

## Speech

# Delivering a revolution in children's social care

From: [Department for Education](#) and [The Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP](#)  
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Nicky Morgan sets out plans to transform children's social work so that social workers get it right for vulnerable children and families.



Thank you Andrew [Christie, Director of Children's Services for the Tri-borough, who will shortly be Children's Services Commissioner in Birmingham] for that kind introduction. It is a pleasure to be here in Kensington and Chelsea - one of our most innovative local authorities.

I am delighted that you'll be joining us as one of our partners in practice, and I look forward to my department working very closely with you over the coming years to achieve something truly remarkable.

Social workers change lives. They have the ability not just to improve the circumstances of vulnerable children but to change them, and therefore their futures, entirely.

That is why supporting social workers, and giving them the tools they need, is a priority for this government and a personal priority for me as Secretary of State.

In my role as Education Secretary I often say that everyone has an opinion on education. Each one of us went to school and the majority of us have at least one family member or friend who is a teacher. From my own family I get plenty of advice!

Yet most of us have never had any real engagement with social services. We've never been through the care system and we've never seen first-hand those heart wrenching situations social workers see on a daily basis.

## **The importance of social work**

Social workers are, indeed, our country's unsung heroes. There can be no doubt that social work is one of the most demanding professions in the world.

It is a difficult, often thankless task where the stakes are high, and the credit is low.

So let me first say a heartfelt thank you to the thousands of social workers supporting our most vulnerable children and families, day in and day out. I've heard about cases like:

- a 15-year-old boy, repeatedly abused by an older man, who eventually made a full disclosure to the police with the specialist support of a social worker
- the foster carers at breaking point, thinking they may have to give up the care of 2 brothers, who with the support of highly skilled social workers developed the skills and confidence to carry on

And we have outstanding practitioners like [Isabelle Trowler, the](#)

[Chief Social Worker for Children and Families](#), who has been working tirelessly with government for the past 2 years.

And experts like Sir Martin Narey and Alan Wood, who have been asked to lead reviews on [children's residential care](#) and multi-agency working.

And of course, [Edward Timpson](#), from my own ministerial team, who has been passionately championing this agenda for years, and who sadly cannot be here today because his mother Alex passed away last week after a long illness.

The Timpson family have fostered around 90 children over the years, as well as adopting two boys. They are a shining example of the selfless love and support that is so desperately needed by the children we serve.

## **The challenge ahead**

While there can be no doubt that we have many deeply committed and truly inspirational social workers, we don't have excellent children's social services everywhere.

And we know that when there are mistakes, or when people aren't given the support they need - the consequences can be heart-breaking. Cases like Baby Peter Connelly, Daniel Pelka or Hamzah Khan.

Cases which show that this work can literally be a matter of life and death.

As the Prime Minister has made clear, we must give every child the best start in life and make sure that every child can fulfil their potential - regardless of the circumstances they were born into.

And we must make sure our support for the most vulnerable is at the heart of that commitment.

## **Reforming the system**

We have a huge task at hand:

- last year, over 630,000 children were referred to children's social care
- over 400,000 children were in need of support, with a significant proportion of these children having suffered abuse or neglect
- and we now know more about challenges like online grooming, child sexual exploitation and child trafficking - all abhorrent crimes

[Eileen Munro's 2011 landmark review of child protection](#) showed that politicians in the past had created a system that was too often concerned with the process of social work rather than its outcomes; one which left social workers confused and demoralised and prevented them doing what they do best - changing the lives of children and families. We inherited a system where:

- practitioners have been made to follow rigid processes instead of being allowed to do 'what works'
- an overwhelming weight of bureaucratic burden, where the need to tick boxes, degraded professional autonomy and distorted our focus on what vulnerable children needed
- inflexible working meant children's needs were not always at the centre of decision making

## **Progress has been made**

Over the course of the last Parliament we made significant moves towards reforming the children's social care system.

Colleagues in the Home Office, local government and in my own department have worked hard to address the challenges we have faced.

We have made real progress in stripping back bureaucracy, securing crucial additional support for children in care, and reforming adoption.

