



Developing social workers' practice

Core principles for employers providing a flexible CPD approach for social workers



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Developing social workers' practice: Core principles for employers providing a flexible CPD approach for social workers

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Introduction

These principles will support employers to provide continuing professional development (CPD) for their social work workforce. They illustrate how the key Social Work Reform Board products can be integrated and provide guidance on how they can be used to inform organisational and professional development plans. Since the GSCC Post Qualifying framework (PQ) ended there has been confusion across the sector about the approach to CPD and how it can be managed. The important difference in the new CPD approach is that academic credit is not seen as the only way that learning and development needs can be met. CPD includes all learning activity and reflection on practice that a social worker should, as part of their everyday practice, critically reflect on and record. CPD is not divorced from practice and similar to the ASYE, these principles strongly advise that all assessment is work based.

'Re-visioning social work education', the independent review of social work education conducted by Professor David Croisedale–Appleby, calls for “a new comprehensive continuing professional development framework for the profession”. Should this recommendation be accepted these principles will support such a framework.

Although social workers might be a small proportion of the overall workforce the reputation of the employing agency can stand or fall by the quality of social worker practice. Good CPD fully incorporated into organisational planning and processes provides confidence for employers and social workers in the delivery of high quality services.

The principles have been developed and tested by a group of employers from across the country; including those with responsibility across adults' and children's services. Throughout this document you will find links to resources and case studies from employers, developed to support workforce development professionals in the audit, design, commissioning and impact evaluation of social worker CPD activity, including in house and academically accredited provision.

The principles need to be considered and applied as a whole as each is interdependent on the other.

Employers felt that the principles helped to:

- provide a framework for strategic planning
- support recruitment and retention
- provide evidence of best practice when undergoing external inspection
- bring together all of the SWRB products
- support employers and social workers meet HCPC re registration requirements
- provide a quality assurance audit tool for in house and academically accredited training
- provide a greater understanding of the CPD requirements for social workers when learning and development planning and activity is incorporated in corporate departments. Thurrock Council provides an example of how social worker needs can be addressed within a corporate [performance and development review](#) system.



The CPD approach

The recommendations in the new [approach to CPD](#) recognise that learning can take place in a range of different ways and circumstances. It is not always associated with a 'course' and the development need may be met through a range of different activities.

The new CPD approach and the principles which govern it offer employers and social workers a flexible approach to the provision and process for CPD. One of the major changes incorporated in the new approach – and reflected in the requirements for re-registration by the Health & Care Professions Council (HCPC) – is a shift from an 'input' model (e.g. 15 days of training or learning activity) to an 'output' model (how does the organisation need me to develop, what do I need to do and what is the impact on practice?). The HCPC standards for CPD state that, "A registrant must seek to ensure that their CPD has contributed to the quality of their practice and service delivery" Southend on Sea Borough Council have produced a [workbook](#) which provides an ongoing record of CPD activity, reflection and impact on practice.

By following these principles, employers will be able to ensure that social workers will collect evidence that can be used for re-registration with the HCPC.

These principles and Social Work Reform Board products

[The Standards for Employers of social workers in England](#) apply to all employers of social workers and describe the joint expectation on employers and social workers to ensure that CPD is ongoing. They also outline the entitlement each social worker has to CPD and the expectation that all social workers will have access to reflective supervision, provided by a registered social worker.

The implementation of the assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE) has highlighted the benefits of reflective supervision. These principles reinforce the need for all social workers to have access to reflective supervision, while at the same time recognising that developing this capacity across the sector will require ongoing support and commitment.

[The professional capabilities framework \(PCF\)](#) provides the standards and expectations for all social workers as they progress through their professional development. For the first time the public, employers and social workers are able to share a common understanding of all aspects of the role of social work and the standards that they can expect at any point in a social worker's professional development.

Workforce planning and commissioning

The principles support employers to embed the PCF as an organisational workforce development tool. It is expected that the PCF will provide the link between organisational development, business planning and the workforce development needs, which must be satisfied to deliver the business plan. An example of how this has worked in practice can be found in the [North London case study](#). The principles assume and support employers to undertake workforce planning activity. They provide a framework for social worker development within the organisation to meet business planning objectives and to be able to measure the impact of CPD in practice. Skills for Care has produced [information and guidance](#) on workforce planning.

