



House of Commons

Children, Schools and Families
Committee

**Training of Children
and Families Social
Workers: Government
Response to the
Committee's Seventh
Report of
Session 2008–09**

**First Special Report of
Session 2009–10**

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The Children, Schools and Families Committee

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

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1 First Special Report

On 30 July 2009 we published our Seventh Report of Session 2008–09, *Training of Children and Families Social Workers*.¹ The Government sent an initial response in October 2009 and offered to provide a response ‘in fuller terms’ once the Government had received and taken stock of the recommendations of the Social Work Taskforce. On 29 January 2010, Baroness Morgan of Drefelin, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department for Children, Schools and Families, wrote to the Chairman enclosing the promised fuller response. Her letter is published below as an Appendix to this Report. The full response appears as Annex A to the letter; the initial response is reproduced as Annex B.

Appendix: Letter to the Chairman of the Committee

CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT ON THE TRAINING OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SOCIAL WORKERS

In my October letter to you in response to your report on the training of children and families social workers (Annex B) I explained that while there were some specific points to which I was able to provide a substantial response, for the most part it was not possible to deal with the Select Committee’s recommendations in detail until the Social Work Task Force had delivered its final report.

As you will know, the Social Work Task Force reported on 1 December last year with a series of 15 key recommendations to transform the breadth of the social work system, including some significant messages on social work education—the focus of the Select Committee’s investigations. The Task Force’s recommendations cover:

- Initial training and education;
- Time, resources and support;
- Professional development and career progression;
- Leadership;
- Public value and understanding; and
- A cohesive and purposeful system.

I am writing to you now, therefore, to offer a more detailed response to your report. The Select Committee produced a thorough and helpful treatment of the key questions for social work education and training. I know that the Task Force gave your report close consideration and drew extensively on your analysis as it developed its own report and recommendations.

¹ Seventh Report from the Children, Schools and Families Committee, Session 2008–09, *Training of Children and Families Social Workers*, HC 527-I and -II

It seems to me that the Task Force's report reinforces your assessment of the issues facing social work, and that its vision for the future of social work echoes the aspirations the Committee sets out in its report, and that its recommendations on delivering that vision are for the most part similar to your own.

I am pleased to note the widespread support from across the sector that the Task Force's report has received and am convinced that the implementation of these recommendations will provide a robust and coherent system that supports social workers from initial training and throughout their careers, and leads to improved delivery on the frontline.

The Government has accepted all the Task Force's recommendations and I will refer to the report and recommendations regularly in what follows. A Social Work Reform Board, comprising representatives from social work education, employers, the profession and government, and chaired by Moira Gibb, chair of the Task force, has been convened. The Reform Board will oversee the implementation of the recommendations and advise the Government on the development of an implementation plan that DCSF and DH will jointly publish early this year. I and my colleagues from the Department of Health and Department of Business, Innovation and Skills are committed to delivering the Task Force's recommendations as a matter of priority, and to providing joint leadership to the system in improving social work in this country.

You will understand that while the direction of social work reform in the coming years is much clearer than it was in October there are still a number of specifics relating to timing, mechanics and, especially in the current financial context, budgets that are still being worked through. We have committed to publishing an Implementation Plan early this year which will clarify these issues further.

In Annex A I address each of the recommendations in the select committee's report under the headings set out in the recommendations chapter of your report. In some instances recommendations/responses have been brigaded.

I would like to express my gratitude again to the Committee for all the time and attention they have dedicated to this key area of work, and to thank you for the important contribution you have made to the programme of reform for social work which is now being put in place.

Yours sincerely

Delyth Morgan

Annex A

RESPONSE TO THE CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT ON THE TRAINING OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SOCIAL WORKERS

1. The Task Force and other initiatives

The Select Committee raises concerns about “the plethora of new initiatives which have been announced and set in motion” and suggest that they are unclear about “how these initiatives fit together either with each other, or with existing structures.”

