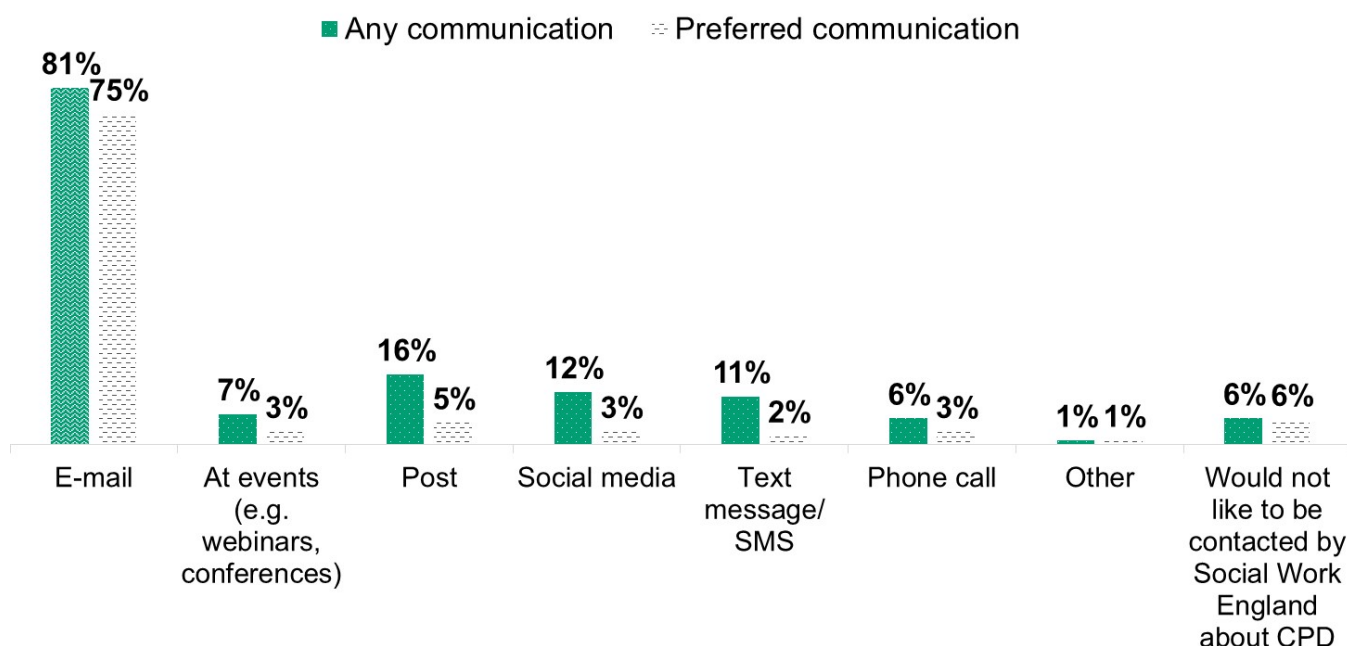


Base: all (504)

Preferred communication

Email is how most want to hear from Social Work England with four-fifths naming it as a communication method they generally like (81%) and three-quarters (75%) saying it is their most preferred communication channel. Other methods are less popular: 16% would like to be contacted by post, but only 5% say this is their most preferred method of communication. Similarly, only 17% would like events from Social Work England but just 3% say this is their preferred method of communication. Around one in twenty (6%) would not like to be contacted by Social Work England at all.

Figure 25. Preference for communication from Social Work England regarding CPD



All social workers (504)

Email is therefore the overwhelming preference of social workers for communications regarding CPD. Half (50%) would want to be communicated with by email and only by email, not selecting any of the other options. Three in ten (31%) would like communication both by email and another method and around one-tenth (9%) would not want to be contacted by email but would like to be communicated with by another method.

A majority of social workers would like to be contacted by email (84%) but men are more likely to be willing to be contacted by phone (13% vs 4%) as well. Social media is more popular among younger social workers, with 18% of 25-34s happy to hear from Social Work England in this way compared to just 7% of those aged 55 and above.

“Newsletter would be good. I do find them easier to read in terms of the layout whereas the email is quite hefty and there’s a lot of information there.” (Interview)

“It’s good to have a range of comms e.g. emails and a newsletter.” (Interview)

Many commented on the email reminders received from Social Work England to complete the CPD requirement in the qualitative research; some think that they were sent too frequently, and they find them irritating, whilst others find them to be crucial in ensuring they completed the task.

The two most common criticisms are receiving reminders after they had recorded their CPD and the tone of the emails being too serious and formal. The ‘telling off’ tone added pressure onto several social workers, who already felt anxious about the task ahead.

“The reminder was useful, but it did feel quite unfriendly and a little threatening.” (Focus group)

“[...] just didn’t feel supportive, very ‘just do as we say’, no real understanding.” (Focus group)

“Threatening words and tone, so you freak out and panic.” (Interview)

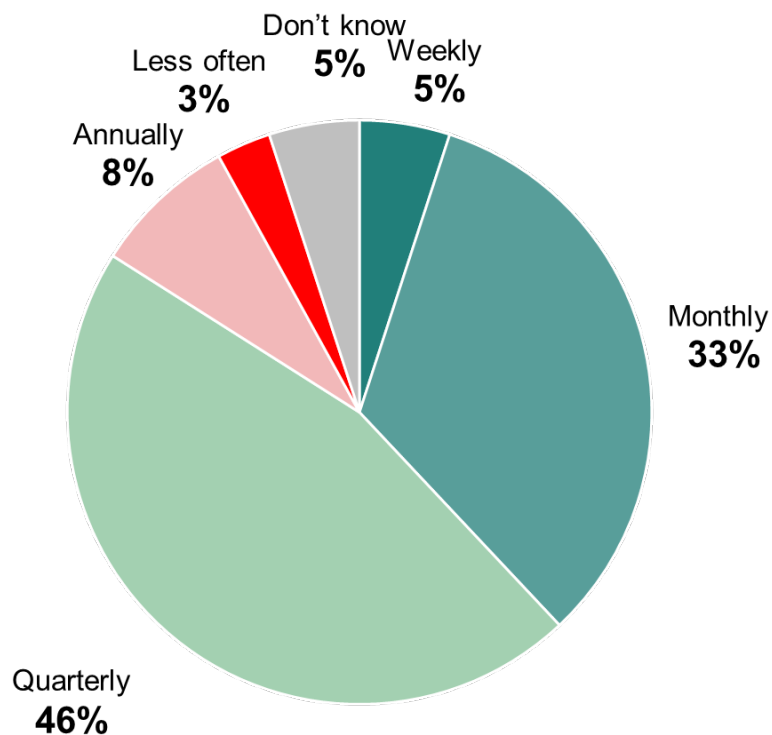
“I think I was frustrated because I’d uploaded straight away but was still receiving the emails.” (Focus group)

