



House of Commons  
Education Committee

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# **Social work reform**

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**Third Report of Session 2016–17**





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**Third Report of Session 2016–17**

*Report, together with formal minutes relating  
to the report*

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## 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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## Summary

In January 2016 the Government announced a set of proposals to reform children and families social work. The sector is already under immense pressure, with social workers facing increasing workloads and local authorities wrestling with funding constraints. Effective reform is needed. We heard during our inquiry that the Government proposals had some significant weaknesses. Our Report recommends some important changes.

We call for a strong professional body to address many of the concerns in the reforms. The closure of The College of Social Work last year created an absence in high profile leadership for the profession. A new body would take the lead on a number of crucial functions to deliver improvement in the sector. Instead of spending more money changing regulators, the Government should focus on facilitating the development of a new professional body for social work. This new body should take responsibility for the development of a post-qualifying framework, an accreditation system and workforce planning.

Reforms are being replaced before they have had a chance to settle, and there has been a distinct lack of collaboration with the sector. We recommend that the Government put in place an in-depth plan for delivery of both reforms already launched and new reforms, with a mechanism to assess their success.

Social work is one broad profession, but the different agendas of the Department for Education and the Department of Health are pulling it in two contrary directions. Having One Chief Social Worker rather than two would improve joined-up thinking about social work at a national level. The diversification of 'qualifying routes' into children and families social work has the potential to bring in talented practitioners, but the expansion of specialist accelerated schemes risks narrowing the understanding of social workers who need a broad knowledge of issues affecting both children and adults. We are convinced of the need for a generic qualification, but there is a lack of clarity around the Government's approach. The Frontline model shows signs of promise but more evidence is needed, and its lack of collaboration with universities is concerning. More long-term research about Frontline will help the Government decide on the future arrangement of initial training.

Existing career pathways are confusing, and the current provision of continuing professional development and post-qualifying training is inadequate and inconsistent. A national career development framework is urgently required. The proposed accreditation system has too many unanswered questions and should be subject to further consultation. The Assessed and Supported Year in Employment should be made mandatory for all newly-qualified social workers.

The Government's new reforms do not focus enough on tackling the endemic retention problems. Poor working conditions, caused by high caseloads, negative media coverage and a dysfunctional 'blame culture', are driving experienced social workers from the profession. Limits should be placed on caseloads, and a national workforce planning system created to forecast supply and demand.

Finally, we should not ignore the wider context in which children and families social workers operate. We cautiously welcome the attempt to bring more innovation into the children's social care system but the Government's proposals are untested. We recommend there should be no expansion of independent trust model until there is proof that it works. Interventions for poorly-performing children's services should focus less on unnecessary structural change and more on giving local authorities appropriate support during the improvement period.



# 1 Introduction

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## Background

1. Children and families social workers are managing increasing caseloads. At the end of March 2015, there were 69,540 children in care, a figure higher than at any point since 1985.<sup>1</sup> A recent study found that one in five children born in 2009–10, almost 150,000 children, were referred to children’s social care before their fifth birthday.<sup>2</sup> The number of children who became the subject of a child protection plan rose from 44,300 in 2010 to 62,200 in 2015.<sup>3</sup> The reasons for these increases are varied and complex. They potentially include demographic changes, greater numbers of children in specific need groups, improved identification of child sexual exploitation, and changes in practice which have led to referrers recognising need at an earlier stage. Against this backdrop of increasing demand, funding constraints have put local authority spending on children’s services under severe stress. In view of these pressures, it is critical to look at the role of children and families social work and what can be done to ensure the profession copes with ever-rising demand. Social workers have a crucial role in improving outcomes for children, young people and families, and it is in this context we examine the best ways to support and improve children and families social workers.

## Our inquiry

2. In a speech in September 2015, the Prime Minister made it clear that improving the quality of children and families social workers and children’s services was a key reform priority for the Government, calling it a “big area of focus over the next 5 years.”<sup>4</sup> We were prompted to launch an inquiry into social work reform by the lack of clarity on how the Government intended to achieve its aim. In November 2015 we wrote to the Department for Education asking it to set out:

- The Government’s overall strategy for the reform of children and families social work;
- The specific problems this strategy is seeking to address and the evidence behind it;
- The action being taken by the Government to avert the recruitment and retention crisis in children and families social work;
- How new initiatives in reforming children and families social work build on other recent reforms;
- The impact upon children’s social care of reductions in funding to local authorities and other employers of social workers.

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1 Department for Education, [Children looked after in England \(including adoption and care leavers\) year ending 31 March 2015](#), October 2015

2 Andy Bilson and Katie E.C. Martin, “[Referrals and child protection in England: one in five children referred to children’s services and one in nineteen investigated before the age of five](#)”, *British Journal of Social Work*, vol 0 (2016), pp 1-19

3 Department for Education, [Characteristics of children in need: 2014 to 2015](#), March 2016

4 [Prime Minister: My vision for a smarter state](#), 11 September 2015

3. We received the Department's response in December 2015. It concentrated on how the Government would deliver three core aims. The first was improving the skills of capacity of the workforce, by introducing a new accreditation and assessment system, and expanding accelerated schemes into children and families social work. The second was creating quality working environments focused on efficiency and innovation, through funding from the Children's Social Care Innovation Programme and sharing best practice from high-performing local authorities. The third was streamlining governance and accountability by working with local authorities and others on new models for delivering children's social care, such as independent trusts, and intervening earlier in local authorities with records of persistent failure.

4. We published the response alongside a call for written evidence on 12 January 2016, seeking comments on the content, focus, and breadth of the Government's proposed reforms.<sup>5</sup> We received 47 written submissions during our inquiry from a range of organisations and individuals, and took oral evidence from six witness panels, including from Edward Timpson MP, Minister of State for Children and Families, and Isabelle Trowler, Chief Social Worker for Children and Families. We also held a private meeting with representatives from the social work sector.<sup>6</sup> We are grateful to all witnesses for providing such high quality evidence, and to all of those who took the time to write to us. During this inquiry we benefited from the advice of Professor David Berridge OBE and Marion Davis CBE as our standing advisers on children's services, and we are grateful for their assistance.<sup>7</sup>

## The Government's reform agenda

5. Since we launched our inquiry, the Government has begun to spell out in more detail the shape its reforms will take. The Government presented its approach as a "radical programme of reform" to transform the care that children receive.<sup>8</sup> On 14 January 2016, the Department for Education published a policy paper called *Children's social care reform: a vision for change*.<sup>9</sup> A more detailed policy paper, entitled *Putting children first: delivering our vision for excellent children's social care*, was published on 4 July 2016 following the conclusion of our inquiry.<sup>10</sup>

6. The Government announced the Children and Social Work Bill in the 2016 Queen's Speech.<sup>11</sup> Two of the stated purposes of the Bill are to enable better learning about effective

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5 Department for Education, [Education select committee memorandum: social work reform](#) (January 2016)

6 See Annex 1 for further details.

7 Professor David Berridge, Professor of Child and Family Welfare, University of Bristol, declared interests as involved at the University of Bristol in educating and training qualifying and advanced social work, and other students, a member of the Bristol City Council Corporate Parenting Panel, and a recipient of research grants from DfE, research councils, trusts, voluntary organisations and others. Marion Davis declared interests as a Trustee of Children and Families across Borders (CFAB), a member of the Improvement Board for Children's Services in Northamptonshire County Council, an external adviser to the Safeguarding Board of Northern Ireland in respect of a thematic review of Child Sexual Exploitation, and author of a Serious Case Review for Sutton local safeguarding children board.

8 Department for Education, [Education select committee memorandum: social work reform](#) (January 2016) para 1

9 Department for Education, *Children's social care reform: a vision for change*, [DFE-00008-2016](#) (January 2016)

10 Department for Education, *Putting children first: delivering our vision for excellent children's social care*, [DFE-00158-2016](#) (July 2016)

11 [Children and Social Work Bill](#) [Lords] [Bill 1 (2016-17)]

approaches to child protection and children's social care, and to enable the establishment of a new social work regulatory regime. Both these purposes relate to proposals in the Government's reform strategy. We will address the Bill where appropriate in the Report.

**7. 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.**

## **Our Report**

8. This Report is divided into six main parts:

- Chapter 2 examines how Government is implementing the new reforms, co-ordinating across different Departments, and consulting with the social work profession.
- Chapter 3 considers the changes to initial training with the expansion of accelerated schemes and how these could be improved.
- Chapter 4 looks at post-qualifying training and what the Government could do to improve the provision of continuing professional development for children and families social workers.
- Chapter 5 examines retention problems in children and families social work and the lack of Government focus in this area.
- Chapter 6 considers the loss of the College of Social Work and the future of a professional body for social work, and looks at the Government plans for regulatory change and practice leadership.
- Chapter 7 looks at the Government plans for structural change in children's services by introducing more innovation and increasing the role of independent trusts and whether this is the best approach.

## 2 The role of central government

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### The implementation of reforms

9. Reform in children and families social work is not new. The last decade has seen a large number of reports, reviews, and reforms of social work. Following the death of Peter Connelly ('Baby P') in 2007, the Department for Children, Schools and Families established the Social Work Task Force to improve the overall quality and status of the profession in England. The Task Force—chaired by Dame Moira Gibb, then Chief Executive of Camden Council—made 15 recommendations in its 2009 report, all of which were accepted by Government.<sup>12</sup> It focused particularly on a national college for social work, a national career structure, professional supervision, continuing professional development (CPD) and social work education. Responsibility for the implementation of these reforms was given to the Social Work Reform Board.<sup>13</sup> In 2010, Professor Eileen Munro was commissioned by the Government to undertake a review of the child protection system in England. Munro's report, published in 2011, was critical of unnecessary form-filling and bureaucracy in social work and emphasised that relationships with children and families should be at its centre.<sup>14</sup> The report also called for the introduction of a Chief Social Worker, Principal Social Workers in each local authority, and the creation of a national college for social work.<sup>15</sup> The Government responded positively to the Munro report and accepted almost all its recommendations.<sup>16</sup>

10. Several pieces of evidence suggested these previous reforms should be given more time to 'bed in.' The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) told us these reforms have "variously not been effectively supported, implemented or allowed to mature due to a combination of a lack of will, time and resources" and called for evaluation of the effectiveness of recent reviews.<sup>17</sup> Cornwall Council stated:

Many authorities have only recently begun to implement social work reforms and others only partially. Some have not appreciated the interconnectedness of the recommendations. For those that have implemented these reforms and can demonstrate their effectiveness, further reform, overlaid on top of these reforms, are confusing, burdensome and unnecessary.<sup>18</sup>

Dame Moira Gibb, formerly Chair of both the *Social Work Task Force* and the *Social Work Reform Board*, told us:

My recommendation would be not to introduce lots of new things but to support the broad programme that was set out [ ... ] and to let things bed down and to evaluate them consistently and to support the outcome they anticipated, to be more objective.<sup>19</sup>

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12 Social Work Task Force, [Building a safe, confident future](#) (November 2009)

13 Department for Education, '[Social Work Reform Board](#),' accessed 09 June 2016

14 Professor Eileen Munro, [The Munro Review of Child Protection: final report- a child-centred system](#) (May 2011)

15 Professor Eileen Munro, [The Munro Review of Child Protection](#) (May 2011) pp 10-13

16 Department for Education, *A child-centred system: the government's response to the Munro review of child protection*, [DFE-00064-2011](#), July 2011

17 British Association of Social Workers ([SWR0029](#)) para 2.3

18 Cornwall Council ([SWR0028](#)) para 5

19 Q82

11. We heard in our private seminar that many representatives were aggrieved at the lack of consultation with the sector on the new reform agenda. Similarly, Samantha Baron, Chair of the Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee, asked the Government to “slow down” and work in co-operation with the sector.<sup>20</sup> When questioned on this, Isabelle Trowler, Chief Social Worker for Children and Families, told us that “hundreds of people” were involved in the development of the current reforms, but agreed if representative bodies were feeling marginalised, there was a need for further consultation.<sup>21</sup>

12. NSPCC welcomed the proposed reforms, but expressed concerns about the perceived piecemeal emergence of each policy and questioned how each element of the reform agenda meshed together. It called for a roadmap of the current wave of reforms, with implementation criteria to measure the success of the proposals.<sup>22</sup>

13. We are concerned that the pace of the new reforms could compromise their effectiveness, especially without proper assessment of the degree to which previous reforms have embedded at a local level. Despite the publication of a more detailed policy paper on the new reforms, the implementation timelines are still unclear and there is no reference to previous reforms. The children’s social care sector has been in continuous transformation over recent years without the necessary time to reflect, assess and embed. The latest reforms need to be conducted in partnership with the sector. Local authorities and other employers require sufficient time to understand what is being asked of them and to put in place the necessary changes.