Recent years have seen the introduction of a range of reforms for social work—a regulatory function through GSCC, introduction of degree level initial training, and a programme of workforce development through the Children’s Workforce Development Council (CWDC) and Skills for Care (SfC). In May 2009 we announced the creation of a £58 million social work transformation fund to build upon this work through a range of approaches to relieving pressure within children’s social work in response to Lord Laming’s report of March 2009, the importance of which to addressing short-term pressures in the system the Select Committee also notes.

This activity is delivering important steps towards improving social work regulation and practice and towards getting the infrastructure right to support social workers in their practice. The work of the Task Force has been important in placing this work, the Select Committee’s and Lord Laming’s recommendations in the context of a system wide strategic approach to questions of training, deployment and practice, ensuring appropriate prioritisation and value for money. Its report now sets out a template for reform over the coming five to ten years that builds on progress so far.

2. National Leadership and sector bodies

The Select Committee urges “the Government to be bold in establishing coherent leadership for the profession that can take responsibility for all parts of the whole, and present a profile distinct from the wider fields of social care and the children’s workforce.”

The Committee also advocates “streamlining of the national sector bodies and rationalisation of their remits” asks for clarification of the relationship between the Task Force’s recommendations and departmental reviews of the delivery system, and urges consideration of a “Social Work Development Agency” to “unite the functions of recruitment, workforce development and funding and commissioning of training”.

In my earlier letter to the Committee (reproduced as Annex B) I explained the relationship between organisational review and the Task Force’s recommendations. The other recommendations in this section concern leadership of or responsibility for both the policy and delivery structures for social work and a clearer voice/champion for the profession.

I anticipate that the National College of Social Work that the Task Force has recommended and the Government has committed to supporting in its early development will play a significant role in addressing questions of voice and profile for the profession.

While the Task Force has not thought it appropriate to recommend a “Social Work Development Agency” along the lines the Select Committee envisages, it has identified similar

concerns around leadership of policy development and delivery. It has called for “rationalisation of the delivery organisations, partnerships and standard setting mechanisms, the proliferation of which contributes to confusion and inefficiencies in workforce improvement” and is clear that “if the profession is to become more confident and more effective, it needs to be supported by organisations that are more clearly focused on the improvement of social work”. Getting the delivery system right will be one of our most important early tasks as we seek to implement the breadth of the Task Force’s recommendations. It is my understanding that work continues on the Department of Health’s review of delivery organisations. The intention is to publish to the same timetable as the implementation plan for social work reform. The review needs to deliver on the White Paper and National Care Service aspirations, as well as social work reform, which increases its complexity.

3. Workforce planning

The Select Committee recommends the establishment of a model to estimate future demand for social workers and “link it to...funding and commissioning of training places for students” It suggests that this task be allocated to one of the sector bodies “which commissions places on the basis of quality assessments and workforce planning” and establishes mechanisms to ensure that funding for social work training is retained within the social work education sector when universities cease to offer courses.

Like the Select Committee, and Lord Laming, the Task Force has identified a more active approach to managing supply and demand of social workers/social work training places as one of the building blocks in its vision of reform. It recommends “a new system for forecasting levels of supply and demand for social workers” that includes “regular, reliable and proportionate gathering of workforce data...centralised data analysis and expertise which can...model policy, demographic and other changes onto overall numbers of social workers needed in future years [and] advise on the implications of these changes for education, training and continuing professional development”

Rather than a single centralised model of supply management, the Task Force envisages “partnerships overseeing workforce strategy, planning and innovation at the level most appropriate to local and regional needs [which] allow employers to collaborate better with one another and with the higher education institutions who educate new social workers locally.”

Social work employers, educators and government will need to work together to identify the range of data and mechanisms that will allow such partnerships to effectively address questions of workforce planning. More detail on this process will be set out in the implementation plan.