Recent announcements - such as our plans to intervene more decisively in failing authorities, Alan Wood's review of local safeguarding children boards, and the Narey review of residential care will take this forward.

And today I am announcing that we will invest more in adoption services and change the law to make sure adoption is always pursued where it is in a child's best interest, so no child misses out on a loving and stable home.

But I also recognise that successive governments have neglected this area.

Because children's social care doesn't have the same 'universal appeal' as schools or hospitals.

And because it serves some of society's most disempowered people, who don't have the same sharp elbows - clamouring for more to be done.

I stand here today to tell you - we have not yet done enough.

That is why one of my first priorities on returning to my role in May was to revolutionise children's social work.

In fact, only this week, the Prime Minister said that he believed our reforms to child protection would be the 'landmark reforms of the next 5 years'.

It is time to inject the same ambition we injected into our education system, into children's social care.

That same intolerance of failure, that same passion for high standards. It is time to say 'ok' is not good enough for these children, and that where there is failure - we can no longer sit by and watch.

As a country we should feel ashamed that more than 20 local authorities today are failing, and some have been doing so for years.

That is why I want to make a serious of commitments over the

next 5 years:

- to make sure children's social care is led by the best, and that we give those excellent leaders the freedom to innovate
- to get the best and brightest graduates into the profession, and to make sure they have the training they need
- to strip back the red tape that stifles innovation; and instead, introduce a system of checks and balances that holds the system to account in the right way
- and as the Prime Minister pledged just a few weeks ago - to intervene in any local authority found to be failing, and where this failure is persistent or systemic, take services away

My department will set out over the coming months exactly how we plan to achieve this from the front door of children's social care right through to services for care leavers, and everything in between.

## **Getting the best social work workforce possible**

Just as we know that we can't have great schools without great teachers - our child protection system needs excellent people at its heart. It is on the shoulders of social workers that the success of the system rests.

Just 5 years ago, social workers had no clear statement of the knowledge and skills they needed to work effectively with children.

Under the old system there were literally hundreds of pages of guidance.

Social workers do not need that kind of prescription, but they do need to know what is expected of them and what professional standard they need to meet.

Put simply, we needed to establish the core knowledge and skills every practitioner needed to do their job well.

That is why, just over a year ago, [at the NCAS Conference](#), I

announced that we would set out new [social work knowledge and skills statements at three levels](#) - front line practitioner, practice supervisor and practice leader.

Thanks to this government, social workers now have that clarity for the first time ever.

Working with Isabelle Trowler, a frontline practitioner and expert in her field, we have developed the clearest statements ever on the skills and knowledge social workers need.

But it is not enough just to state what is expected. We need to now use these statements to assess and accredit social workers so we can have confidence in every frontline practitioner.

There are currently over 20 local authorities across the country trialling this, involving over 1,000 social workers, and I have been delighted by the enthusiasm with which local authorities have come forward to help us.

I want every children's social worker to have accredited status.

That's why I am delighted to be able to announce today that we will be rolling out this programme nationwide so that children's social workers across the country, at every level, will be fully assessed and accredited by 2020.

## **Improving leadership**

Strong leadership is also vital to our reforms.

Just as teachers deserve the support of great headteachers, I want the next generation of social workers to have excellent leadership. Someone with experience who knows what it's like to make tough decisions; balance complex workloads and still stay grounded.

That is why we are putting in place a system of assessment and accreditation for practice leaders as well as for front line practitioners and supervisors.

And this year we will have our first cohort of talented social workers training to become the country's future leaders in social work. These expert and experienced social workers will make sure we have the pipeline of talent we need throughout the workforce.

## Improving the quality of entrants to social work

I also want to see the best people becoming social workers.

Schemes like [Teach First](#) have helped transform teaching into one of the most prestigious and high status professions in the country, and we must now do the same for social work.

[Frontline](#) mirrors that approach by attracting the brightest and the best graduates into social work - giving them fast-track, top quality training in children's social work.

It's no surprise then that there are more than 10 applicants for every place on a Frontline course, and 9 applicants per place for the [Step Up to Social Work programme](#). The majority of local authorities now benefit from these schemes.

