



## House of Commons Education Committee

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# Social work reform: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2016–17

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## Second Special Report of Session 2016–17

*Ordered by the House of Commons  
to be printed 12 October 2016*

## The Education Committee

The Education Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Department for Education and its associated public bodies.

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The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the Internet via [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk).

### Publications

Committee reports are published on the Committee's website at [www.parliament.uk/education-committee](http://www.parliament.uk/education-committee) and in print by Order of the House.

Evidence relating to this report is published on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

### Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Richard Ward (Clerk), Kevin Maddison (Second Clerk), Anna Connell-Smith (Committee Specialist), Nancy Wilkinson (Committee Specialist), Jack Dent (Inquiry Manager), Jonathan Arkless (Senior Committee Assistant), Simon Armitage (Committee Assistant), Gary Calder (Senior Media Officer), and Alex Gore (Media Officer).

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## Second Special Report

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The Education Committee reported to the House on *Social work reform* (HC 201), in its Third Report of Session 2016–17 on 6 July 2016. The Government’s response was received on 14 September 2016 and is appended to this report. In our report, the Education Committee requested correspondence from Frontline and the Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee on the future of social work education. The correspondence from Frontline, received on 26 July 2016, and the Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee, received on 12 September 2016, are appended to this report.

On 20 October 2016 the Government’s response to Social work reform (HC 201) and *Mental health and well-being of looked-after children* (HC 481) will be debated in Westminster Hall.

In the Government response, the Committee’s recommendations appear in **bold text** and the Government’s response are in plain text.

# Appendix 1: Government response

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The Education Select Committee published the report of its inquiry into social work reform on 13 July 2016. This document sets out the Government's response to the Committee's report.

## Ministerial foreword

The Government welcomes the Committee's recognition of its commitment to child and family social work. We are determined to bring about the widest reaching reforms to children's social work in a generation, focusing on three fundamental pillars of reform: people and leadership; practice and systems; and governance and accountability. 'Putting Children First',<sup>1</sup> published in July, contains our strategy for achieving this transformation and builds on the vision paper we published in January.<sup>2</sup>

Social Work Reform is at the forefront of that change programme and the Committee's recognition of our focus on strengthening social work practice and its potential to deliver significant and long term improvements is, of course, similarly welcome. The Government has already taken some very important steps towards achieving our vision.

The appointment of the two Chief Social Workers and the contribution both have made to the development of plans in this area was an important first step – with the knowledge and skills statements, they have produced an essential foundation for the work to raise standards and improve training and support upon which we are now embarked. The establishment of two fast-track training programmes for new social workers, in Step Up to Social Work and Frontline has attracted graduates to social work who would not otherwise have considered such a career and provided a high quality employer led training experience which should enable them to practice successfully and progress quickly in their careers. Our focus on support for newly qualified social workers, through the Assessed and Supported Year Employment similarly provides key support to those embarking on a social work career.

There is, however, as Committee Members recognise, a huge amount still to do. Assessment and accreditation for child and family frontline social workers, practice supervisors and practice leaders — with their associated development programmes — will play a critical role in ensuring high standards of practice are recognised right across the country. Teaching Partnerships will increase the employer voice in what is taught on social work initial education courses and help produce newly qualified social workers better able to deal with the demands of front line practice. And a new social work regulator should help cement a sharp focus on standards in relation to HEI courses, CPD and the practice of individual social workers.

And this is not, of course, solely about workforce reform. It is important that practice systems, governance and partnerships all support a drive for the very best practice. That is why our investment in more than 50 innovation projects to test new approaches to children's social care and in our "Partners in Practice" is significant, along with our reforms

<sup>1</sup> Putting children first: our vision for children's social care.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/putting-children-first-our-vision-for-childrens-social-care>

<sup>2</sup> Children's social care reform: a vision for change.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-reform-a-vision-for-change>

to the adoption system and the support provided to children in care. The establishment of a What Works Centre, the Children and Social Work Bill's proposed power to innovate and a different approach to serious case reviews should all help develop a learning culture, supporting social workers to reflect on and improve their practice. Creating better multi-agency working arrangements should similarly improve working with schools, the police and health providers.

This is therefore an opportune time for scrutiny of what is planned. The Committee's report recognises the potential of our reform agenda but also raises a number of concerns. I hope that the recent publication of our 'Putting Children First' strategy, our commitment to evaluation and assurance about consulting with the sector help to alleviate their concerns. We will, of course, continue to consult, as we develop the detail of our proposals, with local authorities, social workers, other Government departments and the children and families who have most at stake from our reforms.

There are, of course, areas where our views differ from those of the Committee and we set those out in the memorandum which follows. The Committee's view has provided an important mirror on which we have reflected on the principles and substance of what we are planning.

Much of the work concerning social work regulation is dependent on the passage of the Children and Social Work Bill that is currently before the House of Lords. As the Bill progresses, we will continue to be informed by the recommendations of the Committee and the debates with Peers to ensure that we develop the system that the sector wants and deserves.