4. Academic standards and Personal qualities

The Committee writes that it would “wish to see an improvement in the average grades required for acceptance to undergraduate social work training” while noting the importance of ensuring a “means of offering places to experienced applicants who lack an academic background but whose personal attributes would be valuable assets to the profession.”

In assessing applicants for social work training programmes, the Committee advocates the engagement of service users and employers in decision making as standard and suggests best practice guidance be made available. The Committee also urges that previous practical experience in related fields “be taken into account in application procedures, and consideration...given to making it a mandatory requirement.”

The Task Force shares the Select Committee’s analysis of this issue and has recommended that criteria governing the calibre of entrants to social work education and training be strengthened. Practical measures to be implemented include increasing the UCAS point entry requirements to the current average level, requiring demonstration of competence in English and Maths at grade C GCSE or equivalent, completion of a written test and high performance at selection interviews. These changes will mean that academic, logical and reflective skills and life and work experience, communication skills, creativity and emotional resilience are taken into account when offers of places are made. The Government’s framework for the future of Higher Education ‘Higher Ambitions’ published in October 2009 also encourages HEIs to make use of contextual data as part their admissions process, so that they take account of the full range of information available to them to make sure that they are getting the best possible candidates with the potential to succeed.

The Task Force has also recommended a review of the current social work training bursary arrangements to promote applications from people of sufficiently high quality, and to encourage completion of degree courses, entry to and retention in the work force.

The Task Force is clear that standards should not be compromised to allow those whose personal attributes and experience might suit them to social work, but do not meet the academic criteria to undertake initial training. Rather, practical support to help them meet the requirements will be put in place.

The reform board will work closely with social work educators to scope the approach to delivering these recommendations. We will also work with BIS to support their objectives on widening participation to higher education.

5. Fast track and other routes

The Committee suggests the development of a “fast-track” route to qualification as a social worker for those “with relevant experience, a clear idea of what sort of social work they wish to specialise in, or prior qualifications incorporating clearly relevant content”. It also recommends that “Government consider funding arrangements that would encourage more local authorities to offer more [Grow Your Own schemes]”.

As I said in my October letter, the Step Up to Social Work practice-led programme to begin in the coming academic year, and the Graduate Recruitment Scheme which is now in its second year seek to address exactly the issues addressed by these recommendations.

In addition DCSF also makes available approximately £18.5 million a year through the Children’s Social Care Workforce element of the Area Based Grant. This funding is intended for local social care workforce development including routes into social work at a local level.

Complementing existing investment, the GSCC last year published a Grow Your Own toolkit, a step by step guide to help students, employers and universities get the most out of

sponsorship schemes. The toolkit builds on 2008 research into the benefits of grow your own schemes and draws together the experiences of people who have participated in and run grow your own schemes over many years.

This work will be placed in the wider context of the social work reform programme as part of the forthcoming implementation plan.

6. Standards on degree courses

The Select Committee says that “a review of the funding arrangements for social work degrees is needed to ensure that there are no incentives to keep unsuitable students on a course” and that universities “should make provision for students deemed not suitable for practice to put credits towards an alternative, non-qualifying award.”

The Task Force has made similar recommendations around reviewing the funding arrangements to encourage high calibre recruits, better reflecting the costs and responsibilities of placements, and making appropriate exit routes available to those who are revealed to be unsuitable for social work over the course of initial training.

7. Quality assurance of degree courses

The Committee calls for a “more active role in quality assurance” for either the GSCC or Ofsted.

The Task Force has recommended more transparent and effective regulation to give greater assurance of consistency and quality.

As I said in my letter to the Committee in October, the GSCC is already either implementing or developing a range of approaches to addressing concerns about quality assurance. The Task Force has welcomed this work and has recommended that the regulator should be authorised and resourced to

- *“ensure social work courses are properly inspected against a new set of standards in the interests of consistent, high quality provision across the country;*
- *take a robust approach to ensuring that: the content of courses is kept up to date with the changing demands of frontline practice; that organisers and teachers of social work courses are up to date with current knowledge, policy and practice; and that expert practitioners, service users, employers and other professionals are consistently and substantially involved in the design and delivery of courses; and*
- *ensure that criteria for entrance to courses and suitability for entry into the workforce are met through assessment”.*

8. Content of degree courses and Specialisation in degree courses

The Select Committee advocates work with universities and employers to rationalise, combine and set out in greater detail the social work degree requirements “to form a basic common curriculum.”