In terms of information on CPD presented on Social Work England’s website, some find it clear and useful, whereas others are not aware of what information was available and had not watched the short introductory film. A few reflected that more information has since been added to the website, however they would like to see examples of satisfactory write-ups and more examples of informal CPD that they can include; this would help to reassure them that they are recording their CPD correctly.

“They gave out information in various ways, written and video workshops to explain the process and requirements.” (Interview)

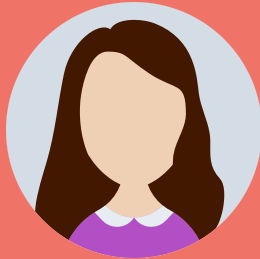
Of those who are happy to hear from Social Work England about CPD, the majority (84%) would like to hear from them at least four times a year. Overall, monthly (33%) and quarterly (46%) are the most preferred frequencies of communication with only a few wanting to hear weekly (5%). A minority would prefer to be contacted annually (8%) or even less frequently than that (3%).

Figure 26. Preferred frequency of communication from Social Work England regarding CPD



All who would like to hear from Social Work England about CPD (456)

The case study below shows how Sophie would have liked more guidance from Social Work England on how much to write in each record. She didn't like the tone of the reminder emails and would prefer them to be more positive and include examples of types of CPD social workers can include.



“[CPD] is usually a chore [...] an additional task on top of the workload.”

“Some of us are struggling to understand what will constitute as CPD, what it means, what it is exactly.”

“It might be useful if they could give some feedback as what they consider as CPD. They could give us a list ‘this is what we consider is CPD’ and ask if anything should be added to that.”

“Having opportunities nationally to share resources, our ideas and ways of working would be very useful.”

Sophie – Social worker for the last 10 years

Sophie specialises in adult mental health

Views and experience of CPD:

- Sophie thinks that CPD is beneficial for social workers to improve their practice, particularly when working on complex cases
- It can be a challenge to find the time to do CPD; she would like to be given fixed time for it.

Understanding and experience of recording CPD with Social Work England:

- Sophie feels that the requirement is a chore and an additional task to fulfil
- She does not think that the requirement is clear and believes that many struggle to understand what exactly is expected of them; she would welcome Social Work England providing various examples of CPD.

Social Work England's communication around CPD:

- Sophie found the portal easy to use but didn't feel there was enough guidance on how much to write
- She did not like the pressurising tone of the reminder emails and would prefer the comms to have a positive tone and provide examples of what others have recorded.

The future of CPD and Social Work England's role around it:

- She feels that it would be useful to receive feedback on the CPD logged
- She would like various CPD opportunities and resources to be shared on a national level and believes Social Work England could facilitate this
- She would like Social Work England to engage with social workers and build a relationship with them so they are not seen as a distant regulator.

What is the future of CPD?

- The qualitative research highlights a range of suggestions for how Social Work England can best support social worker's CPD, including keeping the format simple to minimise the demand on social workers.
 - Throughout, participants reference a desire for more explicit examples and best practice examples, both of the types of CPD activities which can be recorded and how to complete the forms to a high standard.
 - Social workers also want formal training to be linked to Social Work England's website or more promotion of CPD opportunities on the website, including some interest in Social Work England running its own CPD.
 - As social workers struggle to find the time to complete CPD, they would welcome Social Work England engaging with employers to formally set aside time to complete it.
 - Additionally, some raise the suggestion that employers could submit evidence of CPD as many record participation with their employers already and this would avoid repetition.
-

Requiring CPD

In the qualitative research a range of suggestions were made on how Social Work England could best support social workers to fulfil the CPD requirement, they include:

Further promote CPD opportunities on Social Work England's website

Many welcome Social Work England signposting social workers to relevant CPD opportunities (not just formal training) and providers. Additionally, a few would like Social Work England to run their own CPD. Awareness of the current information on the website needs to be increased.

*"Offer their own online courses with interesting topics that you can access on the website."
(Focus group)*

"If Social Work England could use its power to develop cost effective university-based courses for social workers, this would be great." (Focus group)

Formalise time to complete CPD

As many social workers struggle to find the time to complete CPD, they would welcome Social Work England engaging with employers to set time aside formally for CPD.

“Speak to employers, make employers understand [we need] time for it.” (Interview)

“Allocated time, like the doctors.” (Focus group)

“The only thing they could do [is to] get councils to agree to, is to have that regular time, protected time to do it.” (Interview)

Highlight the benefits of recording CPD for the social worker

Some social workers call for Social Work England to better articulate the benefits of recording CPD, both for Social Work England and social workers; this would increase their motivation to complete the task.

“People find it a chore, [it] needs to be shown it can be valuable to the social workers [...] empower you to do it, show value in it.” (Interview)

While throughout the survey and qualitative data collection social workers have noted the time constraints on CPD and a desire for lower requirements, some social workers feel that more frequent CPD requirements would be beneficial – requiring or reminding social workers to record their CPD on a quarterly basis, rather than annually. However, given the backdrop of the pressures cited by social workers, more frequent CPD requirements should be streamlined and simplified to minimise the time required to record it.