**Edward Timpson MP**  
**Minister of State for Vulnerable Children and Families**

## Responses to individual recommendations

### *Introduction*

1. **We welcome the Government's commitment to the important area of children and families social work, and its focus on strengthening social work practice and improving outcomes for children and young people. The proposed reforms have the potential to make some significant improvements to the sector. During our inquiry, however, we heard some concerns about particular aspects. This Report concentrates on these areas of concern. (Paragraph 7)**

We welcome the Committee's recognition of our focus on strengthening social work practice and improving outcomes for children and young people. We agree that our reforms could bring some significant and long-needed improvements and will, of course, continue to engage with the sector as they progress.

### *The role of central government*

2. ***The Government should publish a single national reform implementation plan, with clear expectations for local authorities, employers and educators of what needs***

*to be introduced along with achievable timescales. This plan should cover delivery of both previous and new reforms, and a clear mechanism should be put in place to assess the success of the reform agenda by the end of the Parliament. (Paragraph 14)*

The Department agrees with the Committee on the value of setting out our expectations for the sector and a clear plan showing our reforms and how they fit together.

Since the Committee concluded taking evidence, we have published, on 4 July, ‘Putting Children First’. This policy paper outlines how we will deliver our vision for reform with clear, measurable goals for our policy ambitions through to 2020 and our expectations for the sector.

We will, of course, continue to make more information available when possible. We are planning to consult on assessment and accreditation during the autumn and, subject to the passage of the Children and Social Work Bill, will provide more detail on our plans for social work regulation.

We are clear that our current reforms build on those that have come before and are based on the findings from a number of influential reports. These include the Munro Review of Child Protection and reviews from Sir Martin Narey and Professor David Croisdale-Appleby on social work education.

Evaluating the success of our reform agenda is an ongoing priority for the Department. We are putting in place arrangements to track the impact of our reforms. For our assessment and accreditation programme, for example we will be closely monitoring the outcomes and impact of the new system during phase one of its implementation, working with a number of volunteering employers, as we design the system for wider roll out. The Innovation Programme appointed the Rees Centre as the programme’s evaluation coordinator to provide consistency of approach and to focus on common outcomes to the different projects.

Ministers, officials and the Chief Social Worker continue to engage with the sector to further their understanding and to hear their views on our policy areas. We are always interested to hear from stakeholders on how best to implement our reforms, maximise their impact and minimise any unintended consequences. Over the summer we have engaged with over 170 individuals, representing 98 local areas, to gather views on the future of the accreditation system, and we will continue to gather views through the consultation process. We will create further opportunities for debate, including through consultation on our various reforms in the coming months.

***3. We recommend that there be one Chief Social Worker sitting outside departmental structures, as proposed by the Munro Review. One Chief Social Worker would unify the profession at a national level and encourage joined-up thinking within Government. (Paragraph 23)***

Child and adult services have different priorities and issues, and it is only right that we bring the appropriate level of expertise, tailored to the distinct parts of the profession and working from the most relevant department. The wider sector is often structured in a similar way, for example, through the Association of Directors of Children’s Services and the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services.

The Government's appointment of two Chief Social Workers, one for Children and Families and one for Adults, was undertaken following a joint recruitment exercise by the Department for Education and the Department of Health. Two appointments were made in recognition of the distinct legislative and operational contexts in which the profession operates and the knowledge required to navigate this.

The Chief Social Workers each have specialist knowledge, including an understanding of the key challenges and drivers of improvement in frontline practice for their respective areas.

The role is a vital part of the Government's ambition to raise the status and standing of the social work profession. The Chief Social Workers lead reform and change through consultation and engagement with the profession, other disciplines and with people who use services, their families and carers.

The Chief Social Workers have successfully established their authority in the context of significant reform across adult and children's social care services. They work effectively together and they both share a commitment to the social work profession as a whole.

Social work is a single profession and we work very closely with the Department of Health and other departments to ensure we support the profession as a whole. There are a number of initiatives managed jointly, for all social workers, including regulatory reform, Teaching Partnerships and bursaries. Formal structures are in place to support cross-departmental working, including a joint project board with both Chief Social Workers, Directors and other senior staff, from both Departments, which meets on a regular basis. Informally, there is close integration between policy and legal teams, including weekly working groups on regulatory reform.

### ***Initial training***

4. *We are persuaded of the need for a generic initial qualification for children and families social workers, as they should have a broad understanding of issues affecting both children and adults. Specialisation should primarily occur in post-qualifying training. We recommend that the Government increase generic elements in both Frontline and Step Up to Social Work curricula as we are concerned that at present they focus primarily on children and families social work. (Paragraph 30)*

'Putting Children First', published in July 2016, sets out the Government's vision for excellent children's social care. One of the pillars of our overall reform programme – people and leadership – aims to bring the best people into the children and families social work profession, giving them the right knowledge and skills for the challenging but hugely rewarding work that the profession can offer. We anticipate that by 2018 around 30% of new child and family social workers will come from fast-track routes, and up to 40% by 2020.