While the Committee recognises the importance of generic initial training, it recommends “that each course makes these choices [of modules and placements] formal and explicit, so

that students may specialise in children and families work if they wish by choosing a defined package of modules.

The Task Force echoes the Select Committee in recommending an overhaul of the content and delivery of social work degree courses and calls on Government to act swiftly to implement

- *“a curriculum based on jointly agreed outcome standards for the social work degree with these standards explicitly tied to robust assessment processes*
- *systems for ensuring that everyone who designs and delivers social work courses are up to date with current knowledge, policy and practice.”*

In addition the Task Force recommendations on the quality of practice placements and an Assessed Year in Employment are aimed at improving students’ ability to demonstrate their experience and/or specialisation in children and families work when they are fully registered as social workers.

The implementation plan will set out a process to engage all relevant parties in delivering the detail of this recommendation.

9. Collaboration between employers and universities

The Select Committee recommends “that the Government consider introducing a requirement that all social work education is delivered by formal partnerships of higher education institutions and employers.”

The Task Force has also recommended formal sharing of accountability and responsibility between employers and HE, particularly in relation to the provision of practice placements but also more broadly in programme design, delivery and admissions. Concrete steps to putting such arrangements in place will form part of the implementation plan.

10. Supply of practice placements, Type of practice placements, Quality of practice placements and Social work in practice

The Committee advocates greater responsibility and a more active role for employers in the training of social workers and provision of practice placements. It suggests that “Ofsted should take into account how effectively a local authority provides for and delivers placements for social work students and further development of its workforce when assessing children’s services” and that “the quality of practice placements must be taken into account explicitly in overall inspections of both university courses and local authority children’s services.”

The Committee recommends that this approach be supported through a review of the funding arrangements for practice placements “to ensure that the amount received reflects the true cost and the division of responsibilities.”

The Select Committee believes that students should undertake “at least one of their placements in a statutory social work agency, and [be] supervised and assessed by a qualified social worker in both of their placements.” It recommends that “information should be readily available to prospective students about any courses which have a poor

track record in securing the requisite placements”. It also suggests that “consideration should be given to reducing the length of individual placements, if this would help to ensure that every student has a placement in a statutory service”. At the same time, the Committee cautions that “no social work student should have a placement in a local authority whose services to children and families are assessed by Ofsted as performing poorly.”

The Committee also voices some concern over the need for the Social Work Development Partnership as a separate body responsible for practice placement quality and supply.

The Social Work Task Force’s view of the issues around practice placements is entirely in line with the analysis of the Select Committee. The implementation plan will therefore set out actions and timescales to deliver recommendations to put in place:

- *formal sharing of accountability and responsibility by active partnerships of employers and HE;*
- *the introduction of an advanced teaching organisation award to recognise and reward best practice in social work placements and continuing professional development;*
- *placement criteria to ensure placements in statutory practice;*
- *revised funding arrangements to better support practice placement providers and practice educators; and*
- *assessment standards for practice educators and recognition of role by employers to ensure consistency of experience/judgement.*

Like the Committee, the Task Force believes there is scope (given the introduction of an assessed year in employment) to reduce the total number of placement days to no fewer than 130, but recommends that this is considered in the light of the development of other aspects of the reform programme, including the curriculum and assessed year in employment. This is a question on which we expect the Reform Board to provide further advice.

11. Practice teaching

The Committee believes that all placements should “be supervised by qualified and experienced social workers who either hold or are working towards specific qualifications in practice teaching”, calls dedicated funding to train the workforce and suggests consideration of reinstating the previous training arrangements for practice teaching.