Figure 27. How Social Work England should develop the requirement for CPD



Recording CPD

The qualitative research also revealed a range of suggestions on how Social Work England can support social workers in the recording of their CPD, these include:

Keep the format simple

Some suggest that the requirement should simply involve them writing a list of CPD undertaken or a short paragraph on a couple of examples of CPD they undertook and its impact, instead of feeling that they need to submit a lot of reflective information that they have probably already provided to the trainer and their supervisor. A short, simple, standard form would be welcomed by many.

“Simply recording a title of a course with perhaps a few lines around the topic and some bullet points on what you've learned.” (Focus group)

“A list of what we've done and then maybe a reflective piece.” (Focus group)

Employers to record CPD on behalf of social workers

Some argue that the task is repetitive as they already record their CPD activities with the employer, it is part of their appraisal process and they discuss it with their supervisors. Therefore, they would welcome their employer/ supervisor confirming with Social Work England what CPD they have completed instead.

“Couldn't managers just ensure you do it as part of yearly appraisal? [...] It is time consuming and replication.” (Interview)

“I have already done reflection in supervision with manager - so already done it. Now I have to write it again and reflect. It is repetitive.” (Interview)

“Employers should cover this especially as they should know their staff strengths and weaknesses largely already.” (Focus group)

Provide more explicit instructions

Many would like more clarity and reminders on how much social workers should be writing (i.e. ideal word count) and how many logs they need to provide.

“Be clear around the parameters and expectations so we can meet them - it's not like rocket science [...] some examples and a database of training providers, recommended reading and listening.” (Interview)

“We pay them a fee, if we need to be providing something to them, we need guidance.” (Interview)

Provide best practice examples

Many would like more examples of what type of CPD activities can be recorded and how to complete the form to a high standard. It is clear to many, but some still worry whether they have understood the Social Work England's expectations correctly as they haven't received any personal feedback.

"An example would be helpful [...] All very well to say we are the person to decide but it would be good to get some guidance, it wouldn't do any harm!" (Interview)

"Put examples in of good and bad practice e.g. an example of how to write up reading a book or a film example." (Interview)

"Share examples (and not just exemplars!) - some "good enough" examples." (Focus group)

Formal training to be linked to Social Work England's website

A few suggest that formal training could be more easily recorded if there was a link to Social Work England's website where the confirmation of participation in a course/training could be automatically uploaded.

"Maybe course evaluations should have some Social Work England linked evaluation aspect that could just be approved by the trainer and scanned to your record?" (Focus group)

Insights from social workers' CPD record submissions

- Online training/ learning is a core element of the CPD that social workers recorded, as well as participation in workshops or working groups. Many social workers also reflected on their supervision in the records, tying their CPD to on-the-job experiences.
 - There is a good spread across the CPD standards evidenced; three-quarters reference either standard 4.4, demonstrating good subject knowledge of social work practice and current issues in society (76%), or standard 4.5, contributing to an open and creative learning culture (76%).
 - Many social workers begin identifying their learning needs through discussion with their supervisor, recognising gaps in their practice or that new skills are needed. CPD can also be cyclical, building an increased desire to learn more in the future and also uncovering new learning needs.
 - A clear impact, evident to social workers, is how undertaking CPD builds soft skills, including communication skills and confidence. Increased knowledge can improve the quality of their practice and make social workers more confident in their skills.
 - CPD inherently builds an open and learning culture, with many undertaking CPD in a group or workshop format. Social workers are also keen to share learnings with their colleagues, with some referencing that this improved their own understanding.
 - Social workers understand how CPD impacts their practice via direct feedback from their colleagues, supervisors, and managers. Some also received direct feedback from people with lived experience or saw how their improved practice impacted those that they were supporting.
-

The CPD context

All social workers in all roles and settings are required to record CPD in their Social Work England online account, in order to maintain their registration. Social workers must record CPD every year, but they can decide how much CPD they do depending on their personal circumstances and needs. In their first year, Social Work England did not prescribe what types of CPD should be done, but encouraged social workers to reflect on their CPD as an application of learning in practice.

Social Work England also sets professional standards which outline what a social worker in England must know, understand, and be able to do. Standard 4 is to “maintain my continuing professional development” and is comprised of the following parts:

- As a social worker, I will...
 - 4.1 Incorporate feedback from a range of sources, including from people with lived experience of my social work practice.
 - 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.
 - 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.
 - 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 my learning activities and evidence what impact continuing professional development has on the quality of my practice.
 - 4.7 Record my learning and reflection on a regular basis and in accordance with Social Work England’s guidance on continuing professional development.
 - 4.8 Reflect on my own values and challenge the impact they have on my practice.

YouGov were provided with 750 anonymised CPD submissions in December 2020. The records were randomly selected by Social Work England from the CPD records submitted in the December 2019 to November 2020 cycle. The records were analysed in a qualitative thematic manner, identifying key themes and narratives in the information that social workers recorded. The following chapter sets out a summary of these themes as identified by the research team.

The social worker’s role

When undertaking CPD, social workers function in a number of different roles. A common recorded function is to be an attendee or participant in some form of training or formal learning. Others recorded that the CPD they undertook related to their own role and the work that they do.

“Online learner update training”

“Presentation to my co-workers and team”

“ASYE Assessor for NQSW”

“Contributor to the development of social work role”

Other roles in CPD included the facilitation of sessions with other professionals which often took the form of workshops and groups sessions:

“Co-developer and co-facilitator of two pilot parent/carer support groups”

Delivery type

It is also the case that CPD recorded by social workers varies in how it is delivered and/ or experienced. The online survey of social workers identified that the most common types of CPD undertaken in the past 12 months were 1) online learning, 2) reflective/ self-directed, 3) on the job experience, 4) feedback/ supervision.

Those key themes also emerge in the record data that social workers submitted, with more detail provided on the nature of how the CPD was delivered.

Online training/ learning was a big feature of the CPD that social workers recorded. The online delivery covers both those who were participants in the learning and those who delivered sessions to others.

“Online video training course - watched presentation and undertook assessments.”

“In this example I was a guest speaker delivering training virtually during COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. My role was to share information on how social workers were managing virtual visits to children and how the way of working had been adapted due to COVID-19.”

Other common ways in which CPD was undertaken were through workshops or working group sessions with other professionals or relevant stakeholders.