Frontline and Step Up provide high quality social work education. Courses combine periods of study with placements with social work teams. Academic delivery already covers vital areas common to both adult and child and family social work, such as ethics and practice, assessment of risk and the legal framework. Opportunities also exist for trainees to gain a breadth of generic experience through placement opportunities and

the programmes are required to offer placements in contrasting settings, including adult focused services. All programmes must meet regulator (Health and Care Professions Council) and QAA (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education) approval, and result in generic qualifications that trainees can utilise to become registered social workers, with the option to concentrate on specialisms not limited to the child and family sector. Both Frontline and Step Up courses meet those criteria.

The innovative nature of Frontline and Step Up to Social Work mean they are predicated on being bespoke, employer-led offerings with content varying from area to area - in the same way that university courses vary between different establishments. We do not think that a forced increase in generic social work elements into the curricula for these programmes would be beneficial, either to their attractiveness to employers or to their success in helping deliver high quality trainees into the profession.

**5. *We recommend that the Government commission an extended research study of Frontline alongside university routes to establish comparative long-term outcomes. The Government will then have a stronger evidence base to make decisions on any future changes to the funding and structure of qualification routes. (Paragraph 35)***

We welcome this recommendation and plan to commission a research study that looks into the long-term retention and progression of Frontline and Step Up participants. We intend to explore fully options around comparison groups in order to determine the impact of our fast-track programmes against other entry routes.

**6. *We recommend that any future contract with Frontline to deliver social work education include a university partner to collaborate in the design and delivery of the academic programme. In the meantime, we encourage Frontline and the university sector to cooperate more closely. [...] (Paragraph 38)***

As with the previous procurement exercise, any future procurement of fast track provision for social workers would be subject to competitive tender, open to partnerships other than Frontline, including those from, or in partnership with, universities. We will consider whether and how any invitation to tender could include reference to working with a university partner, alongside the other issues raised in the Committee's report, when the current contract is next up for review in 2019.

Frontline does continue to work closely with universities, including for the accreditation of the programme by a university, as required by the current contract. The university partner will accredit the programme and award a Postgraduate Diploma on successful completion of the first year and a Master's degree at the end of the second. Frontline will be employing people that have an academic social work background to assist in the design and delivery of the programme. In addition, Frontline is setting up an academic advisory group to advise and challenge their curriculum design.

### ***Post-qualifying training***

**7. *The current offer for CPD and post-qualifying specialisation is inadequate, variable and diffuse. We recommend that the Government work with the sector***

*to create a robust, national post-qualifying framework to give a coherent shape to the continuing professional development of children and families social workers throughout their career. (Paragraph 48)*

**8. The Government should develop a rigorous endorsement process for the new post-qualifying framework in collaboration with the social work profession. Re-registration as a social worker with the regulator should be dependent on some current or recent participation in endorsed courses, rather than only generic CPD activity. (Paragraph 49)**

The Government recognises the importance of CPD in ensuring that child and family social workers have the most up to date skills and knowledge for the work they do. Improvements could be made to CPD and post-qualifying specialisation and we have a number of programmes in place and policies under development in this area.

Firstly, reforming regulation offers an excellent opportunity to address concerns relating to the need for a comprehensive CPD framework for social workers, as raised by the Committee. Ensuring there are tailored CPD standards, relevant to social work practice and linked to the renewal of registration, will set a meaningful expectation about maintaining and improving practice throughout a social worker's career, regardless of role or specialism. The proposed changes in relation to the CPD framework, and how this might be implemented, will be subject to consultation with the sector. We expect changes in this area to bring greater alignment with the devolved administrations where minimum requirements are already at a higher level than England.

In addition, Teaching Partnerships are part of the Government's broader strategy to strengthen the quality of practice learning, not only among students but also among practising social workers. For instance, we will fund partnerships to embed the knowledge and skills statements in their practitioner CPD from September 2016. In addition, Teaching Partnerships must commit to developing their CPD in line with the emerging practice supervisor and practice leader developments.

We are continuing to invest in ASYE, building on its success. The introduction of the knowledge and skills statements provide clarity and consistency over the expected standards employers should work with their ASYE social workers to achieve, and the assessment and accreditation system provides an opportunity to strengthen this programme, with ASYE participants expected to gain accreditation following completion, possibly after a period of consolidation in role.

We also intend to establish new development programmes to support child and family social workers at two other key points in their careers. Firstly, we will establish a programme for the development of those making the transition from frontline practice into practice supervision. Secondly, we are already working with the Tri-borough local authorities (Westminster City Council, the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham and the London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea) to develop and deliver a programme for those talented social workers who will be the practice leaders of the future.

We are also keen to provide social workers with opportunities for rigorous continuous professional development which promotes depth of practice in key areas of child and family social work. The first area of practice we want to focus on is achieving permanence for children who are looked after or on the edge of care. In our policy paper 'Adoption,

a vision for change' we announced our plans to publish a specialist knowledge and skills statement for achieving permanence, and to develop an optional CPD programme to support social workers to develop or sharpen the knowledge and skills identified in the statement.<sup>3</sup> On 4th July we launched a consultation on our draft knowledge and skills statement for achieving permanence which sets out what social workers need to know and be able to do in order to make robust permanence decisions.<sup>4</sup> The consultation seeks views on the proposed content of the statement and closes on 9th September.

