



Up to standard?

Your guide to the Standards for
Employers of Social Workers in England

2014 update

What are the standards for employers?

The *Standards for employers of social workers in England* are published by the Local Government Association (LGA) on behalf of the social work reform partners – a group including local government and voluntary sector employers, UNISON, social services directors associations and professional bodies.

The *Standards* set out what employers are expected to do to support their social workers. They specify the working conditions social workers should be able to expect to ensure safe and effective social work practice. They cover all employers of registered social workers in all sectors and types of settings in England.

Service regulators Ofsted and CQC have also been involved in the development of the *Standards*, and they take them into account in their work.

The *Standards* were first published in 2012 and were refreshed in 2014.

You can view and download them at <http://tinyurl.com/employerstandards>.

What you are entitled to expect from your employer

Here is a checklist of some of the key things you are entitled to expect from your employer as a result of the *Standards*.

You should expect to have

Standard 3

- a.** Your workload regularly allocated and reviewed taking account of your capacity and the time you need for supervision and CPD
- b.** A system in place to resolve situations where your workload exceeds your capacity

Standard 4

- c.** Access to sufficient quiet space for formal supervision, informal professional discussions, team meetings and confidential interviews with service users
- d.** A means to raise concerns about inadequate resources, operational difficulties, workload or your own skills and capacity – *without fear of recrimination*
- e.** An effective system to assess, minimise and/or prevent the risk of violence, harassment and bullying to you at work
- f.** Access to employee welfare services
- g.** Effective case recording and IT systems, internet access and mobile communications
- h.** Safe means of transport for fieldwork

- i. Effective access to fellow professionals including legal advisors, translators and interpreters
- j. Sufficient skilled administrative support

Standard 5

- k. At least part of your supervision from a registered social worker
- l. At least monthly supervision
- m. Supervision sessions that last at least an hour and a half of uninterrupted time
- n. Supervision which covers the four domains of: shared decision-making; line management; workload management; identification of personal learning and development opportunities

Standard 6

- o. A clear entitlement to formal and informal CPD including time, resources and support from your employer
- p. Support from your employer to progress through the career structure
- q. Support from your employer to engage in research and practice development activity in universities and professional bodies

Standard 7

- r. Support from your employer in continuing to meet the requirements of your professional registration

To view the *Standards* in full go to <http://tinyurl.com/employerstandards>

What your employer should be doing to meet the standards

- Your employer should appoint/designate a strategic lead social worker who is responsible for implementing the *Standards* and the *Supervision Framework*.
- Your employer should also work with local UNISON representatives to complete and publish an annual 'health check' which gathers social workers' views and experiences of their practice conditions and working environment. The health check should form part of auditing compliance with the *Standards* and should be reported to the elected members/board/trustees of your organisation. To read a case study on how two councils and their UNISON branches approached the health check, go to: www.bit.ly/HwxwB5.
- If your employer does not operate an effective workload management system for your team, they should set up a working group consisting of managers, social workers and UNISON reps to come up with a system that will work in practice. They should use the guidance and templates on workload management systems developed by the social work reform partners and featured in the *Standards* document. You can view the guidance at <http://tinyurl.com/workloadmanagementadvice>

What you can do

UNISON strongly believes that the *Standards for Employers* should be mandatory – and this view was shared by large numbers who responded to the Reform Board consultations. However the government will not agree to this, so we have to work together with all the Reform Board partners to promote the *Standards* and pressurise employers to comply.

UNISON will monitor compliance and continue to campaign for the *Standards* to have real teeth. However it is going to be a real challenge to get progress on the *Standards* across all employers. That means social workers and team managers need to get active and demand action. After all the *Standards* are what the government, the profession's representatives and the employers organisations have all agreed are the minimum requirements for safe effective practice.

You can raise the profile of the *Standards* in your workplace by:

- Thinking about your working conditions and keeping your own notes about where you see problems or shortcomings in compliance with the *Standards*
- Asking for a discussion in team meetings about how well the *Standards* are being met

- Referring to the *Standards* in supervision sessions
- Talking to your colleagues and taking your collective concerns to your local UNISON representative
- Contacting your UNISON branch about getting involved as a UNISON social work contact or steward
- Responding to surveys of social workers that UNISON and other Reform Board partners will run from time to time to check social workers' views about whether the *Standards* are making a difference

Not a member?

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