“I was involved [in] the planning and setting up of a parenting group.”

“Identified a practice issue, convened a workshop with practitioners and Chester University.”

Finally, a strong theme in the delivery of CPD is via feedback/ supervision, which often closely related to on-the-job experiences. Taking the form of various things including; presentations, being supervised, undertaking review meetings and sitting on panels.

“I completed a presentation for social workers, police, family workers and schools in regards to child sexual abuse including the process of referral, what happens next, practice example and learning points.”

“I reflected on the past month of work I had been completing and the impact this had on me and the service users I worked with.”

Topics

A number of clear themes emerged in the topics that social workers covered in the CPD that they recorded in 2020. While a range of different topics were covered by social workers to reflect the diversity of the role, the following three areas emerged as common themes:

Models of practice

A large number of social workers recorded CPD that related to the use of theories in their practice.

“The course [...] of small group discussions/ wider group discussions and the analysis of case studies and practice issues that relate to this area of practice.”

“We discussed theories of resilience in social work practice, as well as the barrier and positives of completing the work that we do. We shared an example of practice or of self-care with the group using a reflective model.”

Working with children and vulnerable adults

Social workers reporting that their CPD related to children or vulnerable adults was a common theme in the type of CPD undertaken. There are a variety of issues that were mentioned around how social workers have developed their knowledge and understanding of how to work with children and vulnerable adults.

“The overview of the course was to enable participants to identify the factors that make children with disabilities more vulnerable to harm and their safeguarding needs.”

“I used the houses tool which helps a child think about risks, strengths and hopes and helps the practitioner assess and reflect on the child’s thoughts and feelings [...] This enables us to create a child-centred system and undertaking this piece of work reminded me of the importance of maintaining a good level of direct work with children.”

Legal acts

Many social workers reported that their CPD focussed upon the various legal acts and requirements that underpin the work they do.

“This training refreshed my knowledge on the Care Act 2014 and Human Rights Act 1998. In my job role as an advanced practitioner in an adult’s social work team, I have responsibility for authorising care and support assessments and reviews completed by social workers I supervise.”

“I delivered a teaching session on the Mental Capacity Act to AMHP trainees.”

The CPD standards

A majority of the sample have evidenced each standard set by Social Work England in their CPD records, showing a wide spread across the different standards. However, as shown in figure 28, some standards are evidenced in the CPD records more than others.

Three-quarters (76%) evidence standard 4.3 in their CPD records with a similar proportion (75%) evidencing standard 4.4 and 4.5. In contrast, fewer evidenced standard 4.1 (53%) or 4.2 (55%). As they form part of entering a CPD record, standards 4.6 and 4.7 are evidenced every time.

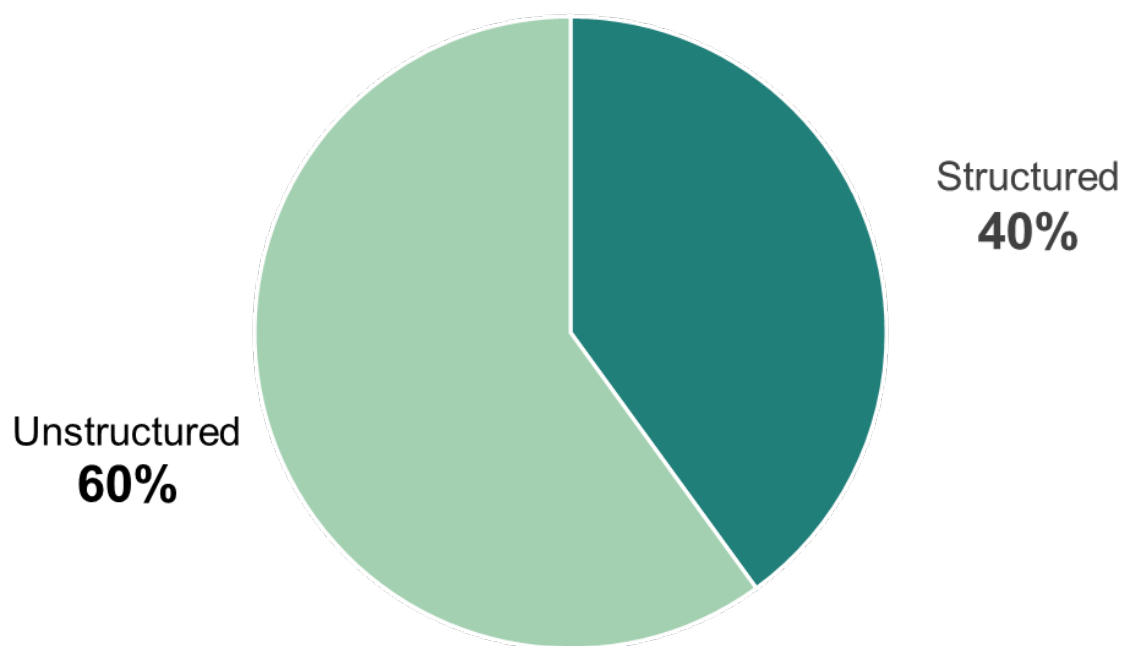
Figure 28. Standards evidenced in CPD records

Standard	%
Standard 4.1 Incorporate feedback from a range of sources, including from people with lived experience of my social work practice	53%
Standard 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	56%
Standard 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	76%
Standard 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	76%
Standard 4.5 Contribute to an open and creative learning culture in the workplace to discuss, reflect on and share best practice	76%
Standard 4.6 Reflect on my learning activities and evidence what impact continuing professional development has on the quality of my practice.	100%
Standard 4.7 Record my learning and reflection on a regular basis and in accordance with Social Work England's guidance on continuing professional development	100%
Standard 4.8 Reflect on my own values and challenge the impact they have on my practice	73%

All CPD records (750)

There appears to be a slight preference for unstructured submissions among social workers with three-fifths (60%) choosing to submit their CPD record this way while two-fifths (40%) preferred the structured version. With a substantial number opting for a structured submission, it would appear that social workers value the choice of the two options.