While organisations may have identified specific workforce development requirements, each social worker should have an individual development plan that reflects their personal and professional needs as identified through supervision and appraisal. The professional development planning diagram (Appendix 1), assumes the identification of development needs and the assessment of outcomes are achieved through the supervision and appraisal process. Supervision and appraisal are central to the delivery of a flexible CPD approach, bringing together the organisational, professional and individual development needs and measuring the impact of the CPD activity in practice.

Leeds City Council has produced a [social work progression handbook](#) which shows how progression through the social worker levels is managed. These principles strongly advocate that normal appraisal processes should be incorporating holistic assessment methods against the PCF.

The assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE)

The ASYE is the first stage of CPD for all social workers and much of the learning from the process and implementation of the ASYE has informed these principles. At a local level, employers can use their experience of the ASYE to extend the CPD approach across all social worker levels. Social workers leaving their ASYE year are eager to continue their professional development. One NQSW who participated in the evaluation of ASYE, stated:

“It (the ASYE) encourages continued learning, policies and practices are always changing, nothing stays the same and this should be the mindset of any practitioner. Learning doesn’t end when you get your degree”

CPD refers to all learning and development activity that a social worker would be expected to undertake. The principles apply equally to the normal appraisal and professional development planning cycle as they would to formal accredited academic programmes. This ensures that all social workers are working towards and being holistically assessed against the standards described in the PCF.

The principles take account of, and can accommodate, other frameworks, such as the [Leadership Qualities Framework](#) and National Safeguarding Standards.

Working in partnership

The majority of employers and all the HEIs who helped to support the development of these core principles are working in partnership with other employers including local authorities, health, voluntary and children’s social work services. The partnership arrangements follow the partnership principles developed by the Social Work Reform Board. In the context of this project the partners shared development ideas, delivery mechanisms and resources, resulting in more effective and efficient ways to deliver CPD with HEIs and or other employers. It was felt that the portability of CPD, from one employer to another, could best be managed through robust partnership processes. See examples within the [memorandum of co-operation](#).



Principle 1—Using the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF)

The College of Social Work's Professional Capabilities Framework is central to the professional development of social work. It is a professional development framework not a career framework although in practice the two frameworks may be linked.

To be fully effective the PCF must be the standard that describes all professional activity within employment practices e.g recruitment, supervision and performance management. There are examples of how employers have integrated the PCF into employment practices on the Skills for Care website.

The PCF can be used to audit and identify organisational and individual professional development needs and to measure the impact of the CPD activity on practice. Learning and development activity should be mapped against the PCF. [Further guidance](#) is available.

- To meet organisational and service outcomes the organisation should have clarity about what social workers should know and to be able to do. The PCF frames, informs and supports the development of organisational outcomes. See diagram 2 in appendix 1. Information to support this activity can be found on the [Skills for Care website](#). The PCF can be used as an audit and diagnostic tool at individual social worker and organisational level.
- Organisational development requirements should be linked to professional and individual learning needs, framed by the PCF. This process should be managed through appraisal and professional development planning. [Thurrock Council's performance and development review](#) for social work managers is an example of this.
- Employers are expected to use the PCF as the basis for supervision, appraisal, performance management and professional development planning. North Somerset Council have produced an [appraisal and professional development plan](#) which support this.
- The PCF provides the level and generic standards that should be incorporated into all learning, development and assessment processes. These standards will be contextualised by the setting, and learning outcomes which are identified. For example PCF - domain five (knowledge) requirements, will be different for mental health social work as opposed to social work in a learning disability setting.
- The PCF provides a structure for the organisation and the individual to audit and assess capability at each level. This helps to identify areas for development at the professional level and to move to the next level of the PCF. North Tyneside Council have produced a [development web](#) for social workers and their managers, to audit and chart progress against the PCF.
- Clarity and transparency is needed to decide which level of the PCF should be used to plan learning and assessment requirements. Many job roles straddle levels of the PCF, for example an NQSW in a specialized setting may be operating at social worker levels in the domains of knowledge and professional leadership. This could create a 'spiky profile' for the individual, meaning expectations of learning outcomes cross the PCF levels, for example domain two values and ethics is assessed at experienced social worker level, while domain nine, professional leadership is assessed at advanced social worker level. It is important that the practitioner, manager and assessor are clear which level the social worker is aspiring to and/or being assessed against.