The Government agrees with the Committee's reasoning behind its recommendation in relation to the post-qualifying framework. The current regulatory model does not focus on setting professional standards for post-qualification practice.

We are developing post-qualification practice focused career pathways. These include ambitious plans to assess and accredit child and family social workers, support those making permanence decisions and continuing to build specialist areas of practice such as in best interest assessments and mental health social work practice.

Having a body that regulates against distinct, social work specific standards with the aim of raising standards across the profession, and supporting the highest quality initial and post qualification, education and training, will have clear benefits for the profession and wider society.

One of the regulator's key functions should be to set standards and take a more rigorous approach for post qualification education and training. For example, setting out requirements in relation to ASYE and approving post qualifying courses relating to Approved Mental Health Professionals and Best Interest Assessors, as well as a more comprehensive approach in relation to CPD at re-registration. This is something that is missing in the current regulatory framework and something we will look to strengthen through our reforms.

***9. We recommend that the Government bring forward its consultation on accreditation. This consultation should set out proposals on what will happen if social workers fail the process, and how it will ensure social workers can continue to move between statutory and non-statutory positions and different types of social work. It should also seek views on the principles behind accreditation and whether it constitutes the best use of resources. (Paragraph 55)***

We expect to publish our formal consultation later this year.

Development of a national assessment and accreditation system is a vital component in ensuring that child and family social workers have the knowledge and skills needed for the difficult work that they do, and on which we rely. We will publish further information about our proposals as soon as we can, and are continuing to engage with social workers and their employers about how the assessment and accreditation system will work in practice to help us shape the proposals on how to best deliver the programme. Over the summer we have engaged with over 170 individuals representing 98 local areas. This has provided great insight into how the system can work in practice.

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3 Adoption: a vision for change. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/adoption-a-vision-for-change>

4 Knowledge and skills statement for achieving permanence.  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/knowledge-and-skills-statement-for-achieving-permanence>

We have agreed to work with 31 volunteering local authorities in phase 1 of the rollout. This work will allow us working collaboratively with employers and social workers to understand the impact of our reforms. Direct work with the local authorities will start in the autumn and we will appoint an evaluation to help us gain an independent assessment of the impact.

*10. The Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) is an important programme. The Government should develop, in conjunction with the sector, a quality assurance system to ensure that ASYE is delivered at a consistently high level across the country and that caseloads are protected. It should also explore options for fully-funding the cost of the ASYE to ensure that employers have the necessary resources properly to support newly-qualified social workers. We recommend subject to these conditions that ASYE be made mandatory for all newly-qualified social workers. In addition, registration as a social worker should remain provisional until the ASYE is satisfactorily completed. (Paragraph 58)*

The Government continues to recognise the importance of supporting newly qualified social workers through the ASYE and is pleased that the number of newly qualified social workers benefitting from the programme continues to increase. Nearly 10,000 child and family social workers have been supported through ASYE, with over £18 million invested over the past five years. We continue to invest in ASYE with the launch of cohort 5, and are clear that, in return for this funding, employers are expected to provide additional supervision, a professional development plan and allocated time for personal development, backed up by an individual learning agreement.

The publication of the knowledge and skills statements has already contributed to bringing clarity and consistency to the ASYE offer. The introduction of the assessment and accreditation programme will help ensure a greater focus is given to ensuring that newly qualified social workers are properly supported to develop the required knowledge and skills for child and family social work, on which they will be assessed following completion of the ASYE.

At this time we do not believe it is necessary for participation in the ASYE programme to be made mandatory but that employers should consider their own arrangements for ensuring that all newly qualified social workers are able to develop the skills and knowledge needed for child and family social work. The introduction of assessment and accreditation will help to develop a clear expectation against which employers must operate.

### ***Retention***

*11. The Government must prioritise fixing endemic retention problems in children and families social work. Its current strategy is too dependent on Frontline and Step Up to Social Work improving retention, when these programmes are too new to provide sufficient evidence they can have an impact. Furthermore, the Government is clear that Frontline and Step Up will only produce a minority of children and families social workers. There needs to be as strong a focus on keeping experienced social workers in the profession as there is on improving the quality of entrants. (Paragraph 64)*

*15. High vacancy rates and retention problems in social work have existed for far too long, especially in specific geographic regions. We recommend that the Government, working closely with local authorities, the regulator, and the social work sector, establish a national workforce planning system to tackle these issues. The system should include national and regional models for forecasting supply and demand, and give employers the ability to influence the supply of graduates. (Paragraph 78)*

The Government recognises concerns about retention within child and family social work and that there are significant variations between local areas in both recruitment and retention. Addressing this requires action at a number of different points. Naturally, this begins by attracting into the profession highly skilled individuals who are committed to a career in social work. Frontline and Step Up are just two elements of a broader approach.

Social Work Teaching Partnerships raise and drive quality at multiple points in the system – recruitment, training, induction and CPD. Expansion of teaching partnerships, announced in April, will support improving more widely the quantity and quality of practice placements, CPD for practitioners and good quality supervision for students and qualified staff.

We are helping to ensure that social workers will be better prepared at the start of their careers through our plans for more rigorous accreditation of social work courses and our continued commitment to the ASYE programme.