14. ***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.***

## Departmental co-ordination

15. Social work in England mainly comes under the purview of two Departments: the Department of Health (DH), responsible for adult social care, and the Department for Education (DfE), responsible for children and families social care. Social work is delivered via local government, which means the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) also has a significant role. Responsibility for child protection also covers a wider spectrum of Departments: the welfare policies of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) directly influence children and families, and the Home Office takes the lead on preventing child sexual exploitation and domestic violence. To co-ordinate the work of the Departments, the Child Protection Taskforce was created in June 2015 as a cross-Government unit consisting of twelve Ministers, and chaired by the Secretary of State for Education, with a remit to extend and accelerate reforms to the quality of children and families social work.<sup>23</sup>

20 Q83

21 Q125

22 NSPCC ([SWR0037](#)) para 1.3

23 Prime Minister’s Office, [‘PM announces new taskforce to transform child protection,’](#) 24 June 2015

16. We heard concerns in our evidence that the Government was focusing on child protection to the detriment of other aspects of children and families social work. BASW queried why the title of the Taskforce was so narrow, given it was implementing reform throughout children’s social work, and expressed concerns it did not take into account the full range of children and families social work.<sup>24</sup> Sue Gerrard, an independent researcher, said that ‘child protection’ is in “principle a broad term referring to protection from all forms of harms, but in practice is generally used to refer to neglect and abuse rather than safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in need.”<sup>25</sup> She told us that by adopting this narrow focus, the new reforms could marginalise a significant number of children who qualify as in need.<sup>26</sup>

### **Fragmentation: children and adults**

17. Several pieces of evidence expressed concerns that DfE and DH were pursuing different agendas for social work. The Local Government Association (LGA) stated that DfE’s memorandum included “little reference to the work of other government departments.”<sup>27</sup> In written evidence, the Association of Professors of Social Work (APSW) said they were “concerned that in the last three years there has been an increasing lack of clarity about the direction of government policy, with key departments (DfE and DH) appearing to diverge on a number of issues.”<sup>28</sup>

18. We were given a number of examples of how the future of children and adult social work appeared to diverge from each other. The proposed accreditation and assessment system, which we will discuss later in this Report, will only be for children and families social workers.<sup>29</sup> The Department said “there are no plans to widen the assessment and accreditation process to adult social workers at this time.”<sup>30</sup> Both Departments commissioned reviews on social work education in 2014, and they came to different conclusions about the degree of specialisation required.<sup>31</sup> The Children and Social Work Bill proposes a new regulator for all social workers, yet its powers will be determined by regulations from the Secretary of State for Education, rather than Health.<sup>32</sup> Subsequently, DfE and DH published in June 2016 a policy statement entitled *Regulating Social Workers*, which revealed Government proposals to establish an executive agency jointly supported by both DH and DfE, but accountable to the Secretary of State for Education.<sup>33</sup> DfE has published a social work reform policy paper, but there is no comparable document by DH. The British Association of Social Workers told us this does not reflect the need for “all social workers to be able to provide a level of service to people of all ages.”<sup>34</sup> Similarly, the University of Huddersfield said that that the social context in which children and adults live mean that “in order to achieve the best possible outcomes children’s social workers need to know about adults.”<sup>35</sup>

24 British Association of Social Workers ([SWR0029](#)) para 5.4

25 Sue Gerrard ([SWR0021](#)) para 7

26 Sue Gerrard ([SWR0021](#)) para 8

27 Local Government Association ([SWR0012](#)) para 5.2

28 Association of Professors of Social Work ([SWR0013](#)) executive summary

29 See paras 48-56

30 Department for Education ([SWR0045](#)) para 6

31 Sir Martin Narey, [Making the education of social workers consistently effective](#) (January 2014); David Croisdale-Appleby, [Re-visioning social work education: an independent review](#) (February 2014)

32 [Children and Social Work Bill 2016](#), Clause 20

33 Department for Education and Department of Health, [Regulating Social Workers: Policy Statement](#), June 2016

34 British Association of Social Workers, ([SWR0029](#)) para 1.5

35 The University of Huddersfield evidence ([SWR0031](#)) para 6

19. The Minister assured us “there is absolutely no intention of trying to split the profession.”<sup>36</sup> Isabelle Trowler told us:

I do not know why it is that people think we are going off in different directions. Of course, there is a really great focus on child and family social work because we are part of children’s social care, but that is because that is a Government priority, as it should be.<sup>37</sup>

### ***The Chief Social Workers***

20. The Munro Review recommended the creation of a national Chief Social Worker to establish a permanent professional presence within Government, taking inspiration from the Chief Medical Officer in DH.<sup>38</sup> Munro envisaged that this Chief Social Worker would make clear to Government the realities of social work practice on the front line and their daily challenges to ensure that policies and procedures were rooted in that reality. Munro concluded:

The review considers the scope of a Chief Social Worker spanning both children and adults to offer distinct benefits. These include recognising the interconnectedness of issues facing children and families as well as not unintentionally dividing the social work profession. It would make good sense for this role to report jointly to the Secretaries of State for Health and Education.<sup>39</sup>

21. The Government instead created two Chief Social Worker positions: one for children and families, reporting to the Secretary of State for Education, and the other for adults, reporting to the Secretary of State for Health. Mr Timpson explained that this decision was made after the initial recruitment to find a single Chief Social Worker was unsuccessful.<sup>40</sup> In our private seminar with social work professionals we heard that having two Chief Social Workers led to confusion, and that there was a lack of joined-up working. Professor Ray Jones, a social work academic who oversees child protection improvement in different areas of England and is a former Director of Social Services, told us in oral evidence:

We now have a divide between a chief social worker in the Department for Education, who is very energetic and able and driving a very fast agenda but with no real match across what is intended and wanted within the Department of Health.<sup>41</sup>

22. Despite the confidence of the Minister and the Chief Social Worker for Children and Families, we are concerned that the DfE and DH agendas are not coordinated, and the profession is being pulled in two different directions. There is a pressing need for greater coordination within Government on the future of social work in England. The splitting of the profession into two separate strands has been unhelpfully divisive. The appointment of two Chief Social Workers, apparently against the wishes of the profession, has exacerbated the problem. In addition, Government policy prioritises child protection

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36 Q190

37 Q130

38 Professor Eileen Munro, [The Munro Review of Child Protection](#) (May 2011) p 121

39 Professor Eileen Munro, [The Munro Review of Child Protection](#) (May 2011) para 7.43

40 Q192

41 Q12

as demonstrated in the title of the Taskforce, and while this is clearly important, it risks marginalising wider issues in children and families social work such as domestic violence, substance misuse, mental health and learning disabilities.

***23. 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.***



## 3 Initial training

### Initial education

24. In 2003, the qualification route for social workers became an undergraduate or postgraduate degree, replacing the previous two-year diploma. The degrees cover social work for both adults and children, with specialism introduced after the first year. The Health Care Professions Council (HCPC) approves Higher Education Institutions to deliver social work degrees and grants approval for individual courses. Following completion of the degree, graduates must register with HCPC to practice as a social worker. ‘Qualifying routes’ for social work were expanded with the creation of Step Up to Social Work in 2010 and Frontline in 2013. The Department invested £35m in both Frontline and Step Up to Social Work (see Box 1 for further details) over the 2010–2015 period, and announced in January that they would expand these approaches by investing a further £100m.<sup>42</sup>

#### Box 1: Accelerated ‘qualifying routes’ into children and families social work

##### Frontline

Frontline was launched as a fast-track graduate recruitment programme for child protection social work to target ‘high flying’ graduates, inspired by the Teach First model. Frontline is an accelerated two-year programme with a minimum entry requirement of a 2:1 degree in any subject. The teaching model is a five-week summer school, followed by two years in a local authority. The first year is a placement, alongside academic sessions, which concludes with a postgraduate diploma in social work. In the second year, trainees work as a qualified social worker in children’s services and continue to study towards a master’s degree, as well as completing a leadership development programme. Trainees receive a bursary of £19,000 for the first year, and thereafter are paid a typical newly qualified social worker salary in their second year by their ‘host’ council.

Currently, 18 local authorities in London and Greater Manchester take Frontline students on placements; in the 2016 cohort, Frontline will expand to the North East, meaning up to 29 authorities overall are expected to participate.

##### Step Up to Social Work

Step Up to Social Work is a full-time training programme with a duration of 14 months. It was created by the Children’s Workforce Development Council (CWDC) as an employer-led postgraduate course on social work with a children and families specialisation. Step Up was designed to attract high calibre career changers to an intensive route into social work, with trainees receiving a bursary of around £19,000. Entry is restricted to graduates with either a 2:1 or higher at undergraduate level, or a 2:2 at undergraduate level plus a master’s degree, as well as relevant experience working with children and families. Students receive a postgraduate diploma when they complete Step Up.

Source: Department for Education, [Frontline pilot: independent evaluation](#) (March 2016) 1.4–1.5

42 Department for Education, [Education select committee memorandum: social work reform](#), January 2016, paras 19–23

## Specialisation in initial education

25. In 2013, DfE commissioned Sir Martin Narey, former Director General of the Prison Service and Chief Executive of the charity Barnardo's, to review initial social work education for children and families social workers. His report, published in February 2014, concluded that there were significant deficiencies in preparing students for the demands of children and families social work practice. Sir Martin concluded that "social work should remain a single profession but with specialised degree programmes" and recommended that:

universities should be encouraged to develop degrees for those intending to work in children's social work. Such degrees would build on a first year common to all social workers, with a second and third year focusing exclusively on children and related issues.<sup>43</sup>

26. Also in 2014, DH asked Professor David Croisdale-Appleby, then Chair of Skills for Care, to conduct an independent review of social work education for adult social workers. In contrast to Sir Martin Narey, Professor Croisdale-Appleby concluded that social work degrees should remain generic so that all social workers "have the capability to work with all individuals, groups and communities and to do so in all settings and institutions."<sup>44</sup>

27. The majority of evidence we received was in favour of a generic social work qualification. The Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee (JUCSWEC) told us that Professor Croisdale-Appleby's report was warmly welcomed by the sector, in comparison with Sir Martin Narey's report, which it said was considered to be based solely on anecdotal evidence.<sup>45</sup> JUCSWEC recommended qualifying courses remain generic, as social workers needed to know about the issues adults faced as these could impinge on children.<sup>46</sup>

28. Frontline and Step Up to Social Work specifically produce children and families social workers, rather than a social worker with a standard qualification. An independent evaluation of Frontline commissioned by the Government, which reported in March 2016, said that its model inherently moved away from generic social work, but that concerns over Frontline's narrow focus on child protection were not borne out.<sup>47</sup> Professor Ray Jones, on the other hand, expressed concerns that specialisation was being introduced too early, which he said undermined the ability of graduates to understand the experience of adults.<sup>48</sup> Cornwall Council said that accelerated schemes were narrowing the range of learning to the detriment of a family approach to social work.<sup>49</sup> At our private seminar, participants unanimously favoured a generic start because they considered that social work required a broad understanding of children and adults to ensure successful practice with both in family contexts.