Principle 2—Reflective supervision/ supporting reflective practice

“Reflective supervision is the regular collaborative reflection between a service provider (clinical or other) and supervisor that builds on the supervisee’s use of her thoughts, feelings, and values within a service encounter”. [Multiplying Connections](#)

Ensuring reflective practice through reflective supervision together with the PCF is central to developing professional expertise, judgement and confidence which are the requirements of autonomous professionals. The Social Work Task Force highlighted these desired outcomes as being crucial for improvement in professional practice which is outlined by Professor Munro and in the Care Act 2014. [The standards for employers](#) state that employers should encourage social workers to plan, reflect on and record learning activity as part of their supervision, using recording tools such as an e-portfolio.

A whole system approach to the development of reflective supervision can be found in the [Thurrock Council CPD case study](#).

- The standards for employers detail the support that all social workers should expect to receive from their employer and are therefore assumed in these principles as underpinning the CPD process. The North London Tri Borough [supervision policy](#) demonstrates how these requirements have been adopted.
- In advance of, or in tandem with, the application of these principles, employers need to assure themselves that line managers, supervisors and supervisees have an understanding of the benefits, purpose and models of reflective supervision. Guidance for supervisors and assessors is available as part of an assessor toolkit. Shropshire County Council have developed [resources to support reflective supervision](#).
- Where the CPD includes significant requirements for learning, application and assessment of practice, enhanced critically reflective supervision should be made available to the candidate. This may include a variety of methods to support the development of critical reflection including action learning, group or peer supervision, mentoring and coaching. [Research](#) indicates that action learning can support the development of critical reflection.
- Employers should ensure the frequency and quality of reflective supervision by auditing and observing practice.



Principle 3—Holistic assessment

The evaluation of the first year of the assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE) reported that both NQSW's and their supervisors/assessors felt that "in the development of professional judgement and confidence a holistic rather than competency-based assessment is preferable".

The design of the assessment used at ASYE is a useful starting point when planning for the assessment of CPD. The definition of **the future of Continuing Professional Development (CPD)** includes all learning activity and practice that a social worker should, as part of their everyday practice, critically reflect on and record. Holistic assessment of this everyday activity should be part of the annual appraisal process and brings together the minimum core assessment requirements (listed below). This list includes the social worker's evidence of informal learning (reading, attending conferences, shadowing, coaching) at one end of the scale with CPD as a combined academically accredited and practice-based piece of learning and development at the other.

It's crucial that CPD includes the core assessment evidence requirements listed at the appropriate depth and intensity to meet the agreed learning outcomes, organisational objectives and professional standards and capabilities.

- Assessment is required across all nine PCF domains but could require greater focus on one or more domains linked to the learning outcomes. For example, at the ASYE level the focus for development has been placed on domain seven (intervention and skills), to reinforce the consolidation of learning in practice, while at manager level the focus is likely to be in professional leadership.
- Recommended core evidence requirements for all CPD assessment includes:
 1. Critically reflective practice to include reflection on decisions, feedback from people being supported and from other professionals and colleagues. Refer to the **principles of critical reflection**. The assessment of CPD will be strengthened and triangulated by the contributions of other professionals. Shropshire County Council have produced a **reflective learning log**.
 2. Feedback from people being supported can be informal and indirect or formal. The appropriateness of the feedback mechanism should be an element included in **critical reflection**. There is **guidance** for developing, collecting and reflecting on feedback from people in need of care and support (These CPD principles initially focus on main grade social workers, but where managers are collecting feedback from people being supported, the focus may switch to the impact of the service they are managing).
 3. Direct observation of practice- A **template** for use during the ASYE can be adapted.
 4. Supervision records including evidence of reflective practice discussions which demonstrate critical thinking, professional judgement and decision making. An example of reflective supervision notes can be found in the ASYE assessment case study **"Simon"**.
 5. Evidence of the impact of CPD activity - **Guidance** on measuring the impact on practice is available.
- All CPD should carry an expectation of development, deepening of understanding and application of values and ethics.