Through assessment and accreditation we are developing a clear career pathway based on the knowledge and skills statements, including the establishment of a new development programme for practice supervisors as well as a programme for the practice leaders of the future. By offering a window into the practice of individual and employers' practice, the assessment and accreditation system will help identify the development needs of child and family social workers, with employers expected to support their social workers to meet the standards. Coupled with our plans to develop tailored standards for CPD, experienced social workers will be better supported to maintain their practice over time.

We know that one of the key things motivating social workers to remain in practice and to remain with particular employers is the opportunity to do good work with children and families. The Government is investing significantly in exploring how to design and support the most effective practice systems through the Innovation programme, with £200 million of additional investment announced in April. The Innovation Programme aims to free up innovative and ambitious local authorities in the delivery of children's social care and to try new ways of organising and delivering services to children. It will support other initiatives, such as our local authority Partners in Practice and the What Works Centre, to scale up and spread good and innovative practice.

This learning, in addition to a robust approach to intervening where there is failure, should help to drive improvement throughout the system and eliminate some of the practices that make particular authorities unattractive places to work.

Whilst these programmes all play an important role in supporting retention, it is important to note that employers have significant responsibilities in this area. Retention rates vary significantly between regions and we will continue to work with employers to help them tailor their approach to address local circumstances.

We agree that improving data on social workers and on local authority workforces is vital and this is why the department introduced the Children's Social Work Workforce in English local authorities Statistical First Release in 2012.

This collection was introduced following Professor Munro's review of child protection and her recommendations on collection of children's safeguarding performance information. Since then, the Narey and Croisdale-Appleby reviews have identified a mismatch between social work students/newly qualified social workers and workforce supply needs. Both advocate better targeting of funding and support to drive quality and match the needs of the workforce.

We have therefore continued to expand the data collection to address this. The data collection is moving to individual worker level detail and this information will be used to build a supply and demand model that can be shared with LAs. We plan on using this data to aid our continued ambition to raise the quality of social work and overhaul social worker education and practice to improve the recruitment, retention and development of social workers.

***12. We recommend that the Government reinforce the use of Standards for employers of Social Workers in England. 'Health checks' of working conditions should be made mandatory. The Government should also consider making the entire framework binding for local authorities. Without better working conditions for frontline social workers, who are facing ever-rising demands, the entire reform programme will be put at risk. (Paragraph 69)***

The Government agrees that social workers deserve high quality working conditions and continues to support the principles set out in the Standards for Employers of Social Workers, published by the Local Government Association.

The standards build on the work of the Social Work Reform Board and set the core expectations from employers. They are effectively a set of principles which need to be implemented in ways that reflect specific local contexts, priorities and resources. Therefore, responsibility for them sits best with local authorities, and we do not believe there is a case for mandatory health checks or making the framework binding, nor that it would be welcomed by employers.

***13. In co-ordination with the social work profession, the Government should consider how successes in social work can be measured and promoted. We recommend the launch of a national public awareness campaign celebrating the positive aspects of social work, and explaining its complexities, to boost the profile of the profession. (Paragraph 72)***

Increasing public engagement and promoting the professional role of social workers and the invaluable contribution they make to supporting and protecting vulnerable children and families, is vital to creating and sustaining a skilled, educated and confident profession. We are working with the Department of Health to develop joint communications emphasising our shared goal of improving the quality of the workforce and raising the status of the profession.

It is also important to note that investment in Frontline, Step Up and Teaching Partnerships are all contributing to raising the profile of social work by demonstrating the level of expertise, knowledge and skills required to be a good social worker.

We will consider further how we can promote the positives of social work, whether that be by way of a national campaign or other external engagement.

***14. The Government should examine the benefits of a 'just reporting culture', as recently announced by the NHS, to move the sector towards a learning culture as recommended by the Munro Review. (Paragraph 75)***

We agree that a learning culture in social work is of the utmost importance in promoting better practice. Recent and current policy developments show our commitment to developing such a culture. The Innovation Programme has enabled local areas to trial and test out new ways of working and to share that learning with others. The Partners in Practice areas will work similarly to promote reform in social care. The What Works Centre for Children's Social Care will play a vital role in this area, too.

Since the Munro review of child protection, we have made significant changes to the serious case review system. Working Together to Safeguard Children already provides that 'professionals must be involved fully in reviews and invited to contribute their perspectives without fear of being blamed for actions which they took in good faith'. Working Together also makes clear that why things happened as they did is critical, particularly understanding practice without the use of hindsight.

We are concerned, however, that too often, serious case reviews fail to meet these goals. Following the Wood Review of the role and functions of Local Safeguarding Children Boards, we are now introducing through the Children and Social Work Bill a new system which will embed learning at the heart of the practice system. Our ambition is to create the conditions for such learning which will lead to a system in which all can have increased confidence.

The Children and Social Work Bill will make significant changes to the current system – both in respect of local safeguarding arrangements and in respect of the review system. The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel will for the first time carry out reviews leading to learning of national significance. The Bill's provisions for national and local reviews include for the first time expectations of timeliness and quality and allow for the efficient collection and dissemination of learning, in which we expect the What Works Centre to play a vital part.