29. Isabelle Trowler told us that the system was able to maintain a generic framework, but with increased allowances for specialist capabilities, and said that "what Sir Martin

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43 Sir Martin Narey, [Making the education of social workers consistently effective](#) (January 2014) p 39

44 David Croisdale-Appleby, [Re-visioning social work education: an independent review](#) (February 2014) p 68

45 Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee ([SWR0024](#)) para 3

46 Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee ([SWR0024](#)) para 5

47 Department for Education, [Frontline pilot: independent evaluation](#) (March 2016) p 124

48 Professor Ray Jones ([SWR0006](#)) para 12

49 Cornwall Council ([SWR0012](#)), para 12

Narey proposed is exactly what is happening.”<sup>50</sup> On this point, Mr Timpson told us that the Department supported the recommendation to have a generic start to social work degrees, and then opportunity to specialise thereafter.<sup>51</sup>

**30. 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.**

## Frontline

31. The DfE-commissioned evaluation of Frontline concluded that the “initial evidence is mostly positive.”<sup>52</sup> The evaluators praised the impressive skills of Frontline trainees and believed a strong cohort of talented practitioners would be joining the workforce. Frontline trainees scored higher overall than students on undergraduate and postgraduate courses, although all three groups were evaluated positively. The report said it was unable to determine whether this was due to Frontline’s training model itself or the programme’s “well-resourced and highly selective” recruitment campaign.<sup>53</sup>

32. Evidence we received was mixed on the merits of Frontline. The primary concern we heard was the lack of evidence supporting Frontline’s teaching model. JUCSWEC told us Frontline’s five week summer school followed by a placement of one year was “untested” and was concerned the Department was prematurely celebrating the virtues of the approach.<sup>54</sup> Research in Practice, a charity which champions evidence-based practice in children’s services, said it was crucial that Frontline was subject to robust evaluation, and said there needed to be sufficient flexibility to change the programme in line with future evaluations.<sup>55</sup> The Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS) said Frontline and Step Up were making “a valuable contribution to the continued effort to drive up the quality of newly-qualified social workers.”<sup>56</sup> Following publication of the evaluation, Brigid Featherstone, Co-President of APSW, told us in oral evidence:

I think there is an awful lot of good news in the evaluation. I welcome the fact that it appears a lot of very talented people have come into the profession that might not have done so otherwise. I think there are a lot of questions about why they have come in that are not answered by the evaluation. Was it the bursary? Was it the fast track into the civil service or was it the fantastic and very rigorous recruitment process that I think we have a lot to learn from? [ ... ] I am very, very happy about a lot of the work that Frontline are doing but there are risks.<sup>57</sup>

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50 Q163

51 Q203

52 Department for Education, [Frontline pilot: independent evaluation](#) (March 2016) p 13

53 Department for Education, [Frontline pilot: independent evaluation](#) (March 2016) p 12

54 Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee ([SWR0024](#)) para 8

55 Research in Practice ([SWR0035](#)) para 9

56 Association of Directors of Children’s Services ([SWR0030](#)) para 11

57 Q60

### *Financial parity*

33. DfE commissioned an independent evaluation of the cost to public funds of the ‘qualifying routes’ into social work in 2016.<sup>58</sup> It found that the most expensive accelerated route was Frontline, which cost approximately three times more than the undergraduate route per student. DfE told us that when net costs were compared Frontline was only 10.4% more expensive than an undergraduate course.<sup>59</sup> Net costs was defined in the evaluation as the cost to the government, minus benefits to the economy, such as students performing the duties of a social worker. However, the evaluation considered net cost comparisons “largely illustrative” and did not itself provide a comparison: the Department’s analysis was done separately. Furthermore, due to a lack of data, the net costs of traditional routes did not contain additional benefits to the economy from students undertaking part-time work in other sectors. Josh MacAlister, Chief Executive of Frontline, acknowledged the programme’s higher cost, but said “early indications of Frontline are that it is producing good value for money.”<sup>60</sup> Recognising the limitations of the Frontline evaluation, its evaluators recommended that “ideally some longitudinal research will be commissioned in future, as was recently done for Step-Up graduates.”<sup>61</sup>

34. The financial implications of Frontline and Step Up’s expansion were a recurring theme in our evidence. Academics were especially concerned at the disparity in funding between fast-track programmes, where trainees receive a bursary of around £19,000 and have their course fees paid, and university social work courses, for which some lower value bursaries are available, but numbers are capped and their future is unclear.<sup>62</sup> BASW said that in contrast to the increased investment in fast-track schemes:

current university based programmes are facing severe cuts to spending and in some cases, closure [ ... ] We need a critical examination as to how to sustain and enhance viable university contributions to social work education programmes across the degree spectrum.<sup>63</sup>

35. ***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.***

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58 Department for Education, [Comparing the costs of social work qualification routes](#) (March 2016)

59 Department for Education ([SWR0045](#)) para 9

60 Q65

61 Department for Education, [Frontline pilot: independent evaluation](#) (March 2016) p 124. The Step Up to Social Work Longitudinal Evaluation is currently assessing the programme’s effectiveness in preparing its graduates for children and families social work, and its impact on career trajectories and responsibilities. These findings will be compared with graduates from different ‘qualifying routes’ after three and five years. For further details see: Durham University, ‘[Step Up to Social Work Longitudinal Evaluation](#),’ accessed 9 June 2016

62 [PQ 31245](#), 15 March 2016

63 British Association of Social Workers ([SWR0029](#)), para 4.3

### **Collaboration with universities**

36. Frontline originally delivered its teaching programme with the University of Bedfordshire, but decided to bring the provision of training in-house as part of its plans to expand. Josh MacAlister explained this decision:

As we scale up to get to about 450 [trainees] a year, working across the country, we were either faced with looking at a continued partnership with the universities delivering the academic component and then Frontline holding the relationship with local authorities, which has done a great job to date but, at scale, would be very challenging. So we made the decision to bring the provision of training in-house, partnering with a university to accredit a Masters level degree for the programme, so still working with a university but with Frontline itself employing the practice tutors and individuals to do the teaching.<sup>64</sup>

37. In written evidence, the School for Policy Studies at the University of Bristol told us that “retaining social work education within research-intensive universities is essential” and that there was a risk that the expansion of Frontline could cause social work education to disappear from universities, which could threaten “internationally-excellent” social work research.<sup>65</sup> Brigid Featherstone said:

Research is the life blood of any profession and [Frontline’s] future intention to disentangle themselves from an ongoing relationship with the HEI could mean that their methods of work are not rooted in an organic research base.<sup>66</sup>

38. The current lack of co-operation between Frontline and universities is unhelpful. Both routes will continue to run alongside one another in the future and it is important that they share knowledge and experience. As universities are the major source of research evidence, they should be able to influence the development of Frontline to ensure the programme remains evidence-based. ***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 co-operate more closely. We ask Frontline and the Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee to write to us setting out how they propose to work together.***

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64 Q62

65 School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol ([SWR0032](#)) paras 4 & 23

66 Q60

## 4 Post-qualifying training

### Improving the skills of the workforce

39. The primary way the DfE is planning to ensure the continuing professional development of children and families social workers is through the proposed Assessment and Accreditation programme. In October 2014, following advice from the Chief Social Worker for Children and Families, DfE announced three levels of social work practice: Approved Child & Family Practitioner; Practice Supervisor; and Practice Leader. Subsequently, the Department published a statement of knowledge and skills for each social work level. These statements will form the basis of a new national assessment and accreditation system for each level, which the Government hopes will provide a career pathway for social workers, public assurance on the quality of practice and expertise, and improve the quality of leadership.<sup>67</sup> DfE awarded KPMG and Morning Lane Associates a £2million contract to design and deliver the social work accreditation standards. In written evidence, DfE said it was too early to indicate the total cost of the assessment process, as the system had not yet moved out of the proof of concept stage.<sup>68</sup> The Department told us accreditation will be only for children and families social workers, with no plans to extend it to adult social workers.<sup>69</sup>

40. The memorandum emphasised the Government’s continued support of the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE).<sup>70</sup> The Social Work Task Force recommended that initial education should “culminate in a new supported and assessed first year in employment” to increase a newly-qualified social worker’s (NQSW) specialisation, set the groundwork for career-long development, and ensure NQSWs can develop their practice skills in a supported environment with reduced caseloads.<sup>71</sup> This led to the creation of the ASYE programme. ASYE is voluntary for employers of children and families social workers, and participation has increased over time, from 1,876 in 2011–12 to 2,774 in 2014–15.<sup>72</sup> The DfE pays employers £2,000 for each NQSW they support through ASYE.

### Continuing professional development (CPD)

41. Children and families social workers are required to participate in CPD throughout their career to stay registered and be able to practice. The Health Care Professions Council (HCPC), the current social work regulator, select annually at random 2.5% of children and families social workers to be audited for CPD. Those selected submit a CPD profile, which is a snapshot of their learning about changes in practice over the previous two years. HCPC is not prescriptive about either the content of CPD activity, which can range from reading journals to attending training and conferences, or the time spent on it. The standards instead dictate that the social worker has to demonstrate how their CPD activities contribute to the quality of their practice and service delivery. We recognise that the Government’s intention to change regulator by 2020 will mean these requirements may be overhauled.<sup>73</sup> In regards to CPD quality, the Minister told us:

67 Department for Education, [Education select committee memorandum: social work reform](#) (January 2016) para 27

68 Department for Education ([SWR0045](#)) para 4

69 Department for Education ([SWR0045](#)) para 6

70 Department for Education, [Education select committee memorandum: social work reform](#) (January 2016) para 25

71 Social Work Task Force, [Building a safe, confident future](#) (November 2009) p 15

72 Department for Education, [Education select committee memorandum: social work reform](#) (January 2016) para 25

73 See paras 85–90 for further discussion of the Government plans for a new regulator.

It is for employers to decide how they want to enable [CPD] to happen [ ... ] What we are doing through teaching partnerships, through the What Works Centre and through Partners in Practice is providing a platform for CPD to be more accessible and of a higher quality. One of the last things we want is social workers, two days before they need to comply with their CPD to get their re-registrations, to go online and do a quick multiple-choice test. We want it to be meaningful.<sup>74</sup>

42. Several submissions spoke of the importance of improving the access to, and quality of, post-qualifying training or CPD for children and families social workers, and expressed concerns that the new reforms did not sufficiently prioritise this. The Safer Safeguarding Group, a group of professionals committed to making child protection activities safer, said that the memorandum “dwells too much on pre-qualification training” and expressed concern about the lack of even a paragraph devoted to post-qualification training, which they said was just as important as it is in “other professions such as medicine.”<sup>75</sup> Some of this evidence suggested the accreditation money should instead be funnelled into the creation of a national post-qualifying framework. Professor Ray Jones said such a framework should start with, but move beyond, the Assessed and Support Year and Employment (ASYE) to develop specialisation for social workers and assist in retention. Sarah Maskery, a senior practitioner of child protection social work who has been involved in workforce development, said the money planned for accreditation should be “re-invested into social work CPD to develop the skills of workers, rather than score them.”<sup>76</sup>

43. Isabelle Trowler told us on this point:

If there is a gap, there is a role for the Government to stimulate the system so that it starts to invest in that. That is what accreditation will lead to. If you set a national standard, and if you have an assessment process where people have to demonstrate that they have the knowledge and skills to do certain things, then inevitably that will trigger local employers to make sure that they develop their stance so they have the knowledge and skills, so they are accredited, and so they can do the job that they need them to do.<sup>77</sup>

44. Karen Castle, an independent social worker and assessor of newly-qualified social workers, said the accreditation scheme needed to go “hand in hand with a robust scheme for continuous professional development that has the same status as CPD for solicitors and other professional groups.”<sup>78</sup> Essex County Council suggested a national CPD programme would be required to address needs arising from the assessment and accreditation scheme.<sup>79</sup>

45. Our evidence suggests improving opportunities for access to quality CPD will assist in retaining experienced staff. William McKitterick, a former director of social services who has led national workforce development work, said he had found one of the key reasons cited for leaving in exit interviews was limited professional development.<sup>80</sup>

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74 Q127

75 The Safer Safeguarding Group ([SWR0016](#)) para 4.6

76 Sarah Maskery ([SWR0009](#)), para 7

77 Q148

78 Ms Karen Castle ([SWR0004](#)) para 3.4

79 Essex County Council ([SWR0023](#)) para 5

80 Mr William McKitterick ([SWR0018](#)) para 4.1.4. For more on retention, see paras 60–81.

46. In our private seminar, we were told that Wales had a much stronger post-qualifying offering (see Box 2). BASW told us that:

The multiple continuing professional development pathways, standards, schemes, evaluations and examinations are confusing, unhelpful and do not contribute to improving workplace standards or stability. Government and BASW need to work together to change this position. This is in sharp contrast to the arrangements and investment in CPD for social workers in Wales and Northern Ireland.<sup>81</sup>

**Box 2: Comparison of post-qualifying requirements in England and Wales**

**England**

Following the closure of the General Social Care Council (GSCC) in 2013, post-qualifying social work is no longer regulated, with the exception of the Approved Mental Health Professionals training. There is also no standard post-qualifying award structure. The Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF), previously owned by the College of Social Work, and now BASW, provides a professional development structure for social workers, and providers of post-qualifying courses can link to relevant levels in the PCF. Learning gained through university awards is positive evidence of CPD but not a specific requirement for re-registration.