Figure 29. Choice of CPD submission



All CPD records (750)

There are no differences in type of submission by gender or age, with men and women and the different age groups equally likely to submit a structured or unstructured CPD record. In total, 83% of structured templates were submitted by women and 17% by men; the same proportions are evident for unstructured templates. This reflects the gender split of the records, where 83% were submitted by women and 17% by men.

Figure 30. CPD forms used by gender and age of social worker

Template	Structured	Unstructured
Women	83%	83%
Men	17%	17%
18 to 34	20%	22%
35 to 44	25%	23%
45 to 54	29%	31%
55+	25%	24%
Total N	303	447

All CPD records (750)

Across the 750 records, structured templates are more likely to have evidenced most of the standards. Four-fifths (80%) of the structured templates evidence standard 4.1; more than twice as many as the unstructured templates (36%). Structured templates are more likely to evidence standard 4.2 as well (79% vs 41% of unstructured). It may be that the structured format requires social workers to think specifically about how they are demonstrating the standards while the looser nature of the unstructured template means they are less likely to directly evidence meeting the standards.

Figure 31. Templates used to evidence standards

Standard	Structured	Unstructured
4.1	80%	36%
4.2	79%	41%
4.3	88%	67%
4.4	84%	68%
4.5	86%	67%
4.6	100%	100%
4.7	100%	100%
4.8	88%	63%
Total N	303	447

All CPD records (750)

CPD records by gender, age and region

An analysis of the 750 sample records suggests that men are more likely to evidence a variety of the standards than women, with standard 4.1 more likely to be evidenced in particular. Three-fifths (60%) of men in the sample evidenced this standard compared to just 52% of women. Other notable differences include for standards 4.2 and 4.4

Figure 32. Standards evidenced by gender of social worker

Standard	Women	Men
4.1	52%	60%
4.2	56%	50%
4.3	75%	78%
4.4	74%	78%

Standard	Women	Men
4.5	74%	77%
4.6	100%	100%
4.7	100%	100%
4.8	73%	75%
Total N	625	124

All CPD records (750)

There are also some differences by age with older social workers more likely to have evidenced standard 4.4 in their CPD (82% of those aged 55-64 compared to 67% of these aged 25-34). In contrast, those aged 25 to 34 are more likely to have evidenced standard 4.2 (61% of 25 to 34s compared to 55% of 55 to 64s) and standard 4.3 (81% of 25 to 34s compared to 77% of 55 to 64s).

Figure 33. Standards evidenced by age of social worker

Standard	18 to 34	35 to 44	45 to 54	55+
4.1	54%	45%	53%	61%
4.2	62%	54%	55%	55%
4.3	82%	73%	73%	77%
4.4	67%	75%	74%	81%
4.5	75%	75%	73%	77%
4.6	100%	100%	100%	100%
4.7	100%	100%	100%	100%
4.8	73%	65%	76%	78%
Total N	159	179	229	183

All CPD records (750)

There are fewer differences by region, but it is notable that evidencing standard 4.5 is higher in the North West (84%) than in other parts of England. Those in the South West are the least likely to have evidenced standards 4.1 (44%) or 4.5 (63%) in their CPD records.

Figure 34. Standards evidenced by region

Standard	East	London	Midlands	North East	North West	South East	South West	Yorkshire and the Humber
4.1	58%	55%	56%	48%	54%	55%	44%	49%
4.2	55%	62%	56%	48%	60%	56%	51%	55%
4.3	72%	80%	76%	74%	83%	71%	73%	78%
4.4	76%	80%	71%	78%	73%	70%	78%	76%
4.5	77%	77%	77%	76%	84%	71%	63%	75%
4.6	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
4.7	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
4.8	71%	78%	72%	72%	73%	70%	73%	76%
Total N	92	100	120	46	98	115	73	76

All CPD records (750)

The issues addressed

Identifying areas for learning

Social workers have different ways of identifying their own learning needs, but it often begins with a discussion with a supervisor that identifies a development need. The CPD records show several cases where a social worker sits down with their supervisor to discuss gaps in their knowledge and areas for improvement and then decides upon a course of action to address this.

“I discussed this presentation at length with my manager and we reflected on how I demonstrate the influence of research in my practice and how I evidence this in my delivery of key decision making to my supervisor”

Occasionally, a development need is identified by a change in job role or promotion leading to a recognition that new skills or experience are needed. This may be the reason for undertaking specific kinds of CPD such as a management course.

“Upon being promoted to assistant team manager the role of panel advisor was identified and the training therefore required”

Many social workers used CPD to develop and deepen their understanding of a specific area of their practice. Examples include human trafficking, foster care and the Human Rights Act. Often this was prompted by an experience in their day-to-day job causing them to ask more questions and identifying a gap in their knowledge.

“This CPD activity has enabled me to shore up knowledge, skills and prior learning and experience of working within the mental health sector as a frontline practitioner”

Another key issue in society explored in several of the entries is child protection, including issues relating to county lines. Again, this is often a result of direct experience with this issue in their daily practice. Improving their subject knowledge has knock-on effects for people with lived experience and those benefitting from their work.

“I was able to use this knowledge [on county lines] in two recent cases I was involved in and make evidence based recommendations to the court and advise other professionals involved in the cases”

An interesting by-product of social workers undertaking CPD is that learning builds an increased desire to learn more in the future and uncovers learning needs that social workers are keen to fill. Social workers reported how their CPD benefited them through identifying future learning needs.

“I have now started going over theory that I first learnt in University and have found it an amazing experience. It's opened my mind to things I thought I understood but realised I didn't!”

It has made me want to learn more about sexuality and autism and to carry out observations of service users living with autism.

External events motivating learning

As mentioned earlier, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in many social workers undertaking specific training to respond to the crisis more effectively. Several records mentioned training either being organised for social workers or conducting their own research into the virus and its impacts. Some records specifically mention an increase in domestic violence as a result of the lockdown prompting them to refresh their knowledge in this area.