Principle 4—Work-based assessment

Work based assessment supports professional development planning and the impact evaluation of learning and development activity on direct practice. Assessment in practice is more likely to result in learning for the individual and the team, supporting culture change and the learning across the organisation.

A major success of the ASYE has been the integration of learning and assessment in practice. Employers felt that retaining this was crucial for any CPD. The ASYE demonstrates that assessment of practice is possible where learning and development is delivered in house or in partnership with an **Higher Education Institute**.

- Individual learning outcomes and expectations for development linked to the PCF are discussed and agreed within the supervision, appraisal and professional development planning process. Thurrock Council has produced a **performance and development review for social workers**.
- Learning outcomes and the impact of CPD should be **measured in practice**.
- Ensuring that all assessment is practice-based and deals with live issues will provide a link between individual, professional and organisational development objectives.
- The overall holistic assessment of the development of capability is best made by the line manager. Where others are contributing or making assessments (e.g. supervisor or practice educator offering enhanced or reflective supervision, academic assessment, etc.), account needs to be taken of these by the line manager in their judgement and decisions. This is a process that has been successfully managed in the **ASYE**.
- Mechanisms should be in place to ensure that the outcomes of the learning and development activity, measured in practice, influence and direct the construction of the next iteration of objectives. For example a component of the assessment is linked to analysis and critique of existing agency practices and/or an exploration of different ways of working or service delivery. See diagram 2 appendix 1.
- As an element of workforce development planning employers should consider how to manage knowledge and experience transfer by using experienced social workers to support the CPD of other staff.
- In supporting the development of the learning organisation, an additional aspect of assessment should include a demonstration of the worker's ability to share learning and promote productive conversations within teams and networks.



Principle 5—Measuring impact

“Impact assessment should focus on what participants learn, how they use what they have learned, and the effect on people being supported and carers in the short, medium and long-term”. The Department of Health have recognised the importance of evaluating the impact of CPD and have provided funding through Skills for Care to support employers to test and develop models for measuring impact.

The project recognised that employers need to be able to measure the impact of CPD on practice and service delivery to support the on-going review of workforce commissioning and the return on investment in their staff. At the same time social workers have to be able to evidence and demonstrate the impact of their CPD activity to maintain their professional registration. More information on this project, the models, tools and case studies is available on the [Skills for Care website](#).

- In order to assess impact, clear targets/objectives need to be identified. The organisation needs to set the required objectives to meet improved or changed service delivery requirements. Organisational development, HR and workforce development should work in partnership to identify these objectives.
- The anticipated impact of CPD activity needs to be established in advance of the selection or development of measurement tools. For example, what changes/improvements do you expect to see in service delivery and the social workers professional practice? What will success look like? Examples of measurement tools include the [North Tyneside Council’s development web](#) and Ripfa Training Transfer model.
- Thinking about how the objectives can be measured is crucial. You will need to decide what evidence will be used to determine impact, including timescales, and how the results will feed back into performance management processes and organisational planning.
- Formulating objectives that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely (SMART) helps to create outcomes that are measurable.
- Tying together organisational and individual development is critical to workforce commissioning. Measuring the impact of an individual’s CPD learning on their practice should feed into organisational development plans and will support the development of a learning organisation and culture change.
- Measuring impact requires a baseline audit or assessment, including organisational and individual assessments against the PCF. The tool for measuring the baseline will be influenced by anticipated outcomes for service delivery and professional practice. Impact SHOULD be measured in the short, medium and long term, using information from more than one source.
- Impact can be measured formally, using statistical data, analysing feedback forms and monitoring staff retention levels. It can also be measured through informal dialogue during performance reviews, increased positivity amongst staff teams and feedback from people in need of care and support.
- The impact of the CPD on practice should be linked to the appraisal system.
- To assure the quality of learning and development activities, employers should use evaluation processes to ensure activities are appropriate. These evaluation processes should be reviewed regularly and the overall impact of the activity on practice should also be taken into account.