Ministers have already made very clear in debate on these clauses that the new national reviews will not be in any way about blame or individual censure, but instead be absolutely focussed on learning. The same applies – as currently – to local reviews.

### ***Professional body, regulation and leadership***

***16. We are concerned about the absence of a professional body for social work to provide high profile leadership for the profession following the closure of The College of Social Work. We accept that a top-down approach to its replacement may not be suitable but the Government must do much more to help the profession recover from the loss of the College. (Paragraph 85)***

**17. We recommend that the Government facilitate the development of a professional body for social work, working in partnership with the British Association of Social Workers (BASW), other social worker representatives and the wider sector. It is imperative the proposed body is widely supported, and that its functions are clearly mandated and not shared with other bodies. It is important that there is a single, unified solution and that BASW and the professional body do not find themselves in competition. (Paragraph 87)**

We regret that the College of Social Work, despite Government funding of £8m over 3 years, was unable to secure sufficient membership from the profession to make it financially viable and that it needed, consequently, to take the decision to close.

Government has set up an ambitious programme of reform aimed at improving standards of practice and the systems and organisational structures that support social workers. These reforms are also aimed at improving the standing of social work as a profession and creating clearer, more satisfying careers in social work. We will continue to engage with BASW, other workforce representatives and the wider sector in effectively developing and delivering this programme.

We agree that the development of a strong professional body for social work is important. What is clear, however, is that the success of such a body will hinge on it being a sustainable, member-led organisation that represents professional interests across the social work workforce.

We would recognise and support such a body but believe the most effective body would be one established by the social work profession.

**18. A regulator should concentrate on public protection by upholding standards and should not stray into defining professional standards for qualifying and post qualifying education which we consider to be the role of an independent professional body. The Government's proposals for a new regulator to have power in these areas will further marginalise the voice of social workers in influencing the standards of their profession. Our proposals for a successor for The College of Social Work should be the Government priority rather than changing the regulatory system once again. (Paragraph 92)**

**19. We are unclear as to why a change of regulator is needed, and call on the Government to rethink its plans. The Government has already spent too much money changing regulatory bodies. Another change will either require further injection of significant public funds or place an unfair financial burden on individual social workers. (Paragraph 93)**

Government believes that the current regulatory arrangements for social workers in England require urgent reform. We need to set credible standards which address evidence of failings in practice and set clear expectations of the profession.

We are sure that the Committee recognises that the need to raise standards in social work is vital for a profession where public protection and the safety of the most vulnerable is inextricably linked with the quality of practice.

There is strong evidence that the best social work services deliver excellent provision through a highly skilled and expert workforce. However, we know that excellent practice is not found consistently across the country. In children's services, Ofsted inspections suggest there are issues with professional practice and leadership. 68% of those inspected under the new framework were rated inadequate or requires improvement for the sub-judgement of leadership and management of their children's social care services (as of August 2016).

Inspections and serious case reviews point to a number of factors which contribute to failings in professional practice including: variability in leadership, supervision and line management and a weakness in the overall system's ability to learn effectively from good practice and from mistakes.

We know from independent reviews of social work education that initial education and continuous professional development need to improve. If those coming into the profession are not equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to practise effectively, this will affect the quality of service the most vulnerable in our society experience. The absence of a professional body and the lack of consensus about how to drive change have stalled the development of a coherent programme to deliver practice improvements and raise the status and standing of the profession.

Given this need for reform, the desire to affect change quickly and the links to the wider reform programme, Government is clear that there is a need for regulatory reform, and that Government has a role in driving this.

Creating a system with a single focus on practice excellence for social workers through regulatory reform will bring about significant change. The current framework, operated by the Health and Care Professions Council, has an approach designed to maintain minimum standards of public safety and initial education across a range of professions, rather than focus on standards in any one profession.

The cost of running the new regulator will be met through charging social workers an annual registration fee - at the current level - and investment from Government. This Government has invested significantly in social work and intends to keep doing so to ensure the needs of the most vulnerable are met. We would therefore not anticipate any immediate changes to the registration fees paid by social workers. Any plans to increase social workers' fees in the future will be subject to full consultation and approval from Parliament.

Government intends that collaboration, consultation and engagement with the social work sector will be a key feature of both the development and running of the new regulatory framework. We have been clear that we will consult on proposed changes and the Committee will be aware that the Children and Social Work Bill is currently before the House of Lords. We are reflecting on the recommendations raised by the Committee's inquiry and listening to the feedback received from Peers through the Parliamentary process.

**20. We have heard that the role of principal social worker is valued. It should be retained so long as local authorities and frontline social workers find it useful. The current confusion over what the principal social worker position should be is not conducive to the role's success. (Paragraph 98)**

**21. We recommend that the Government commission research on the role of principal social workers to establish best practice and that it produce guidance based on this evidence. The Government should include in this guidance clarity over how principal social worker and Practice Leader roles interrelate in current structures. (Paragraph 98)**

The Government continues to support the Principal Social Worker Network and is encouraged by the knowledge that we now have a Principal Social Worker (PSW) in every local authority and in a number of NHS trusts in England.