The Select Committee also calls for practice teaching to “be built into job descriptions so that social workers are not expected to undertake practice teaching on top of their normal workload but as an integral part of it, with commensurate reductions in the caseload they are expected to carry” and recommends that Government consider developing a national approach to supporting the training by the profession of the next generation of social workers through reforms pay and career structure.

Like the Select Committee, the Task Force recommends that “while other professionals may helpfully contribute to the learning of students on placement and provide feedback, all social

work students should in future only be taught and assessed while on placement by qualified and experienced social workers.”

The Task Force envisages training and standards for practice educators and a position in the new career framework (see below) equivalent to that of advanced professionals and the first rung of management. This will help ensure consistency and quality of the practice placement experience and position the education of the next generation of social workers as central to the social work role and career progression.

12. The Newly-Qualified Social Worker Programme

The Committee welcomes the introduction of the Newly-Qualified Social Worker Programme and recommend that it be developed into a “compulsory internship”. Complementing this development the Committee suggests provisional registration until successful completion of the year, a closer involvement for HE, opportunities to gain experience in more than one service area and Government support to employers to help them accommodate newly qualified social workers.

Like the Select Committee, the Task Force has identified a need to build on the current NQSW arrangements and has recommended strengthening them through “the creation of an assessed and supported year in employment as the final stage in becoming a social worker.” Assessment will be “carried out jointly by employers and HEI, with feedback from service users taken into account” and successful completion of the year will be a precondition of gaining the Licence to Practice that the Task Force also recommends. This seems to be in line with the notion of a “compulsory internship” that the Committee recommends.

Issues to be considered as part of the implementation of the assessed year include

- *fixed entitlements to*
 - *time for reflection, study, learning, contact with mentors;*
 - *good quality supervision;*
 - *access to research literature and training opportunities;*
 - *good quality ICT; and*
 - *a managed and balanced case-load*
- *opportunities for shadowing and co-working with more experienced staff to learn on the job and gradually to take on more complex work independently; and for experience across different sections of the agency or partner agencies in the area*
- *formal training contract covering entitlements and responsibilities during the assessed year in employment*

The current NQSW arrangements provide significant support to participating employers to help address the capacity demands identified by the committee. This work will be placed in the wider context of the social work reform programme as part of the forthcoming implementation plan but it seems clear that similar support will be needed as the programme evolves into the assessed year in employment.

13. Post-Registration Training and Learning (PRTL) and The Post-Qualifying Framework

The Select Committee recommends that requirements for post-registration training and learning be made more stringent. It recommends the accreditation of activity that contributes to a 90 hour training and learning requirement, contained within a clear framework that links explicitly to specific roles and sets out formal structures/pathways for career progression. The Committee also suggests a need for central funding to support professional development, and a registration mechanism that recognises specialism through post-qualifying learning and development.

The Committee's views are shared by the Social Work Task Force which has recommended:

- *“the creation of a more coherent and effective national framework for the continuing professional development of social workers, along with mechanisms to encourage a shift in culture which raises expectations of an entitlement to ongoing learning and development”;* and
- *“the creation of a single, nationally recognised career structure for social work.”*

As the Task Force suggests, the Masters in Social Work Practice announced last year will be incorporated into the framework as one of its main features.

Like the Committee, the Task Force has recommended that current requirements for renewal of registration should be made more demanding, and in the longer term have recommended the introduction of a licence to practice system whereby practitioners would first acquire and then maintain their status as social workers through demonstrating that they have kept to high standards of continuing competency and professional development. The Task Force also sees scope within this system for extending licensing to specific roles and career pathways as the Committee envisages.

14. Pay and career structures

The Committee recommends “that a national pay structure for social work be introduced, allowing for regional variation, incorporating a system of spinal points for extra skills and responsibilities and supported by the necessary funding.”