**Wales**

The Continuing Professional Education and Learning (CPEL) is an approved framework for post-qualification courses and governed by rules in the Care Standards Act 2000. The framework is compulsory for all newly-qualified social workers. Programmes must meet requirements in these rules to be approved by the regulator. CPEL supports the national career pathway for social workers in Wales and defines courses for newly qualified, experienced, senior and consultant levels.

Source: British Association of Social Workers, '[Social work careers](#)', accessed 9 June 2016

47. We recognise that the Government's approach may trigger some local authorities to improve CPD, but there are wider issues relating to resourcing and quality assurance that the accreditation scheme will not resolve. We are not convinced local employers will "inevitably" expand their CPD training given the financial pressures on budgets, and there could be significant variances in quality. Isabelle Trowler agreed that one way to solve the inconsistency of approach would be to have one streamlined approach, dictated and funded by Government.<sup>82</sup> In written evidence, JUCSWEC advocated a national, unified post-qualifying framework with a professional body endorsing and approving courses to ensure quality assurance.<sup>83</sup> William McKitterick said there needed to be externally validated courses leading to higher professional awards.<sup>84</sup>

81 British Association of Social Workers ([SWR0029](#)) para 4.5

82 Q150

83 Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee ([SWR0024](#)) para 19

84 Mr William McKitterick ([SWR0018](#)) para 4.2.5



48. *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.*

49. *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.*

## Accreditation and assessment

50. It is the Secretary of State's ambition to have every children and families social worker fully assessed and accredited by 2020. The Chief Social Worker for Children and Families said in January 2016 that there would be a consultation on whether accreditation would be mandatory or not "within weeks."<sup>85</sup> When we asked her about this, she said the consultation was pending the results of the year-long pilot and that the "plan is to go to consultation as soon as possible."<sup>86</sup> There are still no details about the planned consultation.

51. Evidence to our inquiry was mixed on whether accreditation and assessment would bring benefits or not. The ADCS said, for instance, that "the introduction of three accredited statuses has the potential to improve the consistency of practice at these three levels, and perhaps across the board" and we received similar evidence that was hopeful about the positive impact of accreditation.<sup>87</sup> However, concerns were raised about the vagueness of the Government's plans. For example, Essex County Council said that "having an accredited layer to the professional practice can assist with providing a more balanced public narrative of social work" but added it had concerns about "the lack of communication with the sector around implementation, costs, resources required and expectations."<sup>88</sup> Samantha Baron, Head of Social Work at Manchester Metropolitan University and Chair of JUCSWEC, said that there was a lack of clarity about what accreditation would entail.<sup>89</sup>

52. ADCS told us that a particular area of concern for their members was the lack of detail about the implications of failure.<sup>90</sup> This included a lack of clarity on whether social workers could re-sit the test, the relationship between registration and accreditation, and the implications of repeated failure. Similarly, Research in Practice said there were questions remaining about "what failure to meet the standards would mean for an individual" and called for improved engagement and transparency.<sup>91</sup> When we asked what proportion of social workers would be expected to fail accreditation, Ms Trowler said "we do not know yet" but said social workers unable to meet the standard "will absolutely be in the minority."<sup>92</sup> When *Community Care*, a social work professional publication, asked

85 Community Care, [Trowler: 'Social workers will get say on mandatory accreditation'](#), January 25 2016

86 Q134

87 Association of Directors of Children's Services ([SWR0030](#)) para 4

88 Essex County Council ([SWR0023](#)) paras 10-13

89 Q76

90 Association of Directors of Children's Services ([SWR0030](#)) para 6

91 Research in Practice ([SWR0035](#)) para 11

92 Q136-137

Ms Trowler whether a credible fail rate was necessary to avoid it being a rubber-stamping exercise, she said the Government was “still in the process of looking at what the scores from the accreditation pilot mean.”<sup>93</sup> In oral evidence to us, she stated that social workers who fail “would absolutely need to be able to retake it” but said the consultation would help decide the limit on how many times.<sup>94</sup> Additionally, Ms Trowler made it clear that those who failed would nevertheless be able to maintain their registration and therefore presumably their ability to practice.

53. Several submissions discussed the possible negative impact of accreditation on career flexibility for children and families social workers. The NSPCC, for example, questioned how accreditation would impact the ability of social workers to work across different countries in the UK, as many of the social workers employed by the NSPCC and other organisations do.<sup>95</sup> We also heard that accreditation had too specific a focus on statutory settings. The NSPCC suggested the language in the knowledge and skills statements, which will form the basis of the assessments, was focused on statutory tasks. They concluded that the proposed framework could “potentially interrupt the flow of the workforce” as accreditation may only be accessible in statutory settings, and this could have an effect on employment prospects of social workers elsewhere.<sup>96</sup> The ADCS released a position statement on accreditation in May 2016 which suggested it could cause the link between adult and children’s social care to be broken, and added that it could cause those who were unaccredited to move into non-statutory positions.<sup>97</sup>

54. We recognise that the proposed accreditation and assessment system is in development, but there are still too many unanswered key policy questions for a programme which has the potential to destabilise an already fragile workforce. Subjecting social workers to rapid reform and possible upheaval may have severe consequences. If the Government intends to proceed with accreditation, it needs quickly to provide greater clarity on how it will operate.

***55. 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.***

## Assessed and Supported Year in Employment

56. We received several pieces of evidence suggesting the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) was an effective programme for new social workers and should be made mandatory. Cornwall Council said in written evidence that their robust, well-established ASYE programme, called ‘Foundation for Social Work’, draws the right people into the profession and reduces turnover. They favoured the supported year becoming mandatory for all newly-qualified social workers.<sup>98</sup> Members of BASW in England said

93 Community Care, [Isabelle Trowler on practice, professionalism and private influence in social work](#), June 2 2016

94 Q137–138

95 NSPCC ([SWR0037](#)) para 1.2

96 NSPCC ([SWR0037](#)) para 2.3

97 Association of Directors of Children’s Services, [ADCS Position Statement: The Assessment and Accreditation of Three New Social Work Statutes](#) (May 2016), p 3

98 Cornwall Council ([SWR0028](#)) para 17 and recommendation 10

they wanted ASYE to be “used increasingly by more employers.”<sup>99</sup> Samantha Baron, Chair of JUCSWEC, and Brigid Featherstone, Co-President of the Associations of Professors of Social Work, said in oral evidence that the supported year should be mandatory and fully funded by the Department.<sup>100</sup>

57. We heard that, before any move to make ASYE mandatory, it needed to be quality assured across the country. Nick Berbiers, Head of Young People’s Services at The Who Cares? Trust, said that, while he fully supported ASYE, he was concerned about its patchy implementation across England, including inappropriately high caseloads. He suggested these need to be addressed through a quality assurance mechanism.<sup>101</sup> The Chief Social Worker for Children and Families said that she was in favour of making ASYE mandatory.<sup>102</sup> The Minister said no decisions had been made about the mandatory status of ASYE, and said that it was “an area where we would be interested to hear the Committee’s view, having considered all the evidence [ ... ] I would want to have as much confidence as I possibly can before making a decision to say this is something that every social worker has to do.”<sup>103</sup>

***58. 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.***

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99 British Association of Social Workers ([SWR0029](#)) para 5.18

100 Q78

101 Nick Berbiers ([SWR0008](#)) para 18

102 Q155

103 Q218

## 5 Retention

59. As of September 2015, there were 28,570 children and families social workers in statutory settings, or a full-time equivalent of 26,500.<sup>104</sup> There were 5,470 FTE vacancies, or 17% of the workforce, an increase of over a quarter since 2014. There were large local variations in the vacancy rate: Yorkshire and Humber was on 7%, whereas London was 25% and Outer London 29%. These retention problems are not new: the interim report of the Social Work Task Force in 2009 found that widespread staffing shortages were compromising the quality of social work.<sup>105</sup> Shortages of experienced social workers have increased reliance on the locum social work market, with the majority of vacancies filled by agency workers.

60. In its memorandum, the Government conceded that there were retention concerns, with the average career in social work lasting less than eight years, compared to 16 for a nurse and 25 for a doctor.<sup>106</sup> The Government concluded:

The quality of the environment in which social workers operate can be a key determinant of recruitment and retention variations. That includes: the quality of supervision and wider leadership and management; opportunities for development and career progression; workloads and levels of bureaucracy; organisational culture; and how much the local system is valued by others including the public and the local press.<sup>107</sup>

The Government suggested that it would tackle these points through its overarching reform agenda, which would improve the confidence and training of social workers to cope with everyday demands, the quality of supervision, creating a clear career path, and disseminating best practice through the system. There was also a suggestion that robust intervention in failing local authorities would eliminate unattractive places to work.<sup>108</sup>

61. A recurring theme in our evidence was the lack of focus on retention in the Government's reforms, especially in comparison to recruitment. The LGA said:

Our main concern is that these proposals do little to address the significant problem of retaining experienced social workers, and attracting back those who have previously left the profession. These experienced workers cannot be replaced by NQSWs without some risks. We would urge the Government to focus as much attention on this issue as that of attracting new people into the profession.<sup>109</sup>

104 Department for Education, Children's social work workforce 2015, [SFR07/2016](#) (February 2016)

105 Social Work Task Force, [Facing up to the Task: the interim report of the Social Work Task Force](#) (July 2009), para 1.22

106 Department for Education, [Education select committee memorandum: social work reform](#) (January 2016) para 38

107 Department for Education, [Education select committee memorandum: social work reform](#) (January 2016) para 39

108 Department for Education, [Education select committee memorandum: social work reform](#) (January 2016) para 40

109 Local Government Association ([SWR0012](#)) para 2.7

## Influence of accelerated 'qualifying routes'

62. The Government's memorandum stated that Frontline and Step Up to Social Work

result in good rates of entrants entering and remaining in social work after graduation, minimising the usual attrition rates into the profession. Further studies showed that around 80% of the first two Step Up cohorts gained posts as social workers (compared with 61% of postgraduates from traditional entry routes moving into social work).<sup>110</sup>