Guidance on the function and the support for adult PSWs required by local authorities to enable PSWs to operate effectively has been included in the revised statutory Care Act guidance.

The role has been successful in many local authorities because it is locally defined and supported. Given the wide ranging and diverse work of PSWs across the country, the department would not wish to interfere by telling local authorities how they should organise their services and staff roles. We would encourage local authorities to review the role of their PSW and for the network to look at ways of pulling evidence together to share best practice.

It is not the intention that the practice leader role replaces the PSW role; some PSWs may meet the expectations of the practice leader status, as may some Directors of Children's Services. The government anticipates that the very important work that the PSWs have been carrying out will continue to have a place in local authority systems.

### ***Structural change and innovation***

**22. We welcome the Government's focus on encouraging innovation but we believe some caution is necessary. The Government needs to ensure that projects are evaluated fully before being applied at a national level. We want to see further details about the What Works Centre, including the strength of its relationships with research active universities, its approach to evidence, and its level of funding. The Centre's focus should be expanded to all aspects of children and families social work, not just child protection. (Paragraph 105)**

We agree that evaluation is very important and to achieve the best results possible we need a robust evaluation of the innovation programmes and a clear rationale as to what best practice looks like and in which conditions. Independent evaluation of the programmes has been a feature of this work from the beginning, with around £8m allocated to support evaluation of wave 1 projects. The Innovation Programme appointed the Rees Centre as the programme's evaluation coordinator to provide the consistency of approach and to focus on common outcomes to the different projects. This evidence will give us a strong basis on which to fund further practice and contribute to future reform in children's social care.

Robust evaluation and understanding the conditions for excellent practice is fundamental to the effectiveness of the new What Works Centre (WWC) for Children's Social Care. It will identify the most effective interventions and practice systems, and support their implementation by practitioners and decision makers, in order to improve outcomes for

children who are at risk of, or suffering from, abuse and/or neglect. It is intended that the WWC will draw on the research and analytical skills of universities in order to develop a robust evidence base, and develop strong relationships with the academic community, as well as practitioners and decision-makers. It will commission new, high quality research and evaluations to fill gaps in our understanding around effective practice, and support its translation into better practice on the ground. Up to £4m will be made available each year up to 2019/20 to fund the WWC. It is anticipated that the WWC may attract additional funding once established. The WWC will have in scope the totality of support in the statutory space, from targeted early support all of the way through to permanence. This will include support for disabled children. We have engaged closely with universities, along with other sector stakeholders, in the development of the proposals. Further details on its initial priority focus areas and the set-up process will be made available in autumn 2016.

*23. We recommend that the Government assess the effectiveness of the existing independent trusts before expanding the model any further. Statutory children's services should remain in local authority control until there is clear evidence that the independent trust model improves outcomes for children and young people. It appears that charities may not be as enthusiastic about taking on statutory services as the Government is to invite them to do so. (Paragraph 112)*

*24. Six months is an unrealistic timescale in which to expect substantial improvement. Take-over of a local authority at this point could lead to further disruption and demoralisation and should be a last resort. At the end of the six month period, an assessment should take place to consider a range of options, including whether given more time, and a comprehensive package of support, the local authority could improve its children's services without them being taken over. (Paragraph 113)*

As soon as any local authority is found to be inadequate, it will enter government intervention and be provided with a comprehensive package of support, including an expert improvement adviser, in order to help it improve.

We recognise that most local authorities that have failed are capable of improving their services, with some support and challenge from government, but will require time to do so. The Government does not expect local authorities to be near the end of their improvement journey after 6 months of Government intervention. Local authorities should, however, show clear evidence of progress within this time and a leadership that is focused on delivering improved social care systems and practice.

The Government is clear, though, that where local authorities have persistently (rated inadequate twice in 5 years) or systemically (found inadequate on all key judgements) failed and do not have the ability to improve themselves in a reasonable timeframe, then children are at serious risk. We will continue to take whatever action is required to ensure that children in those areas receive the services they deserve.

We recognise that the decision to remove service control should not be taken lightly. In cases where local authorities are judged not to have made sufficient progress or have seriously failed, a Children's Services Commissioner will be put in place to consider whether, given local circumstances, it would be right to remove services from council control for a period of time in order to secure sustainable improvement. We believe that

this is a proportionate and imperative drive to secure improved services for the most vulnerable children in the country and the seriousness of failure, in our view, precludes the kind of pause the Committee is seeking.

Local authorities will still retain statutory responsibility for children's social care services but day to day operational control will transfer to independent trusts, with new leadership and expertise, where that is the best way to bring about sustainable long-term improvement. Good evaluation and ensuring that these organisations have continued learning at their core will be critical to ensuring that this improvement can be sustained.

The Government recognises the need to gather evidence on the impact of children's services trusts. There is a growing bank of evidence from recent Ofsted inspections of Doncaster and Slough of improving services, after years of failure, since the trusts took over – particularly highlighting the strengthening of leadership and management. Achieving for Children, the community interest company that runs children's services on behalf of Kingston and Richmond councils, took Kingston from 'inadequate' to 'good' in less than three years. The Department is already undertaking an evaluation of the trusts in Doncaster and Slough and will continue to develop the evidence base.