Principle 5 - Measuring impact cont.

Social workers should be supported to reflect on and evaluate the impact of their learning in practice. Professional development objectives for individual social workers should be aligned to the PCF.

Supervisors are best placed to oversee the measurement of impact on individual practice and service delivery. This will form part of their overall assessment of the social worker's development.

When commissioning modules with an HEI, the programme should be based on organisational development needs but the design should be flexible enough to incorporate individual learning needs. The design of the programme should include impact assessment tools.



Principle 6—Portability

Unlike the ASYE, the flexible and hybrid approach recommended for CPD does not easily lend itself to standardisation. Employers and social workers will want to see and evidence how they are developing against the PCF, particularly as workers move from post to post. The PCF can provide a framework to record the standards and the level achieved. Across the sector employers are developing the experience of local and area standardisation of assessment at ASYE, and the learning from this can inform the same for ongoing CPD. Employers comment on how important good CPD is for the recruitment and retention of high quality social workers. Providing more coherent records of the standards and the outcomes of CPD will help employers with their recruitment process.

In the same way that questions on successful completion of ASYE are being incorporated into recruitment processes, outcomes of ongoing CPD should be an element of recruitment beyond the ASYE. To assure the quality of CPD, employers are working in partnership to quality assure their processes through the use of these principles. It is expected that the responsibility for recording and verifying the achievement will be a joint professional and organisational response. The following suggestions have been made for achieving quality assurance and portability:

- Job interviews should include questions on the outcomes and impact of CPD activity on the social worker and their practice, and on their level of critical reflection. For example, how has their recent learning and development activity changed their practice and can they describe how the outcomes from recent professional development activity can support them in their role.
- Employers will need to satisfy themselves that the CPD process for existing and newly appointed social workers are robust and consistent. This will require tools to measure impact and record the CPD and assessment undertaken.
- A CPD portfolio is part of the evidence used by a social worker to demonstrate how they have progressed for HCPC re-registration, and may be the minimum expectation for giving evidence of development against the PCF. The College of Social Work (TCSW) provides an e-portfolio for its members. Southend on Sea Borough Council have developed a useful [workbook](#).
- Those employer partnerships who are using these principles as an audit tool for their quality assurance activity, will have increased confidence in the robustness of their assessment } decisions. There are examples including CPD within the [Memorandum of Collaboration](#).

These could be strengthened by:

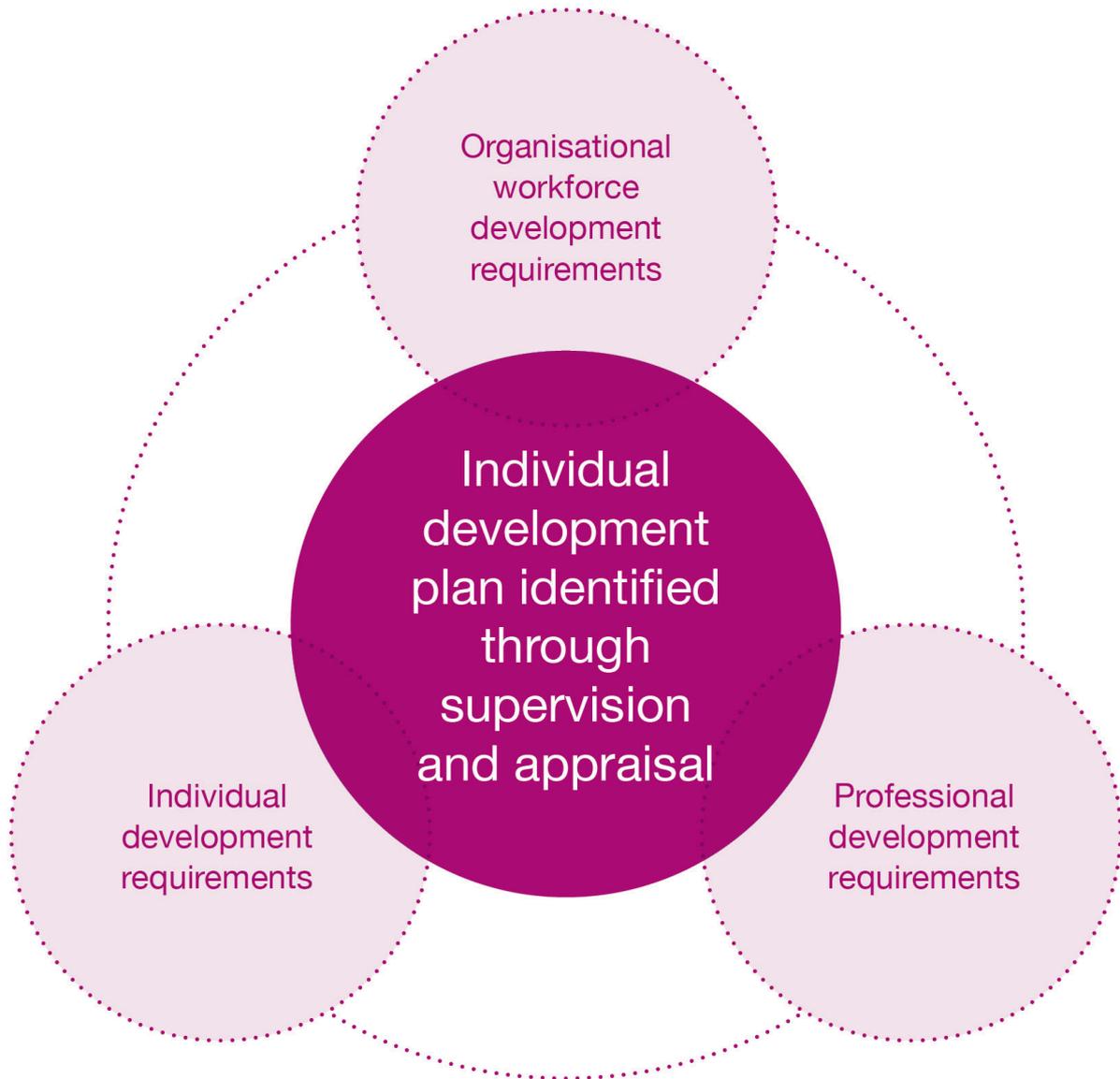
1. Shared paperwork.
 2. Moderation of assessments between local employers, including sampling of appraisal reports.
 3. Quality assurance of assessors' and line managers' supervision and assessment skills.
- [Guidance for practice development educators](#).
4. Endorsement of CPD learning programmes by TCSW.
- Obtaining TCSW endorsement as a training organisation will add weight to assessment decisions.
 - Portability will be supported by the development of an organisational model for transcripts (see appendix 2 for suggestions of what might be included in a transcript). Each organisation or partnership would need to consider whether activity was significant enough to warrant a transcript or certificate.