63. We received evidence which challenged the Government's interpretation of these statistics. The University of Huddersfield told us that it was too early to make any conclusions as the first Frontline cohort only qualified in 2015.<sup>111</sup> Josh MacAlister emphasised this point in oral evidence, saying "we haven't seen anyone finish the two-year programme yet, so I recognise that time will tell on retention figures."<sup>112</sup> The independent evaluation of Frontline concluded that it was unable to judge the career durability of Frontline trainees.<sup>113</sup> It surveyed participants of the study on whether they expected to remain as a social practitioner for periods of five or more years, and periods of seven or more years. The majority across both Frontline trainees and students from traditional routes expected to remain for five or more years. 73% of students from universities thought they would remain for seven or more years, whereas only 42% of Frontline trainees did.<sup>114</sup>

**64. 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.**

## Improving working conditions

65. In our private seminar the morale of social workers was described as "extremely low". Excessive workloads were identified as one of the primary reasons for this, and evidence suggests caseloads are at dangerously high levels. Ofsted's most recent social care report from 2013–14 found that reports from various sources cited high caseloads year on year.<sup>115</sup> A survey in 2012 by BASW found that 77% of respondents thought their caseloads were at an unmanageable level.<sup>116</sup>

66. We received evidence calling on the Government to do more to reduce caseloads. Acorn Care and Education, an education and care provider for vulnerable people, said the variation in caseload levels across England was a serious problem that was not addressed

110 Department for Education, [Education select committee memorandum: social work reform](#) (January 2016) para 22

111 University of Huddersfield ([SWR0031](#)), para 14

112 Q73

113 Department for Education, [Frontline pilot: independent evaluation](#) (March 2016) p 13

114 Department for Education, [Frontline pilot: independent evaluation](#) (March 2016) p 50–51

115 Ofsted, [Ofsted social care annual report 2013/14](#) (March 2015) p 42

116 British Association of Social Workers, [The State of Social Work 2012](#) (May 2012) p 3

in the Government's reforms.<sup>117</sup> The Children's Society said it was "crucial that caseloads are regularly reviewed to ensure social workers are working on an appropriate number of cases that are varied."<sup>118</sup>

67. When we put this to the Minister, he said it was up to Ofsted when inspecting children's services to assess the impact of workload on the quality of social work.<sup>119</sup> Colin Green, a former social worker and Director of Children's Services, pointed out that Ofsted inspections make it very clear that "unless caseloads are manageable e.g. mid-teens to about 20 children per social worker, it is very difficult to meet the required practice standards."<sup>120</sup> The Chief Social Worker for Children and Families told us the solution was spreading best practice to share how local authorities with good retention rates were able to provide positive working environments for their social workers.<sup>121</sup>

68. *The Standards for employers of Social Workers in England* is a voluntary framework developed by stakeholder partners between 2009 and 2012 following a recommendation from the Social Work Task Force to establish a 'health check' of caseloads and other working conditions.<sup>122</sup> However, as the framework is not mandatory, we are concerned these 'health checks' are not taking place. A 2015 investigation by *Community Care*, a social work professional publication, found that implementation of the standards was inconsistent, and around half of councils did not set a safe caseload benchmark.<sup>123</sup> Dr Ruth Allen, Chief Executive of BASW, said:

There is little accountability for organisations in using [*The Standards for employers*] now. There is something like that framework that Government might use in conjunction with the employers and their employer bodies, LGA and so on. Maybe to resurrect that in a new form would be important.<sup>124</sup>

69. ***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.***

## Fixing the 'blame' culture

### Improving media coverage

70. The two most significant recent reports on the state of social work in England—*Building a Safe and Confident Future*, by the Social Work Task Force, and *The Munro Review of Child Protection*—both highlighted the sustained negative media images of social work, compounded by a lack of understanding about the profession.<sup>125</sup> A key tenet

117 Acorn Care and Education ([SWR0017](#)) para 15

118 The Children's Society ([SWR0033](#)) para 2.3

119 Q195

120 Mr Colin Green ([SWR0011](#)) para 10

121 Q177

122 Local Government Association, [The Standards for employers of Social Workers in England](#) (May 2014)

123 Community Care, ['Most authorities don't know whether social workers' caseloads are at an unsafe level,'](#) March 11 2015

124 Q88

125 Social Work Task Force, [Building a safe, confident future](#) (November 2009) paras 5.1-5.12; Professor Eileen Munro, [The Munro Review of Child Protection](#) (May 2011) paras 7.51-7.65

of Eileen Munro's report was the high level of 'anxiety' in the child protection system. She argued that it caused increased referrals to children's social care, and could result in the lowering of thresholds when determining whether to recommend the removal of a child from their birth family.<sup>126</sup>

71. Essex County Council told us that the media portrayed children's services in a negative light, and that this criticism had increased in recent years.<sup>127</sup> Nick Berbiers, Head of Young People's Services at The Who Cares? Trust, told us that social work had failed to transmit a positive message to the public via mass media.<sup>128</sup> At our private seminar, there was consensus that the way social workers were represented in the media contributed to poor morale and high vacancies. In the past, The College of Social Work took a lead role through its Policy and Communications Unit to promote a more balanced public view of social work. Following the closure of the College in 2015, it is unclear who will continue this work.

72. Successful social work is rarely noticed, but it is vital for improving outcomes for children and young people. What social workers can and cannot do is frequently misunderstood by the public and the media, unlike other professions such as teachers or doctors. Furthermore, the discourse about social work is too often delivered through the lens of when things go wrong, such as child deaths. ***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.*** We consider in Chapter 6 how the profession should organise itself.

### Creating a learning culture

73. The Government's memorandum stated that "sometimes social workers operate in a spirit of defensive, process-oriented compliance."<sup>129</sup> Our evidence suggested the fear of blame within children and families social work is counter-productive to the retention of social workers. We heard in our private seminar that the negative rhetoric from central Government about social workers, and the fear of being blamed for mistakes, was contributing to high stress and low morale in the workforce. The School for Policy Studies at the University of Bristol called for a "sea change in the approach to the allocation of blame and responsibility."<sup>130</sup> Cornwall Council wrote:

The statement that non-defined 'failure will not be tolerated' only adds to the high anxiety experienced by frontline social workers, which in turn leads to defensive practice. Defensive practice only serves to reduce the effectiveness of social work. It also adds a barrier to recruitment and retention, especially as many operate in fear that they will be blamed (and punished) for systemic failings or the failings of others.<sup>131</sup>

126 Professor Eileen Munro, [The Munro Review of Child Protection](#) (May 2011) para 8.25

127 Essex County Council ([SWR0023](#)) paras 1 and 7

128 Nick Berbiers ([SWR0008](#)) para 4

129 Department for Education, [Education select committee memorandum: social work reform](#) (January 2016) para 10

130 School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol ([SWR0032](#)) para 33

131 Cornwall Council ([SWR0028](#)) para 8

74. The Munro report recommended a move towards a learning culture, so that the system could adapt its practice when things went wrong.<sup>132</sup> Rt Hon. Jeremy Hunt MP, Secretary of State for Health, announced in a written statement in March 2016 the creation of a learning culture rather than a blame culture in the NHS, so that practitioners could speak out when mistakes are made.<sup>133</sup> Mr Hunt referred to the ‘safe space’ that applies to those who speak to the Air Accident Investigation Branch. This idea of a ‘just reporting culture’, in which practitioners are permitted and encouraged to talk about errors, can enable a system to better learn from incidents and near misses. The Safer Safeguarding Group told us:

We believe that developing a just reporting culture, in which people feel safe to talk openly about their mistakes, and a learning culture in which people can develop and grow, are key factors that will help children’s services departments retain valued members of staff.<sup>134</sup>

75. We are concerned that a ‘blame culture’ appears to exist within social work, which can be exacerbated by the way the media reports on social work cases. This culture is a significant reason why experienced social workers are leaving the profession. Tackling the blame culture needs to be higher on the Government’s reform priorities. ***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.***

## Workforce planning

76. Several submissions to our inquiry raised the issue of poor data and lack of workforce planning. Colin Green, a former Director of Children’s Services, told us that the statistics the DfE collected on the children and families social work workforce lacked sufficient detail.<sup>135</sup> BASW said that a workforce planning strategy looking at least ten years into the future was crucial.<sup>136</sup> Dame Moira Gibb told us:

I do think [workforce planning] is currently inadequate. It does seem to me that the problem with workforce planning is we are again focused on the entrants rather than on the retention aspects, which seem to me to be more important.<sup>137</sup>

77. Marc Seale, Chief Executive and Registrar of the Health Care Professions Council, said:

Central Government has a very important role to play. That is based on my understanding of how the system runs in health. It needs to be centrally co-ordinated but it needs absolute support from the employers, the educators, the regulator and the professional bodies to make sure they have the right data.

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132 Professor Eileen Munro, [The Munro Review of Child Protection](#) (May 2011)

133 HC Deb, 9 March 2016, [col HCWS597](#)

134 The Safer Safeguarding Group ([SWR0016](#)) para 4.10

135 Mr Colin Green ([SWR0011](#)) para 5

136 British Association of Social Workers ([SWR0029](#)) para 5.8

137 Q74



We as the regulator hold a lot of data in terms of historic information and we do a lot of forecasting for university programmes and things like that. Again, we are always happy and willing to share that information.<sup>138</sup>

***78. 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.***

## 6 Professional body, regulation and leadership

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### Social work professional body

#### *The closure of the College of Social Work*

79. The College of Social Work (TCSW) was set up in 2012 following a recommendation by the Social Work Task Force for a national college that would promote practice excellence, provide a national professional voice, and influence national and local policy.<sup>139</sup> The Government supported the creation of the College and provided £5 million of seed funding over two years for the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) to establish the TCSW, and a further £3 million to support the College in its formative stages. The College closed in 2015 after just three years of existence following financial difficulties. Mr Timpson said that membership did not get to the level required for the College to become self-sustaining and that the Government decided it did not want to put millions of pounds more “into what was effectively an insolvent body.”<sup>140</sup> Annie Hudson, former Chief Executive of TCSW, Jo Cleary, former Chair of TCSW, and Dave Hill, former Trustee of TCSW, discussed the reasons for the College’s demise in their written submission:

TCSW’s effectiveness and sustainability was arguably vulnerable from its inception because of an ongoing lack of coherence about its core functions. These functions have instead been dispersed across a range of organisations, including HCPC and BASW. TCSW faced a continued challenge in defining and shaping a clear mandate for its role and functions and this in turn made it harder to recruit members [ ... ] TCSW was not set up with the role and functions that would ensure there was a clear and compelling incentive for social workers to join their new professional college, as has been the experience of other professions’ colleges.<sup>141</sup>

#### *Replacing the College*

80. We heard there was a strong need to fill the gap created by the collapse of TCSW. Barbara Peacock, representing the Association of Directors of Children’s Services, lamented the closure of TCSW and said that it had left “a very significant gap” which she considered should be filled by a body which could provide a professional voice into Government.<sup>142</sup> Essex County Council expressed concern about the lack of professional voice following the demise of TCSW.<sup>143</sup> Professor Ray Jones said the decision by the Government not to continue supporting the College meant considerable investment had been “wasted” and “the ambition that many of us have had for 20 plus years of having a College of Social Work like the Royal Colleges has now been negated.”<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Social Work Task Force, [Building a safe, confident future](#) (November 2009) para 4.2

<sup>140</sup> Q220

<sup>141</sup> Annie Hudson ([SWR0046](#)) para 15

<sup>142</sup> Q15

<sup>143</sup> Essex County Council ([SWR0023](#)) para 3

<sup>144</sup> Q15

**Box 3: Functions and characteristics of a new professional social work body**

We believe a professional body for social work needs to be independent from Government and owned by the profession, self-sustainable, and clearly demarcated from the social work regulator to prevent blurring of functions.

A professional body for social work should have the following functions, some of which are currently dispersed across a range of organisations. It is imperative they are all in one place to ensure the sustainability and attractiveness of the body.