The Task Force considered the case for national pay arrangements in social work. It argues persuasively that the major factor behind concerns around pay is the current lack of scope for career progression within social work practice rather than the basic rate of pay. On the basis of the messages they have heard from both unions and employers, the Task Force believes that the quickest way to address these issues is through a combination of a nationally defined career path and local negotiation over pay. The Task Force has therefore recommended the creation of a single, nationally recognised career structure for social work that will

- *classify the main stages of a career in social work (from first year student onwards);*
- *make clear the expectations that should apply to social workers at each of these stages;*

- *link to the national framework for CPD (above), the forthcoming Masters in Social Work Practice and the 'licence to practice' scheme; and*
- *be used by employers and unions to agree pay and grading structures which properly reward social workers in line with their skills, experience and responsibilities—including those social workers who stay in frontline practice.*

The Task Force recommends a career structure covering 5 tiers from social work student to a range of advanced roles including management, practice education and advanced professional status.

I note and am encouraged by the fact that the National Joint Council for Local Government Services has established a working party to consider the implications of these recommendations. I recognise, however, the Task Force's caveat that should employers and unions fail to implement changes based on the proposed career structure the Government should consider the introduction of a national pay review body. I will keep the situation under review.

15. Pressures in the workplace

To address issues of capacity within the system, the Committee believes “that investment is needed on a substantial and sustainable scale, not just directly in training, but in frontline service delivery and workforce capacity.”

There is already substantial investment being made in social work training and service delivery.

The most recent data indicates that annual expenditure by councils in meeting social services responsibilities is in the region of £21 billion. The Department of Health invest approximately £100 million a year in social work training and bursaries for all social workers and DCSF is investing £130 million in the current spending period on workforce recruitment, retention and development. This programme of work includes significant support in terms of training and national recruitment campaigns as well as funds to local authorities.

Making best use of these significant resources in future implementation of the reform programme set out by the Social Work Task Force will be important. I also note that the Task Force advocates exploring approaches to remodelling social work delivery within existing budgets as a means of addressing urgent pressures in the system.

16. Remodelling the workforce

The Committee notes approaches being taken to remodelling social work deployment and delivery and recommends “that the Government formally assess the benefits of this model for social work education.”

I addressed this recommendation in some detail in my previous letter to the Committee, setting out the range of approaches the Government is already taking to exploring the benefits of different approaches to remodelling delivery and deployment. The Task Force acknowledges this work in its report and recommends that “formal and informal piloting of the remodelling of social work services should be encouraged and incentivised” to address short term pressures.

17. Agency workers

The Committee recommends “investment in and planning for the workforce over the long term [as] the best way to ensure that local authorities do not rely excessively on agency workers” and suggests that a mandatory requirement to complete the NQSW year with a statutory employer should be introduced so that newly-qualified workers cannot take up agency work immediately after qualification.

The Committee also identifies a need for greater quality control of social work agencies.

I agree with the Committee’s analysis that factors that lie behind current vacancy rates need to be addressed to deal with any areas of over-dependence on agency staff. The range of existing work to address recruitment and retention pressures (graduate sponsorship, return to social work, NQSW), combined with the implementation of the Task Force’s recommendations on managing supply, career structure and workload will make a significant impact in this regard.

18. Chief Social Workers

The Select Committee’s report recommends “that the Government establish a formal pilot of Chief Social Worker roles in local authorities.” With functions including “leading collaboration with training providers, taking overall responsibility for practice teaching and student placements, workforce planning, and ensuring that effective supervision and professional development is available to all social workers.”

While the Task Force has not explicitly recommended the implementation of a chief social worker model, they have set out a standard for employers that they believe should be implemented initially on a “kite mark” basis, backed up by direct intervention if a voluntary approach is ineffectual. As part of this standard the Task Force advocates “the presence of a senior manager who is also a qualified social worker and who oversees the overall health of professional social work in the organisation” and notes that this role might in practice be similar to chief social worker model employed in Scotland.