The Government would welcome charities becoming involved with children's services trusts but recognises the challenges they may face in doing so. We will continue to seek opportunities to involve the voluntary sector in statutory services through the work of children's services trusts and other alternative delivery models – such as Norfolk's development of a joint Looked After Children Service with Barnardo's.

## Appendix 2: Correspondence from Frontline and the Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee

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### **Letter received 26 July 2016 from Josh MacAlister, Frontline Chief Executive, to the Chair**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide evidence to the Committee's recent inquiry into the government's social work reform programme. It is encouraging to see such interest in an often overlooked profession, and we welcome the spotlight that the inquiry has brought. As requested, we are writing in response to the particular recommendation in the report relating to Frontline.

Earlier this year Frontline announced its decision to directly design and deliver the social work qualifying programme having previously worked with a university that delivered the academic content. This decision was taken with great care and thought and it was informed by our first three years of running the programme. Our motivation was to bring greater coherence to, and so improve the quality of, the programme. This will benefit those that matter most – children and families who need outstanding social workers.

We do, however, intend to continue working with universities. We have already made a commitment to establish an academic advisory group to provide advice and challenge to our curriculum design. This will be in place by the time we begin delivering the programme in July 2017, and following the process of seeking HCPC approval for the programme. We will also be employing people with backgrounds in academia to deliver and design the programme. These individuals will have the opportunity to undertake a Frontline supporter doctoral programme so they can influence the future design of the Frontline model and add to a wider body of knowledge in social work through high quality research. Finally, Frontline will continue to work with a university to accredit the programme and award a Master's degree.

As I noted in my evidence to the Committee, this model of a university accrediting another organisation to deliver an academic programme is already well established in social work education, including by institutions such as the University of Bath. In education the approach is even more commonplace with prestigious universities including Newcastle, Bristol, the Institute of Education and Goldsmiths awarding qualifications for content delivered by other organisations. Given its widespread use it was surprising that the Committee chose to challenge Frontline's application of this commonly used approach.

Concerns about our decision to deliver the programme directly have often been based on a false dichotomy between concepts of 'practice and theory' or 'academia and craft'. Those undertaking social work can and should be able to theorise about practice. As an organisation, we have always taken the view that learning how to do great practice is an intellectually demanding exercise that has academic underpinnings. Therefore the notion that universities are the exclusive source of knowledge creation, research or evidence is incorrect. Frontline's ambition is to be both influenced by new ideas and research, and

to also contribute to the knowledge about what works. This will require Frontline to be an active member of a community of organisations interested in practice, including local authority children's services, universities and research institutions.

We therefore welcome your report's recommendation that we set out how we might work with the Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee (JUCSWEC) in the future. We would welcome opportunities to engage with JUCSWEC to share best practice and exchange learning. For example, we would be keen to engage in their conference, something we have done previously. This is of course a decision for JUCSWEC as the organisers of the conference. We would also welcome other opportunities to hold regular joint sessions with academics to share learning from different qualifying programmes. This could be through engagement with the Association of Professors of Social Work or, as we have done over the last three years, through working with a number of individual academics. We already engage with our partner local authorities and the regional and national networks of Principal Social Workers in this way.

We would also like to take this opportunity to highlight an inaccuracy in the report which could be misleading for those currently undertaking or considering applying to our programme. Your report states that "Frontline and Step Up to Social Work specifically produce children and families social workers, rather than a social worker with a standard qualification." Individuals completing either programmes do so with a generic social work qualification approved by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). Your report also notes that an evaluation of Frontline commented that our model "inherently moved away from generic social work". However, this overlooks the traditional qualification model where social workers qualify with specialist leaning as a result of the 100 day placement they receive. We would also like to highlight that the Frontline programme includes a guaranteed contrasting placement in an adult focussed service. This same guarantee is not in place on all social work courses.

I would be happy to meet to discuss any of the above points further if it would be helpful.

### **Letter received 12 September 2016 from Samantha Baron, Head of Social Work at the Manchester Metropolitan University**

Thank you for inviting JUCSWEC to formally respond to the Education Select Committee final report into the DfE strategy for social work. We are very pleased to see the recommendations put forward by JUCSWEC have been incorporated within the Committee report and we look forward to working towards those recommendations and in working collaboratively across the social work sector to enhance standards for the social work profession.

In being asked to consider appropriate collaboration between JUCSWEC and Frontline, JUCSWEC were hoping to work together to provide a joint response to the Committee's report. I understand from earlier communication, that Frontline have already submitted a separate response and therefore a collaborative response has not been possible at this point.

JUCSWEC are committed to the founding principle of working collaboratively in partnership to ensure high standards are maintained and continually developed and that such standards are underpinned by clear research and evidence generated from both the

University sector and practise based organisations. To progress this further, it would be helpful to have further clarification regarding the focus and potential outcomes of such collaboration and where appropriate, JUCSWEC will collaborate to ensure high standards are maintained across the sector.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this enquiry and on behalf of JUCSWEC, we look forward to continuing to work across the sector, promoting excellence in social work education.