Don't just take it from me. Take it from the local authorities working with these programmes, who have told us the quality of students is consistently very high.

That's why I want to see an extra 750 qualified social workers coming from fast-track programmes in the next year alone, and why I can announce today we will be investing a further £100 million into Frontline, and into our specialist course - Step Up.

Step Up will make 550 places available next year and Frontline will expand to the North East of England.

We'll also be extending our Teaching Partnerships scheme - building stronger links between universities and employers, so trainees can be confident they are getting the skills they will need in the job.



## Setting the right standards for social work

But I also want us to be confident that every new social worker joining the workforce has received high quality initial training, whether that's through new graduate entry routes or through the more traditional undergraduate courses.

I want that to be true of every newly qualified social worker, whether they go on to specialise in children's or adult's services.

Not enough of the courses available in higher education are currently good enough, as Sir Martin Narey's review told us.

Whilst some courses are excellent, too many don't give trainees the skills and knowledge they need.

This lets down social work trainees, and moreover, it lets down the children they are working to support.

That's why we need a new approach to the regulation of social work which makes sure only the best courses are available.

And so I am delighted to announce today that in partnership with the Secretary of State for Health, it is our intention to set up a new body charged with driving up standards in social work and raising the status of social workers.

The new body will have a relentless focus on raising the quality of social work education, training and practice in both children's and adults' services.

It will set standards for training as well as overseeing the roll out of the new assessment and accreditation system for children and family social workers. This will happen as soon as possible.

And let me be clear, we don't need more quangos, or more bureaucracy - we need a body that will genuinely uphold rigorous professional standards.

## More innovation and support

It is clear we have an ambitious programme ahead that will deliver a truly first class workforce in social work.

But our problems are not just within the social work profession.

The system we expect social workers to work in does not create conditions for excellence and innovation.

Even when they have all the requisite knowledge and skills, social workers are still constrained by a system that doesn't give them the freedom to innovate and excel.

So, as well as transforming the social work profession, we need working environments that support excellent practice and development, overseen by outstanding leaders.

This ambition is already being supported by investments of £100 million through our [Innovation Programme](#).

This is funding projects such as the [Right Home project in Calderdale](#), which offers young people at the edge of care a single person to go to when they need help, and a range of supported housing accommodation when they cannot live at home, including a respite children's home, boarding school accommodation, and support for young people leaving residential care.

But projects like this are only the beginning - we need to go further.

This is why we will establish an independent [What Works Centre](#), with up to £20 million of additional funding, working alongside the new regulatory body and the Chief Social Worker for Children and Families.

The What Works Centre will be an evidence based resource to support social work practice like never before.

Its mission will be to bring together everything we learn from practice at home and abroad, including our own Innovation

Programme, cutting edge practice in local authorities, and evidence from serious case reviews.

This centre will make sure social workers get the support they need - so they can learn lessons from the past and make sure they have access to the best research in the world.

And it is also why we are committed to ensuring that the very best leaders and practitioners are given the freedom to push boundaries; that outdated regulations, laws, guidance and processes do not stand in the way of the best local leaders innovating in the best interests of children and families.

That is the spirit behind our Innovation Programme, and also behind our new push to develop Partners in Practice.

The Partners in Practice programme represents an exciting new partnership with the country's best performing local leaders.

Together they are redefining what a children's services department looks like, with the only design principle being what works for children.

We announced 6 of these partner authorities in December and I am delighted to announce a second wave today with the additions of Cambridgeshire, Lincolnshire and Islington.

These local authorities will provide a blueprint for excellence that the whole system will be able to learn from.

In social work children's lives are at stake.

Our reforms are big and bold because we need the best people on the front line, armed with the knowledge and skills to change lives.

I stand before you today to say to all those social workers out there: I fully support you.

This government wants to invest in your profession and enable you to bring about the change I know you so desperately want to see.

Until we hear children and families consistently say, 'We got what we really needed' - none of us should stop trying to make this system better.

These reforms are about getting it right for social workers so that social workers can get it right for children and families.

Because we owe it to them to get it right.

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**The Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP**

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