The implementation of this recommendation, along with the publication of revised statutory guidance to meet Lord Laming’s recommendation that “all Directors of Children’s Services who do not have direct experience or background in safeguarding and child protection must appoint a senior manager within their team with the necessary skills and experience” seems to meet the aspirations of the Committee’s recommendation, if not the precise mechanism.

Annex B

CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT ON THE TRAINING OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SOCIAL WORKERS

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE OCTOBER 2009

Thank you for your report into the training of children and families' social workers. This is an important report which makes a very constructive contribution to ensuring that the social work system delivers the best outcomes for our children and young people. The Committee has been thorough in its treatment of both initial training and continuing professional development and has made a series of helpful recommendations about specific aspects of social worker experience and the wider delivery system which I welcome and intend to act upon.

Social workers are critical to the nation. Their work makes a real difference in the lives of the most vulnerable in society. Equipping social workers with the knowledge, skills and experience they need is key to ensuring the positive outcomes that we all aspire to for children and adults in vulnerable circumstances. As I said to you when giving evidence, getting social work training right is a critical priority across government.

As you know, when the Secretaries of State for Health and for Children, Schools and Families established the Social Work Task Force, they asked it to give specific consideration to the training system as part of its recommendations for the future of the profession.

I have asked the Task Force to give close consideration to the recommendations of the Select Committee in its deliberations and report later this year. You will appreciate, in this context, that it is difficult to offer a detailed Government response to each recommendation in the Committee's report at present. However, I can reassure you that the Government is committed to taking forward a comprehensive programme of reform for social work once the Task Force reports, and I believe the report of the Select Committee and its recommendations offer a very significant contribution to this.

The above notwithstanding, a number of the Select Committee's recommendations are directly related to current Government activity. Where this is the case, the Government is in a position to offer a response to the Select Committee now—set out in the following paragraphs. In its report, the Select Committee also asked specifically for clarification on two particular items which are also addressed below.

I would be pleased to write to the Committee in fuller terms once the Government has received and taken stock of the Task Force's recommendations if the Committee would like me to do so.

Yours sincerely

Delyth Morgan

Fast track and other routes

In its report the Select Committee notes the limited scope for “routinely compressing the content of the social work degree” but suggests that for some, including those with relevant prior training or experience, such an approach might be a productive opportunity “for applicants through non-traditional routes.”

The Select Committee also cites a number of strengths in the Grow Your Own model of social work training and recommends consideration of funding arrangements to encourage a wider offer of this nature.

The Government shares this analysis of the current framework of initial social work training.

In July the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families launched the development of just such a “non-traditional route” when he announced a new “on the job” training programme. The programme will be delivered in partnership by local authorities and higher education. It is aimed at attracting high-calibre career changers by removing some of the barriers associated with traditional training routes and recognising prior learning and experience to accelerate qualification where appropriate. Training consortia are being formed at the moment and programmes of study will begin in Autumn 2010.

The Graduate Recruitment Scheme, meanwhile, seeks to harness the benefits the Select Committee identifies in Grow Your Own schemes to a national programme. The scheme was expanded following Lord Laming’s report earlier this year to support local authorities to sponsor high quality candidates to undertake the postgraduate training route. Over 200 students are beginning training under this scheme this academic year.

Quality assurance of degree courses

The Select Committee advocates a more active role in quality assurance of initial social work training by either the General Social Care Council (GSCC) or another body in order to ensure that questions of quality are not left to the present degree in the hands of the trainers themselves.

While the Social Work Task Force has signalled in its interim reports that it is likely to make recommendations in this area in its final report, ahead of this there are a number of approaches to addressing the concerns raised about quality assurance that the GSCC is either considering or is already beginning to implement. These include:

- Targeted and sample visits to meet course management boards, lecturers, students and employers have been introduced—this may include observation of teaching and visits to placements and will involve service users and carers;
- GSCC is considering introducing mechanisms to gain direct feedback from students, NQSWs and employers as part of its annual reporting function;
- From spring 2010 regulatory outcomes for training providers will be published;

- A national benchmark for the quality assurance of practice learning has been established. This will be made mandatory for all providers of social work training from the next academic year onwards; and
- The regulation model is being developed to provide a more risk-based approach that focuses greater attention on areas/institutions where weaknesses are suspected or have been identified.