Useful resources

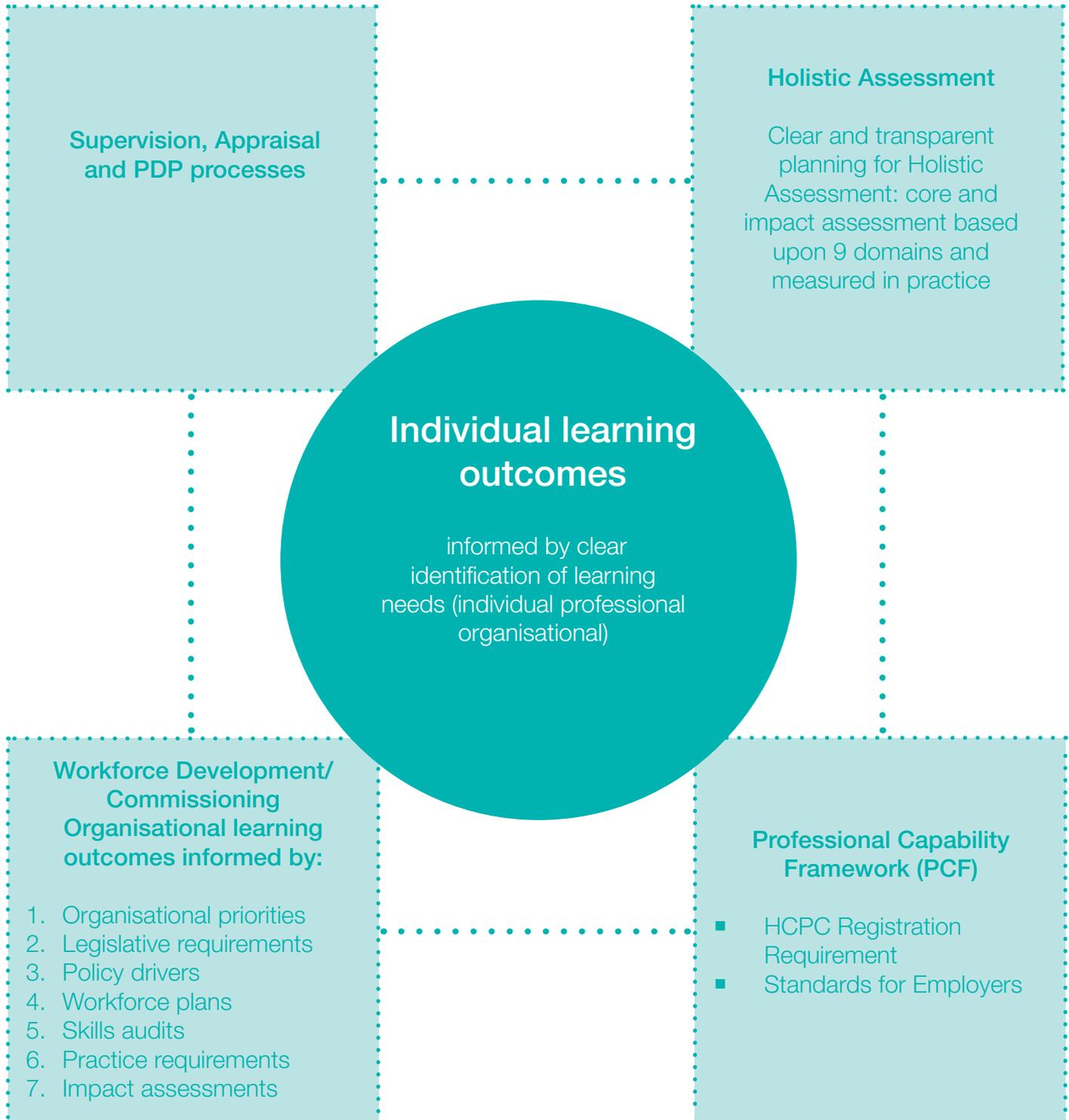
- [Thurrock Council – Performance and review](#)
- [Southend on Sea Borough Council – Workbook](#)
- [Leeds City Council – Progression handbook](#)
- [Thurrock Council - Performance and development review for social work managers](#)
- [North Somerset Council – Combined appraisal and PDP](#)
- North Tyneside Council - [Development web](#) and [user guide](#)
- [North London Tri Borough Adult Social Care – Supervision policy](#)
- [Shropshire County Council – Reflective supervision models](#)
- [Thurrock Council - Performance and development review for social workers](#)
- [Shropshire County Council – Reflective learning Log](#)



Appendix 1-Professional development planning diagram



Appendix 2 - Workforce commissioning: organisational, professional and individual development planning diagram.



Appendix 3

Organisational transcripts - suggestions for inclusion

- Details of individual and employing organisation.
- Description of CPD activity.
- Assessment level (against the PCF).
- Assessment process and evidence presented, e.g. direct observations, reflective summaries.
- Academic or other accreditation.
- Name and role of assessor (registration number).
- Verification decision and date.
- Declaration of adherence to the CPD core principles.
- Outcome of CPD activity, including impact on practice.
- Short overall reflective comment by the social worker.

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