“Given the ongoing [COVID-19] restrictions in place, and the simultaneous rise of reports of domestically-violent incidents during the period of lockdown itself”

“A lot of the discussion was around how our current practice has changed because of [COVID-19] and how the drive for quality practice has been impacted on by restrictions regarding visits but also because families are facing additional hardship.”

“Reflected on the current issue in society about the impact of COVID-19 on the lives of families; both in terms of safety, additional stress, financial implications and mental health and wellbeing”

In addition to COVID-19, the Black Lives Matter movement during 2020 has specifically driven some social workers to undertake CPD. The movement provides an opportunity to discuss institutional racism and how colleagues or people with lived experiences might be affected.

“In the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests and the events that preceded them, this session explored the use of psychology approaches to facilitate greater understanding and to generate conversations with service users about how they were personally affected.”

“We discussed how this year Black Lives Matter has impacted on our black colleagues in work”

It was noted in figure 11 that in the past 12 months, almost half (48%) of social workers had undertaken CPD related to equality, diversity and inclusion. Social workers who undertake CPD on topics like this may not directly reference a particular movement but see it as part of wider societal discussions around discrimination on the basis of race, gender, or other characteristics.

“The application of this legislation is then discussed in the context of its use and this is where current issues of social justice, racial bias and impact of individual's social situations are considered and discussed”

“Attending this seminar made me reflect on gender inequality and gender violence both on a global scale and also more close to home in our own society.”

“This CPD helped to consolidate my knowledge and understanding of socio-economic differences across the country, the ways in which minority ethnic groups, women and others can face discrimination”

A desire to understand and reflect on their own implicit bias is also a reason for social workers to undertake CPD, which may be linked to equality, diversity and inclusion topics. The impact of CPD on implicit or unconscious bias is discussed later in this chapter.

Theories and frameworks

As mentioned earlier, the most common topics referenced within the CPD records include the use of theories and legislation in their practice. This ranges from learning new academic theories underpinning decision-making to furthering their understanding of the legislation they operate under. These can be part and parcel of the same learning as

academic research can provide further reading in light of specific legislative acts particularly when dealing with vulnerable adults or children.

“A common theme emerging is the uncertainty of the world we live in and the challenge of keeping abreast of speedily changing legislation and case law that drives and informs our practice.”

“I was able to develop my knowledge of the Care Act 2014, and how adults can also be put at risk of harm and the need for vulnerable people to be safeguarded. [...] I was able to further develop my knowledge of [...] the work of Forrester et al. (2012). I was also able to enhance my learning [...] through the work of Mason (2012)”

Also evident is the use of models and frameworks in social workers' practice and how learning to use these models to structure decision-making is a core method of improving practice. Common theories included attachment theory and systems theory as well as broader sociological theories such as feminist theory.

“Particular theories were discussed including Attachment Theory - how this will impact a child's engagement with any assessment and how we can misinterpret reactions making upskilling in assessment and analysis critical.”

“We covered other theories such as Social Learning Theory, Crisis Intervention, and Systems Theory - again these all are critical in safeguarding practice.”

“Secure Base Model - this was discussed due to the agency fostering panel providing some feedback on us as assessors including this theory into our form of assessments and respite assessments when writing up our reports.”

Social workers are also very conscious of how their practice impacts those with lived experience and undertake CPD to improve their understanding of this impact. Person-centred practice and other topics are common themes within CPD – emphasising how those with lived experience are individuals and decisions made around them should be considered holistically. Frameworks such as the strengths based approach emphasise those with lived experience as individuals the social worker is collaborating with.

“Case study examples of real-life situations which allowed for critical thinking and applying my own interventions to reach person centred outcomes.”

“Participation in this session has prompted me to revisit and strengthen my understanding of Person-centred and Strength Based models of social work practice by exposing myself to prominent academics producing work in these fields. This in turn has prompted a greater focus on collaborative practice.”

Impact of the CPD on their practice

One of the most fundamental impacts on a social worker's practice is where CPD causes them to reflect on their own values and belief systems, and how they feed into decision-making. Many social workers recognised the influence of their own personal values and working to be objective in their judgements. Linked to person-centred practice, this is evidenced by tailoring services to those with lived experience.

"This supervision enabled me to reflect on how big, complex pieces of work such as a Mental Capacity Assessment make me feel, and how important it was that I do not let my own values' bias my assessment in any way."

"This training has allowed me to reflect on how my personal values have an influence on my decision making and the need to be aware that every social worker will have personal values which can influence the way they conduct assessments and reviews."

In part, recognising their own values and biases also encourages social workers to have greater empathy for those with lived experiences and recognise the different contexts that they may be living in. Having the theoretical knowledge and frameworks for decision-making as a result of CPD means that social workers are empowered to find the best solution for people with lived experience regardless of their personal feelings.

"I re-examined how a shift in my value base to place more emphasis on a family's strengths and existing safety measures would improve engagement and ultimately provide a more balanced plan".

"The training helped me to see that it is just as important to discuss this area of a person's life with the same level of active listening, and with the same aim of empowering the individual to find a solution, as it is in any other area."

A strong theme in the impact of CPD on quality of practice is the increased confidence that increased knowledge brings. Being equipped with an understanding of relevant theories and frameworks improves their decision making and has a knock-on impact for other soft skills such as communication and confidence.

"I was able to work better because I was better informed and more knowledgeable and as a result had better outcomes for the vulnerable people I support."

"The learning has impacted on the quality of my practice and the impact of my teams practice in the improvement of the recognition and confidence of identifying risk of FGM at the front door in safeguarding children. It has made me more confident in my decision making around FGM."

One clear positive impact of undertaking CPD was improvements in soft skills, namely improved communication skills and increased confidence. These two themes emerged strongly, and social workers often reported how the CPD that they had undertaken had influenced the quality of their practice through being able to communicate better or being more confident in certain situations.

“This course has enabled me to identify and recognise changes in behaviour and consider how my attitude and presentation can directly affect the other person’s behaviour”

“I am of the view that I am now more confident, and my practice has improved well above what it was in the past. I am now focused more on relationships as it is person-based, which would help my clients.”

“I noticed that at the beginning of my practice I was lacking in confidence in myself as a social worker and my abilities. [...] This increased my confidence and in turn improved the quality of my practice.”