- (1) Be a ‘broad church’ that represents a diverse workforce of social workers in a range of settings;
- (2) Provide high profile leadership and a national voice for the profession which explains what social work is and what social workers do, to and on behalf of the profession, to the public, the media, and Government;
- (3) Make the profession an attractive choice by building a professional identity and culture;
- (4) Defining the continuing professional development and post-qualifying pathway for all social work, including development of a national framework, providing and endorsing courses, and the ownership of any future accreditation scheme;
- (5) Promote practice excellence, including links with research, and owning and safeguarding of professional standards;
- (6) Shape and influence national and local policy and practice;
- (7) Build good working relationships with the Government, the regulator, employers, and educators.

81. We heard different opinions on how a new professional body should be developed. Some of our evidence pointed to the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) as the natural replacement for TCSW. We heard that BASW already was a self-sustaining grassroots movement that represented 20,000 social workers, with the capacity to evolve into a wider role. Marc Seale, Chief Executive and Registrar of HCPC, told us that he supported BASW becoming the centre of the body of knowledge for the profession, because the solution should “not need to create any more bodies and if the Government goes and does another version it will end up with the same waste of taxpayers’ money.”<sup>145</sup> In written evidence to us, BASW set out its desire to be the College’s successor as the “only body in England currently positioned to fulfil this role” and recommended that:

The Committee should recognise BASW as the successor body to the College of Social Work, recognising it has taken on some of the most valued College functions (including the Professional Capabilities Framework, Continuing Professional Development Scheme, key written resources and the member-led ‘Faculty’ structure). Within its forward plans are the building blocks to further develop in its new role and position within the social work and social care sector.<sup>146</sup>

<sup>145</sup> Q113

<sup>146</sup> British Association of Social Workers ([SWR0044](#)) para 9 and recommendations to Committee

82. However, support for BASW as a successor body was far from universal. We received some evidence that suggested a new body, separate from BASW, should be formed. June Thoburn, Emeritus Professor of Social Work at the University of East Anglia, raised concerns over BASW's ability to balance two different functions: representing the rights of social workers in the workplace, over issues such as pay and conditions, and representing the voice of social work overall. The latter, Professor Thoburn argued, was the role of the College, whereas the former was covered currently by BASW and other trade unions.<sup>147</sup> However, BASW argued in their evidence that there are examples of professional bodies which combine "promotion of excellent practice" with "representation and advice for members" such as the Royal College of Nursing, which doubles up as a College and trade union.<sup>148</sup>

83. Annie Hudson, along with other former College of Social Work colleagues, wanted there to be a new body for social work "independent of government" and "fully committed to ensuring effective and consistently strong practice standards."<sup>149</sup> Annie Hudson told us the key lesson to learn from the closure of the College of Social Work was that its successor body must have "a clear and explicit mandate and set of functions, together with a sustainable business plan."<sup>150</sup>

84. When we asked the Minister what a new professional body might look like, Mr Timpson said:

Having tried it from the top down, my strong preference is from the bottom up, from those grassroots. We have the British Association of Social Workers. We know they have a growing membership. That could well be the best groundswell of a professional body for social work. It would be wrong of me to impose another model through Government. What we need to do is let them make that decision. I am very supportive of there being a strong professional body for social work.<sup>151</sup>

85. Our evidence was clear that there was a need for a new body. How that should be delivered matters less than securing the clear support of the sector and individual social workers, and including strong incentives for membership such as having responsibility for professional accreditation. The Government is investing considerable resources into social work reform, and has been open to supporting a social work professional body in the recent past. Therefore it has a responsibility to help establish a replacement for the College. **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.**

86. A strong professional body could help address many of the concerns we have covered so far. The new body could take the lead on a number of important functions, including greater representation of the voice of the profession at a national level, unifying social work as one profession, defining and improving professional standards, developing a post-

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147 June Thoburn ([SWR0043](#)) para 2

148 British Association of Social Workers ([SWR0044](#)) para 24

149 Annie Hudson ([SWR0046](#)) para 20

150 Annie Hudson ([SWR0046](#)) para 15

151 Q221

qualifying framework and endorsing post-qualifying courses, developing and overseeing an accreditation scheme, developing and running quality assurance for the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment, creating a national workforce planning strategy and changing media coverage by promoting public awareness of the successes of children and families social work.

**87. 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.**

### The new regulator

88. Social workers are required to register with a regulator to ensure that only qualified and competent practitioners are able to practice. The Health & Care Professions Council (HCPC) has regulated social workers in England since 2012, following the closure of the General Social Care Council (GSCC). HCPC is an independent multi-profession regulator, covering 16 health professions, including occupational therapy, radiography, and chiropody.<sup>152</sup> In its January 2016 paper, *A vision for change*, the DfE announced it would “set up a new regulatory body for social work” with “a relentless focus on raising the quality of social work, education, training and practice in both children’s and adult’s social work.”<sup>153</sup> The decision to remove the regulatory responsibility from HCPC was not based on its competence: the Minister told us the Government wanted a regulatory body “focused purely on social work” and that they would not be able to deliver the right changes “in the form of the regulatory framework that was set up within HCPC.”<sup>154</sup> Mr Timpson said the new regulatory body will have a “wider remit” than HCPC to look at post-qualification, accreditation, and potentially CPD.<sup>155</sup>

89. The Government has advanced these plans in its legislative agenda with the Children and Social Work Bill currently before Parliament, which includes provisions for setting up a new body.<sup>156</sup> Little detail of how the system will work is set out in the Bill. Indeed, in oral evidence, the Minister told us that “it is fair to say we still have work to do to establish the deeper, granular details of exactly what the regulatory body will be tasked with.”<sup>157</sup> Subsequently, during the passage of the Bill and just before consideration of this Report, the Government published a policy statement on the regulator that provided much more detail on its expected functions.<sup>158</sup> The Bill provides for powers that could be implemented via delegated legislation to the Secretary of State for Education, including setting standards for social work education and the establishment of an accreditation scheme.<sup>159</sup> The explanatory notes for the Bill state that a specialist social work regulator is a response to “reviews of social work education by Sir Martin Narey and Professor

152 Health and Care Professions Council, ‘About us,’ accessed 9 June 2016

153 Department for Education, Children’s social care reform: a vision for change, [DFE-00008–2016](#) (January 2016) p 6

154 Q225

155 Q222

156 [Children and Social Work Bill](#), Part 2, Chapter 1

157 Q223

158 Department for Education and Department of Health, [Regulating Social Workers: Policy Statement](#), June 2016

159 [Children and Social Work Bill](#), Part 2, Chapter 1

David Croisdale-Appleby.”<sup>160</sup> The Narey review, however, suggested there was a “strong case for transferring HCPC duties in relation to social work to the College” which would remove the duplication of both bodies in prescribing professional standards.<sup>161</sup> Professor Croisdale-Appleby said his preferred way forward “would be to see the basic standards of the HCPC enhanced by the standards of the endorsement given by TSCW”: in essence, a professional body setting the standards and a regulator upholding them.<sup>162</sup>

90. HCPC’s predecessor, the General Social Care Council (GSCC), a dedicated social work regulator, was closed down as part of the then Coalition Government’s aim to reduce public spending. The GSCC relied on DH grants. It was estimated that GSCC would require individual annual fees of £235 to sustain itself without these grants. HCPC was chosen to regulate social work due to the benefits of ‘economies of scale’: with over 340,000 registrants, the annual fee is a much lower £90, and HCPC is fully funded through this registration fee income.<sup>163</sup> BASW estimated that it cost £17.6 million to shut down the GSCC and £1.7 million to transfer regulation to the HCPC, and told us that its members felt another expensive change would waste time, money and resources.<sup>164</sup> Professor June Thoburn, a former vice-chair of GSCC, told us in oral evidence that she knew from her experience the changes would be very expensive, and she was not sure that this was “the best use of scarce resources at this time.”<sup>165</sup> Community Care estimated a new regulator would cost at least £15m, based on consultations with experts with experience of regulation, and a comparison of set-up costs of similar bodies in the devolved nations.<sup>166</sup> The Department told us they could not “anticipate any immediate changes to the amount social workers have to pay to be regulated,” and while they could not guarantee that fees will never increase, they would “consult on any future fee changes.”<sup>167</sup>

91. Our evidence argued that the Government plans to give the new regulatory body powers over improving education and standards was not the right move. The Professional Standards Authority told us that “improving education and standards across the board should not be confused with the primary role of regulation, which is to protect the public by ensuring the standards are being met.”<sup>168</sup> Professor June Thoburn told us it was important that any new regulatory body concentrated on public protection, and not defining social work quality, which had been one of the reasons for the establishment of The College of Social Work.<sup>169</sup> Dr Ruth Allen, Chief Executive of BASW, told us that the professional association was better placed to define professional standards and that a Government-led regulator having control over standards would create “completely unnecessary tension.”<sup>170</sup> In their June 2016 policy statement, the Government said they believed that “the most appropriate course of action at this time is for regulation to move closer to Government”

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160 [Explanatory Notes to the Children and Social Work Bill](#) [Lords] [Bill 1 (2016–17)]

161 Sir Martin Narey, [Making the education of social workers consistently effective](#) (January 2014) p.22

162 David Croisdale-Appleby, [Re-visioning social work education: an independent review](#) (February 2014) p.73

163 Health and Care Professions Council ([SWR0042](#)) para 3.3

164 British Association of Social Workers ([SWR0029](#)), para 5.11

165 Q100

166 Community Care, [‘Social work’s new regulator will cost millions. Who will foot the bill?’](#), January 27 2016

167 Department for Education ([SWR0045](#)) para 3

168 Professional Standards Authority ([SWR0036](#)) para 5.2

169 June Thoburn ([SWR0043](#)) para 5

170 Q105

and that independence would be possible only in the longer-term. It argued an effective independent body would need to be partnered with a strong professional body, which currently did not exist.<sup>171</sup>

**92. 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.**

93. The evidence we have seen suggests that due to a reduction of ‘economies of scale’, the creation of a separate social work regulator would lead to an inevitable future choice between a dramatic rise in registration fees or continued substantial investment from the Government. *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.*

## The future of Principal Social Workers

94. The Munro Review recommended each local authority designate a principal child and family social worker to advise on enhancing practice skills and take responsibility for “relating the views of social workers to those whose decisions affect their work.”<sup>172</sup> The majority of children’s services in local authorities now employ a principal social worker. More recently, the Government in July 2015 created the Practice Leader status as one of the levels of accreditation. Practice Leaders are defined as “qualified social workers with the day to day operational responsibility across the whole local system for child and family social work practice [ ... ] most usually this is referred to as the Assistant Director of Children’s Social Care or Director of Family Services.”<sup>173</sup> As ADCS point out, these two descriptions have “striking similarities.”<sup>174</sup> Both roles suggest an individual who is responsible for practice leadership.