The Newly-Qualified Social Worker Programme

The Select Committee's support for the Government's Newly-Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) programme is welcome. The current arrangements do not go as far as the Select Committee's recommendation of an explicit link between registration and successful completion of the NQSW year—a suggestion under consideration by the Task Force at the moment. Nevertheless, we do believe that the recent move to extend the programme to all local authorities and voluntary sector organisations will lead to a shared expectation of standards of those entering the profession amongst employers and social workers themselves. We are grateful to the Select Committee for setting out such a clear position on the matter of linking registration to the completion of the NQSW year and our action on this will also take into account any Task Force recommendations on this.

The Committee also recommends a review of the programme to learn lessons on the implementation of the programme, its benefits and challenges. An evaluation is already in train, with an independent evaluator reporting on the outcomes of the programme's first year in spring 2010.

The Committee also notes the level of investment that successful delivery of the NQSW programme demands and recommends Government subsidy. It is worth noting that the current arrangements for the NQSW programme include significant funds for employers to meet the costs of protected time, training and development, supervision, and implementation.

Remodelling the workforce

The Select Committee notes the potential benefits of approaches by some LAs to remodelling social work deployment both in terms of successful delivery and potential to foster a learning environment. It recommends a formal assessment of the benefits of such approaches.

The Government is already investing in furthering understanding in this area. This includes work to look at regional/sub-regional approaches to improving the retention of social workers, and a programme which is monitoring the impact of 11 different approaches to workforce reform and remodelling in social work.

Other approaches to social work delivery are also under investigation. The Social Work Practices pilot is monitoring the effectiveness of giving responsibility for cases to small groups of social workers who hold individual budgets and are commissioned by, but independent of, local authorities. Family Intervention Projects work with the most challenging families delivering a multi-agency support package which addresses the needs of the whole family.

There is potential in all of this work to generate important messages for improvement in social work deployment and delivery. As the Select Committee notes, it is important that the impact of these projects is understood, not only on an individual project basis but looking across the whole suite of work. Early findings and lessons learned from this work are being fed into the Task Force's deliberation process and will also be disseminated across the sector.

Post-Qualifying Framework and CWDC career framework

In its report, the Select Committee particularly requested "clarity about how the Children's Workforce Development Council's career framework" and the planned practice focused Master's degree contribute to expectations of ongoing professional development and "link to the Post-Qualifying Framework".

The Government shares the Select Committee's views on the importance of a continuous process of professional development and reflection throughout a social worker's career. The various levels of the CWDC career framework set out expectations of professional competence at the end of the first year in practice (the NQSW phase), the end of the third year in practice, and for those in advanced professional roles. These expectations of professional competence are linked through performance management and supervision to consideration of professional development needs and identification of appropriate activity, including that on offer through the Post-Qualifying Framework.

Relationship between Task Force recommendations and the outcomes of internal reviews of the delivery organisations.

The Select Committee also explicitly asked in its report for clarification as to how reviews of the various regulatory and delivery organisations in social work will relate to the final recommendations of the Social Work Task Force.

The Task Force has been given a wide-ranging remit to consider all aspects of the social work system, and to set out recommendations for its long-term reform. This remit extends to consideration of the appropriate structures for policy and delivery in social work.

The Government is committed to delivering a comprehensive programme of reform in the light of the Task Force's recommendations. The findings of the remit reviews that the Select Committee notes will be important in the implementation of any recommendations around reconfiguring the delivery system.

The Select Committee will also be aware that the Department of Health commissioned a review of the conduct function of the General Social Care Council at the end of July. The Government will also consider the outcomes of this review in thinking about the delivery system needed in the future.