Linked to person-centred frameworks, a number of social workers also closely related their increased knowledge of particular issues with their ability to demonstrate greater empathy with those they work with and improve their communication to involve those with lived experience.

“I have learned to place an emphasis on listening and empathising [...] more working collaboratively with patients to explore what they would like to realistically change.”

“It has forced me to consider how I respond to conversations with parents about their own responses to incidents of domestic violence and helped me to [...] get parents talking about this issue meaningfully and honestly.”

“I consider the quality of my practice has improved in terms of [...] the misunderstanding of language used and how this can be interpreted by young people in vulnerable situations.”

Contributing to an open and learning culture

There are three core ways in which the specific CPD undertaken operates in an open and learning culture. These are:

Discussion group work within the training

Many types of CPD encourage active reflection and discussion during the sessions where topics can be talked through with other participants. While face-to-face CPD was reduced during the pandemic, many social workers praised development sessions which used “breakout rooms” or similar techniques to support this active participation and engagement with their counterparts.

“Broad discussion and contribution from a wide range of people, including people who have lived experience.”

“This in-depth discussion of casework and theory allowed for the issue to be discussed in detail and offer an honest and thought-provoking analysis, whilst also considering our own perceptions and beliefs. An outside trainer gave the program, this allowed for an independent professional to give their views”

“The training was on Zoom which made it feel a little artificial, however the use of virtual break-out rooms helped discussion to take place more easily”

Sharing the knowledge gained with colleagues and within supervision

Once a social worker has undertaken CPD, they often then share the learnings with their wider team. This maximises each individual social worker’s development through open and informal learning. It also ensures learning is dynamic and ongoing as colleagues and managers prompt additional reflection on the CPD topics and teachings.

“I was able to subsequently share my experience and the information [...] with the team during group supervision and during the team's lunchtime learning sessions and had the opportunity (along with my colleagues) to reflect on the information”

“This allowed me an opportunity to hear from other colleagues as to the different approaches that they took to a situation, their methods and how they look to overcome challenges in a way that might be different to my own”

“The peer supervision gives us a chance to bring our perspectives, knowledge, critical reflection and values together to discuss important aspects of our work.”

Multi-agency interactions and learnings

A key facet of social work practice is multi-agency work and liaising across organisations to ensure positive outcomes for people with lived experience. Learning from and understanding other organisations’ approaches ensures that social workers have a holistic view of how people with lived experience might be affected by decisions and enables person-centred practice.

“The sharing of ideas between professionals was important to help us work from the same page so to speak; this then offered the child a sense of predictability from home to school”

“The wider professional network should be kept involved throughout all processes. Schools, GP, drug and alcohol workers often do not know our processes and it can be helpful and less anxiety provoking for the professional network if they were to be kept informed.”

“Conversations with several service providers to ensure they can support a personalised approach”

Feedback and supervision

Part of an open and learning culture is the ability for social workers to get feedback on their practice. This helps to identify areas for future learning as well as provide evidence of the positive impact CPD has had on their practice. There are a number of ways in which social workers report receiving feedback:

Direct feedback from colleagues, supervisors and managers

Many social workers received positive feedback from their colleagues on how their practice has improved. Often if the CPD was discussed with a supervisor beforehand, feedback from that supervisor was sought once CPD was completed; similarly, many supervisors sought feedback from those they supervise. This suggests that this relationship is important in establishing the impact of CPD.

“From the feedback received from my colleagues and managers, I believe that the knowledge gained from this workshop has contributed positively to the work I do”

“This session enables all to feedback their own practice as well as comment on others - a reassuring exercise to enable all to grow and improve and identify any areas of development.”

Direct feedback from people with lived experience

A second reason often cited is that people with lived experience have provided feedback on the performance of the social worker. This can be either formal or informal feedback and demonstrated the impact of the social worker in this situation.

“I know that it has had a positive impact due to the comments from the young person, family and agencies”

“Through feedback from the young people I work with and when I engage with them and they can tell me how they have approached something differently, or have used something they have learned which has made a difference to them. In group work young people will be asked to feedback weekly on their experiences and what they have learned”

Witnessing the impact on those with lived experience

Similarly, many social workers have seen first-hand how their improved practice has impacted those that they are helping. If the social worker can see the evidence of how they are helping people with lived experience, they can see the value in the CPD on their practice.

“I have also been using these techniques with service users when having difficult conversations about processes and their complaints [...] the social worker was struggling to manage the parents’ behaviour and service users were asking to speak to me as the manager. After in depth conversations, the service users ended up reflecting on their attitude and behaviour and were more accepting of our intervention which enabled the young person to stay with birth family.”

Conclusions

Social workers do see the benefits of CPD, understanding that it benefits them personally and protects the profession's standards. One of the core benefits of CPD is that it keeps social workers' practice up-to-date. Social workers report undertaking CPD in order to keep their knowledge fresh and keep abreast of changes to policies that affect them and people with lived experiences. This has been of particular value given the changing circumstances during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 – from social distancing requirements, to remote working and online challenges.

The most common type of CPD undertaken in the last year is online learning and courses, although it should be noted that some social workers had previously booked in-person CPD that was moved online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Social workers are very positive about the CPD that they completed; considering it accessible, useful, and relevant. They particularly value CPD which is relevant to their day-to-day role and which directly improves their support for people with lived experiences.

There is one key barrier to completing CPD that recurred throughout the research – a lack of time. Many social workers report not having enough time in the working day in order to complete CPD. It is also sometimes seen as lower priority than other tasks; social workers mention having to cancel CPD due to other demands on their time, which has been particularly noted as COVID-19 presents new challenges and demands.

The broad benefits and challenges of CPD are seen in sharp relief when viewed through the lens of COVID-19. CPD has helped social workers understand new challenges the pandemic has presented; some specifically undertook COVID-19 related CPD and others say that CPD helped them reflect and deal with issues that arose as a result of COVID-19. On the other hand, these new pandemic-related challenges have increased the demands on social workers' time. The opportunities for CPD have sometimes varied and the shift to online and remote work has not suited all.