95. The Government told us their “development of Practice Leaders build on and extend the reach of the principal social workers [Munro] recommended”, which implies Practice Leaders might be a replacement for the principal social worker role.<sup>175</sup> Participants at our private seminar did not find the two roles easy to differentiate, and told us that they were concerned the new role of Practice Leader might conflict with the role of principal social worker. Barbara Peacock said that the principal social worker at her council, Medway, did not understand the Practice Leader role.<sup>176</sup> When we put this confusion over the roles to the Chief Social Worker, she said:

171 Department for Education and Department of Health, [Regulating Social Workers: Policy Statement](#), June 2016, paras 7 and 49

172 Professor Eileen Munro, [The Munro Review of Child Protection](#) (May 2011) para 7.21

173 Department for Education, Knowledge and skills statements for practice leaders and practice supervisors, [DFE-00290-2015](#), November 2015, p. 8

174 Association of Directors of Children’s Services ([SWR0030](#)) para 8

175 Department for Education, [Education select committee memorandum: social work reform](#) (January 2016) para 34

176 Q19

The practice leader role is not a new role. The practice leader role is usually the most senior social worker in a local authority that has day-to-day responsibility for children's social care. It is often the assistant director, for example [ ... ] It is quite interesting because, in my perspective, I do not think there is any confusion about who the practice leader is.<sup>177</sup>

When pressed on the relationship between the two roles, Isabelle Trowler added:

I do not think there is a fixed one—that is what I am saying. Local authorities have recruited principal social workers and they are using that role in a wide variety of ways, so some have the title attached to another job that they are doing. Other people have the role of principal social worker and are case holding. There is not a fixed relationship [ ... ] because the principal social worker is a very new role and what we need to do is to watch and see how that develops and whether it is a good use of resource.<sup>178</sup>

96. A survey of principal social workers by The College of Social Work in 2015 found that 60% held the PSW role as an “add-on” to a senior manager, head of service or assistant director position.<sup>179</sup> The principal social worker is not a statutory requirement in children's services, and there is no guidance on what the role should look like. This is in stark contrast to principal social workers in adult social care, whose position is enshrined in statutory guidance which requires local authorities give principal social workers sufficient powers to “have the most impact and profile.”<sup>180</sup>

97. Principal social workers at our private seminar were concerned that their position might be eliminated in the new reforms, before it had sufficient time to prove itself and embed in the system. We note that the LGA's submission included a guide to social work recruitment and retention, written for local authorities, based on a series of detailed case studies. It included a core message that “the role of principal social workers as a voice for professionals in your council is increasingly important.”<sup>181</sup> Professor Ray Jones told us:

The principal social worker role as a practice leader, professional lead within children's services, is relatively recent. I think it is about two or three years old at the most. Already, we are churning that up and about to invent something else. We do need to calm ourselves down a bit and get a return on what we are changing, rather than changing it so frequently.<sup>182</sup>

98. We have already discussed the need for the Government to ensure important recommendations from the Munro Review have been embedded in the system. Principal social workers were introduced in 2011, and they have only existed in most local authorities since 2012 or 2013. **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. We recommend that the Government commission research on the role of principal social workers to establish best practice and that it**

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177 Q157

178 Q160

179 Community Care, [‘Future of the principal social work role at risk, says leading PSW,’ April 15 2015](#)

180 Department of Health, [Care and Support Statutory Guidance](#) (May 2016) para 1.28

181 Local Government Association ([SWR0012](#)) appendix 1

182 Q16



*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.*

## 7 Structural change and innovation

99. So far in this Report we have focused on the social work profession. We cannot, however, ignore the proposed changes to the wider context in which they operate. In this Chapter, we consider the Government's plans to reform the structure of children's services and stimulate innovation in the system, and discuss the concerns we have heard about this approach.

### 'Different ways of working': innovation in children's social care

100. Clause 15 of the Children and Social Work Bill is entitled *Children's social care: different ways of working*. Its stated purpose is "to enable a local authority in England to test different ways of working with a view to achieving better outcomes under children's social care legislation or achieving the same outcomes more efficiently."<sup>183</sup> This clause is driven by one of the core tenets of the Government's social work reform strategy: to stimulate the level of innovation in the children's social care system. This aim is being delivered through the Children's Social Care Innovation Programme, launched in 2014 and expanded in 2016, which is designed to encourage local authorities to try new approaches and learn from best practice. Local authorities are allocated funding for projects which "take bold new approaches."<sup>184</sup> The Government's memorandum set out plans to establish "a permanent mechanism for identifying excellence and disseminating across the system" through the creation of a 'What Works Centre' for child protection. Alongside this, the Government announced a 'Partners in Practice' system whereby the best-performing local authorities will work together to provide a "blueprint for excellence that the whole system will be able to learn from."<sup>185</sup>

101. Our evidence generally welcomed introducing more innovation into the system, but there were concerns about the long-term sustainability of some of the programmes. Marion Russell, Principal Child and Family Social Worker for Cornwall Council, expressed reservations over its longevity:

Innovations need to be sustainable. We cannot keep doing short-termism and just doing something else that works for a short period of time and then that gets binned and then something else starts. So with whatever innovations, we do need to have built-in sustainability and they need to do that systemic cultural change. They are not an add-on that happens over there, "That one did not work. We will do something else." It is innovation with sort of roots and sustainability built into it as well.<sup>186</sup>

102. Research in Practice, an independent organisation supporting evidence-based practice with children and families, were concerned the Government might move ostensibly successful programmes from trial periods to standard practice too quickly, without enough time to learn how or why they worked and without addressing possible implementation barriers.<sup>187</sup> Addressing the creation of the What Works Centre, they said:

<sup>183</sup> [Children and Social Work Bill](#), Clause 15

<sup>184</sup> Department for Education, [Children's Social Care Innovation programme](#), [DFE-00103-2016](#), April 2016, p. 11

<sup>185</sup> Department for Education, ['Delivering a revolution in children's social care.'](#) accessed 9 June 2016

<sup>186</sup> Q53

<sup>187</sup> Research in Practice ([SWR0035](#)) para 3

It is important [the What Works Centre] is able to conceptualise and implement evidence in ways that are shown to be best suited to supporting behaviour change and that reflect the complexity of child protection and social work. To that end we caution against relying on a model of trials and passive dissemination alone.<sup>188</sup>

103. The School for Policy Studies at the University of Bristol said innovation needed to be evidence-based and one way to ensure this was to locate the What Works Centre “within the culture of a research active university or group of universities.”<sup>189</sup> Discussing the What Works Centre, the Minister said “research coming from universities is going to be at the core of that through it being an academic-led centre.”<sup>190</sup> We also heard it should not be limited only to child protection. ADCS told us “the focus of the Centre should not be limited to child protection but should cover the whole spectrum of children’s services.”<sup>191</sup>

104. Isabelle Trowler told us that innovation would help to solve issues with working conditions and retention by allowing weaker authorities to learn from stronger authorities through the ‘Partners in Practice’ programme.<sup>192</sup> Research in Practice warned that “authorities who have made significant progress to improve are still vulnerable to failure.”<sup>193</sup> Durham Council was an original member of DfE’s Partners for Practice after it received an ‘outstanding’ judgement in 2012. It withdrew from the programme after its most recent inspection found its children’s services ‘required improvement’. Inspectors found a service reorganisation of its early help services had distracted attention from other teams.<sup>194</sup> The redesign has been partly due to the introduction of ‘Families First’ model, backed by more than £3 million from DfE’s Innovation Programme.

**105. 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.**

## Intervention and new structures

106. Another significant element of the Government’s innovation strategy, which ties in with its commitment to increase the robustness of governance and accountability, is the intention to bring in new ways of delivering children’s services other than through the traditional local authority model. The memorandum said the Government would work “with local authorities and others on new models for the delivery of children’s social care, through social care trusts, combined social care systems and city deals.”<sup>195</sup> The Children and Social Work Bill proposes exemptions for certain local authorities from

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188 Research in Practice ([SWR0035](#)) para 4

189 School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol ([SWR0032](#)) executive summary

190 Q214

191 Association of Directors of Children’s Services ([SWR0030](#)) para 14

192 Q177

193 Research in Practice ([SWR0035](#)) para 15

194 Ofsted, [Durham County Council: inspections of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers](#) (May 2016)

195 Department for Education, [Education select committee memorandum: social work reform](#), January 2016, para 31

the requirements of social care legislation, similar to current powers for the Secretary of State to exempt local authorities from the requirements of education legislation set out in Part 1 of the Education Act 2002.<sup>196</sup> The Prime Minister signalled this policy intent in December 2015 when he announced that poorly-performing children’s services would be taken over in a “formalised academy style system” by high-performing local authorities, child protection experts and charities, who would be brought in as sponsors or formally take over statutory services via an independent trust arrangement.<sup>197</sup> It was suggested this would happen if improvement was not seen within six months.

107. In its July 2016 policy paper *Putting children first*, DfE set out how this type of intervention would work in practice. DfE said that after an inadequate rating it would provide expert scrutiny to diagnose problems, and that progress would “be reviewed every six months”. If insufficient progress had been made after six months, or when council failure was considered to be systemic or persistent, a Commissioner would be appointed to “review whether services should be removed from council control”. DfE stated that when a Commissioner was appointed there was a “presumption that the service will be placed outside of the council’s control”.<sup>198</sup> Systemic failure was defined as being assessed inadequate across all key Ofsted judgements, whereas persistent failure was defined as two or more inadequate judgements in a 5-year period.<sup>199</sup>

108. Independent trusts currently run statutory services in Doncaster and Slough, and it was announced in May 2016 that services in Birmingham would be similarly reorganised. A recurring theme in our evidence was the lack of an evidence base to support the Government’s proposals. The LGA said that “there was currently little evidence that removing children’s services from council control and transferring responsibility to a third party organisation is an effective tool in driving improvement.”<sup>200</sup> Essex County Council said the Government’s plans would create an “inconsistent national arena for the delivery of statutory social work duties” and a local authority “provides a neutral well understood broker” for its partnership agencies.<sup>201</sup> Professor Ray Jones, when asked about authorities losing control of children’s services, told us:

We have had two councils—Doncaster and Slough—to date where that has been required. Both of them have been re-inspected by Ofsted and found not to be improved, but it does not surprise me because they spent their time reorganising, rather than finding out what was going on at their frontline and getting it back into control. My view is that even when authorities are in trouble, we know how to make it better, but at the moment we are introducing arrangements that distract us from doing that.<sup>202</sup>

109. Paul Moffat from Doncaster’s Independent Children’s Trust disagreed with Professor Ray Jones’s portrayal of Doncaster’s performance. He said that although Doncaster had been judged ‘inadequate’ in November 2015, Ofsted did find improvement, and “there

196 Explanatory Notes to the Children and Social Work Bill [Lords] [Bill 1 (2016–17)] para 21

197 “PM: We will not stand by –failing children’s services will be taken over”, Department of Education press release, 14 December 2015

198 Department for Education, *Putting children first: delivering our vision for excellent children’s social care*, [DFE-00158–2016](#) (July 2016) para 121

199 Department for Education, *Putting children first*, [DFE-00158–2016](#) (July 2016) para 121

200 Local Government Association ([SWR0012](#)) para 3.4

201 Essex County Council ([SWR0023](#)) para 1

202 Q27

was confidence in the leadership and management going forward.”<sup>203</sup> However, when asked whether the model is transferable to other areas, Paul Moffat said “I do not think it is a panacea; it is not something that can be applied in 152 authorities.”<sup>204</sup> Research in Practice in written evidence stated that:

The move to independent trusts to run children’s services in the event of poor performance does not yet have an evidence base. This is not to say that forming trusts will not prove to be effective, but that this approach should be subject to evaluation in the small number of authorities where they are in place before adopting this mode of intervention in other areas. The evidence on performance improvement indicates that it is people, not structure that drive improvement.<sup>205</sup>

110. We also heard that six months was not enough time for a local authority to turn its fortunes around. There was a unanimous view amongst witnesses in our first session that it was unrealistic.<sup>206</sup> The LGA told us:

Transforming a child protection system takes time, and evidence suggests that embedding lasting change takes considerably longer than the six-month target suggested by the Government. It is also essential that additional funding is provided for struggling areas to ensure that the necessary improvements are effective and sustainable.<sup>207</sup>

111. We asked two large charities whether they would be willing to take on statutory services, or act as a sponsor. Dr Sam Royston, Director of Research and Policy at The Children’s Society, said that “we have no plans to knock on the door around running statutory children’s services at this point in time.”<sup>208</sup> Peter Watt, National Services Director of NSPCC, said clearly “we would not want to take on the running of the services in an area.”<sup>209</sup> Although they clearly do not represent the entire voluntary sector, this suggests that finding charities to help out in the running of statutory services may prove difficult. Paul Moffat told us that there had not been a plethora of people wanting to be sponsors for the Doncaster Independent Children’s Trust.<sup>210</sup> Marion Russell of Cornwall Council said:

I would reiterate that in many authorities the structure and the people are already there. If you have a lead member who is committed to children, a director who has those skills and abilities and the other pieces are in place, then you can work towards that improvement. Restructuring, changing systems, creating more churn takes the eye off the ball and takes the focus away from what you are doing with children. Absolutely, that can be done in partnership with other colleagues who have that expertise, but it is not about separating it; it is bringing it all back together.<sup>211</sup>

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203 Q32

204 Q39

205 Research in Practice ([SWR0035](#)) para 16

206 Q27

207 Local Government Association ([SWR0012](#)) para 3.6

208 Q36

209 Q37

210 Q35

211 Q33

112. *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.*

113. *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.*

## 8 Conclusion

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114. It is clear that the Government treats social work as an important priority, but its reforms focus on changing structures potentially to the detriment of the people delivering this key public service. There needs to be more co-operation between the Government and the sector, with children and families social workers given greater input into the future structure, development and regulation of their own profession.

115. The Government needs to take urgent action in partnership with the sector and the social work profession to address issues like poor working conditions and lack of professional development. The most important way to achieve this collaboration is through the establishment, with the Government's support, of a strong professional body for social work with a clear set of functions. This body, building on the role of the College of the Social Work, but avoiding the pitfalls the College encountered, would play a major role in implementing reforms and the changes we have proposed. With the new body in place, the Government and the profession together would improve children and families social work and deliver better outcomes for children, young people and families across the country.

# Conclusions and recommendations

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## 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)

## 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)
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)

## 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)
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)
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 co-operate more closely. We ask Frontline and the Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee to write to us setting out how they propose to work together.* (Paragraph 38)



## 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)*
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)*
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)*

## 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)*
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)*

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)*
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)*
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)*

### 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)*
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)*

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)*

### 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)
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)*

## Annex 1: Private seminar on social work reform

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The following is a summary of a private meeting between representatives from the social work sector and members of the Committee, which took place on 24 February 2016. The discussion focused on the Government's social work strategy as outlined in the DfE Memorandum to the Education Committee.

### Attendees

- Samantha Baron, Chair of the Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee and Head of Social Work at Manchester Metropolitan University;
- Christine Bennett, Principal Social Worker at Sheffield City Council;
- Nick Berbers, Head of Young People's Services at The Who Cares? Trust;
- Clive Diaz, Principal Social Worker at Gloucestershire County Council;
- Brigid Featherstone, Co-Director of the Association of Professors of Social Work and Professor of Social Work at Huddersfield University;
- Lisa Harris, Principal Social Worker at Walsall Council;
- Mandy Nightingale, Chair of the Principal Children & Family Social Workers Network and Principal Social Worker for Essex County Council;
- Alison O'Sullivan, then President of the Association of Directors of Children's Services and Director of Children's and Adult's Services for Kirklees Council;
- Bridget Robb, then Chief Executive of the British Association of Social Workers;
- Jonathan Scourfield, Professor of Social Work at Cardiff University;
- Maggie Siviter, trustee of the National Association of Independent Reviewing Officers.

### Definition and ownership of social work

- **The role of the Chief Social Worker:** There were complaints the role was poorly defined and the Chief Social Worker was a civil servant who fed down departmental decisions, but could not challenge or feeds ideas up. There was also confusion over the need for two Chief Social Workers, and criticism of their lack of joined-up working.
- **Fragmentation:** The reforms were accused of splitting social work into two groups of distinct, unrelated groups of social workers: those working with children and those working with adults. The discussion concluded that this fragmentation produces social workers with narrow expertise and partial knowledge.

- **Lack of consultation:** There were concerns about a lack of dialogue with social workers. The consensus was that social workers did not ‘own’ their profession in the way that doctors or lawyers did.
- **Negative language and media representation:** The seminar was critical of the way politicians and the media describe social work in negative terms, especially on child deaths, despite evidence that England performs well internationally. There was wide consensus this contributed to poor morale and retention rates.

## Education and development of the workforce

- **Expansion of fast-track schemes:** There were worries about the creation of a two-tier system, whereby children’s social workers were fast-tracked and adult social workers came from university programmes. Other worries highlighted the disparity in funding, and the decision to expand Frontline before its independent evaluation had reported back.
- **Future sustainability of traditional courses:** Representatives of the sector at the seminar suggested the loss of bursaries could cause social work university courses to be cut.
- **Lack of professional development:** Opportunities for CPD and post-qualifying training were considered to be poor for social workers. The consensus was the Government strategy concentrated primarily at initial training and the first years of practice.
- **Morale of the workforce:** Social worker morale was described as extremely low, caused by negative rhetoric, high caseloads, excessive paperwork, and long hours.

## Leadership

- **Future of principal social workers:** Several participants were principal social workers. They were fearful the role had not been given enough time to prove its worth and would cease to exist in the new reforms.
- **Increasing strain on leaders:** The seminar discussed the increased pressure on Directors and Assistant Directors of Children’s Services, who were facing reduced administrative support and were being forced to combine the position with another department, such as adult services.

## Quality of evidence

- **Evidence behind the reforms:** The discussion concluded that the momentum behind reforms in recent years for social had been high profile child deaths, but these were declining. There were criticism of DfE for expanding Frontline ahead of the results of the independent evaluation, and the use of statistics in the memorandum.

- **Methodology of Ofsted inspections:** The attendees at the seminar saw the experience and style of Ofsted inspections as unhelpful, and wanted an inspection regime which focused on improvement over judgement.
- **Date on recruitment and retention:** Participants noted that the Government did not collect data on recruitment of social workers. There was some debate over how a social worker is defined and whether the Government definition was too narrow. Concern was expressed about experienced social workers moving out of statutory roles into other sectors where they use titles other than “social worker”.

# Formal Minutes

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## Wednesday 6 July 2016

Members present:

Neil Carmichael in the Chair

|                  |                     |
|------------------|---------------------|
| Lucy Allan       | Catherine McKinnell |
| Marion Fellows   | Ian Mearns          |
| Suella Fernandes | Stephen Timms       |
| Lucy Frazer      |                     |

Draft Report (*Social work reform*) proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 115 read and agreed to.

Annex and summary agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Third Report of the Committee to the House.

*Ordered*, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

*Ordered*, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available (Standing Order No. 134).

[Adjourned till Wednesday 13 July at 9.00 am

## Witnesses

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The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

### Wednesday 23 March 2016

*Question number*

**Ray Jones**, Professor of Social Work, Kingston University and St George's, University of London, **Barbara Peacock**, Co-Chair, South East Regional Group, Association of Directors of Children's Services, and **Councillor Roy Perry**, Chair, Children and Young People Board, Local Government Association and Leader, Hampshire County Council [Q1–30](#)

**Marion Russell**, Principal Child and Families Social Worker, Cornwall Council, **Dr Sam Royston**, Director of Research and Policy, The Children's Society, **Peter Watt**, National Services Director, NSPCC, and **Paul Moffat**, Chief Executive, Doncaster Children's Services Trust [Q31–56](#)

### Wednesday 20 April 2016

**Samantha Baron**, Chair, Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee, **Brigid Featherstone**, Co-President, Association of Professors of Social Work, **Dame Moira Gibb**, Chair, Skills for Care, and **Josh MacAlister**, Chief Executive, Frontline [Q57–83](#)

**Dr Ruth Allen**, Chief Executive, British Association of Social Workers, **Annie Hudson**, former Chief Executive, The College of Social Work, **Marc Seale**, Chief Executive and Registrar, Health and Care Professions Council, and **June Thoburn**, Emeritus Professor of Social Work, University of East Anglia [Q84–120](#)

### Wednesday 4 May 2016

**Isabelle Trowler**, Chief Social Worker for Children and Families, Department for Education [Q121–183](#)

**Edward Timpson MP**, Minister for Children and Families, Department for Education [Q184–229](#)



## Published written evidence

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The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

SWR numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Acorn Care and Education ([SWR0017](#))
- 2 Annie Hudson ([SWR0046](#))
- 3 Association for Improvements in the Maternity Services ([SWR0025](#))
- 4 Association of Directors of Children's Services ([SWR0030](#))
- 5 Association of Professors of Social Work ([SWR0013](#))
- 6 British Association of Social Workers ([SWR0029](#))
- 7 British Association of Social Workers ([SWR0044](#))
- 8 Child Welfare Inequalities Project ([SWR0015](#))
- 9 Community Care ([SWR0039](#))
- 10 Cornwall Council ([SWR0028](#))
- 11 Department for Education ([SWR0045](#))
- 12 Essex County Council ([SWR0023](#))
- 13 Frontline ([SWR0027](#))
- 14 Hackney Council ([SWR0034](#))
- 15 Health and Care Professions Council ([SWR0040](#))
- 16 Health and Care Professions Council ([SWR0042](#))
- 17 Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee ([SWR0024](#))
- 18 June Thoburn ([SWR0043](#))
- 19 Local Government Association ([SWR0012](#))
- 20 Mr Colin Green ([SWR0011](#))
- 21 Mr Matthew Tidmarsh ([SWR0001](#))
- 22 Mr William McKitterick ([SWR0018](#))
- 23 Mrs Donna Leyland ([SWR0005](#))
- 24 Ms Hilary Hubbard ([SWR0007](#))
- 25 Ms Karen Castle ([SWR0004](#))
- 26 Ms Sue West ([SWR0003](#))
- 27 Nick Berbiers ([SWR0008](#))
- 28 NSPCC ([SWR0037](#))
- 29 Professional Standards Authority ([SWR0036](#))
- 30 Professional Standards Authority ([SWR0041](#))
- 31 Professor Ray Jones ([SWR0006](#))
- 32 Research in Practice ([SWR0035](#))
- 33 SafeLives ([SWR0020](#))

- 34 Safer Safeguarding Group ([SWR0016](#))
- 35 Sarah Maskery ([SWR0009](#))
- 36 School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol ([SWR0032](#))
- 37 Service User Carer Forum - MSc Social Work - University of Bristol ([SWR0010](#))
- 38 Sir Martin Narey ([SWR0047](#))
- 39 Sue Gerrard ([SWR0021](#))
- 40 Sylvia Rose ([SWR0002](#))
- 41 The Children's Society ([SWR0033](#))
- 42 The Fostering Network ([SWR0019](#))
- 43 Triangle Consulting Social Enterprise ([SWR0014](#))
- 44 Unicef UK ([SWR0026](#))
- 45 University of Huddersfield ([SWR0031](#))

## List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

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All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

### Session 2015–16

|                            |   |                    |
|----------------------------|---|--------------------|
| First Report               | The role of Regional Schools Commissioners  | HC 401<br>(HC 975) |
| Second Report              | Holocaust Education   | HC 480<br>(HC 974) |
| Third Report               | Appointment of the Chief Regulator of Ofqual  | HC 822             |
| Fourth Report              | Mental health and well-being of looked-after children   | HC 481             |
| First Joint Special Report | Education, skills and productivity: commissioned research   | HC 565             |
| First Special Report       | Apprenticeships and traineeships for 16 to 19 year olds: Government Response to the Committee's Seventh Report of Session 2014–15 | HC 317             |
| Second Special Report      | Extremism in schools: the Trojan Horse affair: Ofsted Response to the Committee's Seventh Report of Session 2014–15               | HC 324             |
| Fourth Special Report      | Holocaust Education: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report of Session 2015–16                                      | HC 974             |
| Fifth Special Report       | The role of Regional Schools Commissioners: Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2015–16                | HC 975             |

### Session 2016–17

|               |   |        |
|---------------|---|--------|
| First Report  | Careers education, information, advice and guidance                                       | HC 205 |
| Second Report | Appointment of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills | HC 170 |