External events such as the COVID-19 pandemic can spur social workers to undertake CPD in response to related challenges. In anonymised records, social workers also referenced the Black Lives Matter protests during 2020, driving an interest in broadening their understanding of institutional racism and other forms of discrimination. Understanding and challenging their biases is a key area that social workers seek to develop through CPD, recognising that for frameworks such as People-centred Practice it is key to recognise the person with lived experience as an individual in their own right and not to impose their own value judgement into the decision-making.

Organisations and managers often identify particular areas for social workers' learning through supervision sessions and other discussions. However, some social workers note that support for CPD and ongoing learning can be surface level – valuing CPD as far as necessary to meet minimum requirements for practice, but not necessarily offering practical support to social workers.

Although some social workers say that this 'box-ticking' attitude is carried through to the requirement of CPD by Social Work England, many realise that the requirement for CPD benefits the profession as a whole. Actively reflecting on their CPD helps to improve their practice, and the records demonstrate the profession's standards to the public. Recording CPD for the requirement is generally seen as easy, although a small minority referenced that it took a long time for them to do or said there was a lack of clarity in the instructions. In terms how social workers understand CPD and the requirement, formal training and courses are the most commonly referenced and, without being prompted, very few mention doing informal or creative CPD.

Social workers are keen for more support from Social Work England, particularly around minimising the demands on their time and ensuring a smooth reporting process. There is substantial appetite for examples of best practice across both the types of CPD which can be recorded as well as the forms themselves. Those who had seen the supporting information on Social Work England's website consider it clear and useful, but not all social workers are aware of it.

Annex

Sample composition

Qualitative

Below is the sample composition of respondents from YouGov's panel who took part in the online focus groups and in-depth interviews.

Gender	Location	Ethnicity	Social work type	Employer type	Social work length
Female	North West	English / British	Other	NHS	3 years or more, but less than 5 years
Female	South East	English / British	Adults	Local Authority	3 years or more, but less than 5 years
Male	North West	Other Mixed ethnic background	Children & families	Local Authority	1 year or more, but less than 3 years
Male	London	English / British	Children & families	Local Authority	5 years or more, but less than 10 years
Female	East of England	English / British	Both	Local Authority	1 year or more, but less than 3 years
Male	London	English / British	Children & families	Local Authority	Less than 1 year
Female	West Midlands	Indian	Both	A social work agency	3 years or more, but less than 5 years
Male	East of England	Pakistani	Both	NHS	5 years or more, but less than 10 years
Female	London	Other White background	Both	N/A – Independent social worker	More than 20 years
Male	West Midlands	English / British	Other	Local Authority	10 years or more, but less than 15 years
Female	Yorkshire and the Humber	English / British	Children & families	Local Authority	10 years or more, but less than 15 years

Gender	Location	Ethnicity	Social work type	Employer type	Social work length
Male	South East	English / British	Adults	Local Authority	15 years or more, but less than 20 years
Female	North West	English / British	Children & families	Local Authority	15 years or more, but less than 20 years
Female	South East	White and Black Caribbean	Adults	Local Authority	10 years or more, but less than 15 years
Male	West Midlands	Irish	Both	Local Authority	More than 20 years
Female	South East	Prefer not to say	Children & families	Local Authority	More than 20 years
Female	North West	English / British	Both	A private organisation but not an agency	15 years or more, but less than 20 years
Female	East Midlands	English / British	Adults	Local Authority	10 years or more, but less than 15 years
Male	North West	English / British	Both	A social work agency	5 years or more, but less than 10 years
Female	South West	English / British	Children & families	Local Authority	5 years or more, but less than 10 years
Male	South East	Other Mixed ethnic background	Both	A private organisation which is not an agency	3 years or more, but less than 5 years
Female	North West	White and Black Caribbean	Children & families	Local Authority	3 years or more, but less than 5 years
Female	Yorkshire and the Humber	English / British	Other	Local Authority	10 years or more, but less than 15 years
Female	North West	English / British	Adults	Local Authority	Less than 1 year
Female	Yorkshire and the Humber	English / British	Children & families	Local Authority	10 years or more, but less than 15 years
Female	London	African	Adults	N/A – Independent social worker	10 years or more, but less than 15 years
Female	West Midlands	English / British	Children & families	A private organisation which is not an agency	More than 20 years
Female	North East	English / British	Adults	Local Authority	More than 20 years

Gender	Location	Ethnicity	Social work type	Employer type	Social work length
Female	East of England	English / British	Children & families	Local Authority	1 year or more, but less than 3 years
Female	West Midlands	Indian	Both	Local Authority	15 years or more, but less than 20 years
Female	South West	Any other White background	Children & families	Local Authority	15 years or more, but less than 20 years
Female	East Midlands	English / British	Both	Local Authority	More than 20 years
Male	South East	English / British	Children & families	Local Authority	3 years or more, but less than 5 years
Female	South West	English / British	Adults	Local Authority	5 years or more, but less than 10 years
Male	London	English / British	Adults	NHS	More than 20 years
Female	London	English / British	Adults	NHS	10 years or more, but less than 15 years
Female	Yorkshire and the Humber	English / British	Both	Other	15 years or more, but less than 20 years
Female	South East	English / British	Adults	Local Authority	10 years or more, but less than 15 years
Male	North West	Any other White background	Adults	Local Authority	More than 20 years
Female	South West	English / British	Children & families	Local Authority	3 years or more, but less than 5 years
Female	North West	English / British	Children & families	A social work agency	3 years or more, but less than 5 years
Female	West Midlands	Caribbean	Adults	Local Authority	5 years or more, but less than 10 years
Female	East of England	English / British	Children & families	Local Authority	5 years or more, but less than 10 years

Quantitative

Below is the sample composition of respondents from YouGov's panel who took part in the online quantitative survey.

Gender	Male	119
	Female	384
Age	18 to 24	7
	25 to 34	108
	35 to 44	126
	35 to 54	112
	55+	151
Ethnicity	White	415
	Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME)	46
Type of Social Worker	Children & Families	226
	Adult	206
	Both	51
	Other	21