

headline report

Sector Skills Agreement:

the big deal

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Sector Skills Agreement: the big deal

The Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) aims to improve the lives of children, young people, their families and carers in England by ensuring that those working with them have the best possible training, qualifications, support and advice. It helps children and young people's organisations and services to work together so that the child is at the centre of all services.

High quality services depend upon a well-trained and well-supported workforce. CWDC's Sector Skills Agreement (SSA) will be the plan of action to make this a reality, identifying the range and level of skills needed to make a world-class workforce.

CWDC's SSA is called '**the big deal**' and it will be key to the future development of the children and young people's workforce, specifically for those working in children and young people's social care, early years childcare and the advisory and education support services. Where there are issues in common, CWDC works closely with Skills for Care, who is responsible for the strategic development of the adult social care workforce in England.

The context of the SSA

Over the last decade there has been an increasing recognition that 21st century living demands services that reflect the varied needs of our complex and interdependent society. The changing expectations of children, young people, families and carers, the improved quality of life, demographic trends and changing economic circumstances have all contributed to the need for a 'modern' workforce which is highly skilled, well trained, flexible and well supported.

This workforce has experienced a number of wide-ranging changes in recent years alongside significant amounts of government investment. It is supporting and developing individuals in their personal, family and community contexts, and promoting the positive outcomes set out in "Every Child Matters"; Change for Children – be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic well-being.

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The SSA has five stages of development:

1. Identify what skills are needed now and in the future.
2. Assess current provision of training.
3. Identify where the gaps are and what can be done to fill them.
4. Explore the potential for collaboration between employers and training providers.
5. Develop the plan of action.

Key principles

The SSA will identify the skills that will be needed in the future across the private, maintained and voluntary, community and faith sectors, for employers, the self-employed, employees, volunteers and others in this workforce.

The SSA will be:

- driven by the voice of the employer and the self-employed.
- based on sound evidence.
- comprehensive, defining short and medium term priorities.
- focused on a positive, inspiring and creative vision.

The development of the SSA will be guided by recent thinking which envisions a world-class children's workforce as one which:

- strives to work as effectively as possible for all children and young people.
- is reliable, competent, confident and safe.
- offers individuals a satisfying and rewarding career.
- is trusted by parents, carers, children and young people.

Objectives

The SSA is about action, not words. It will be designed ultimately to benefit children, young people, their families and carers. The SSA is intended to increase awareness of training and skills needs among employers and employees, encouraging greater investment and transparency in the system of training and qualifications. By incorporating analysis of future skills demand, the SSA will draw attention to the breadth of learning needs across the workforce. This will seek to address problems of recruitment and retention and encourage a workforce that is more representative of the society it works with.

The SSA aims to encourage:

- **a highly skilled and professional** workforce which is accessible, effective and accountable.
- **leadership and management** which promotes excellence in the workforce.
- a workforce which is **flexible and integrated** in its working practices, putting the needs of children, young people and families at the centre of how services are delivered.
- **continuing professional development** which enables workers, the self-employed and volunteers to develop additional skills.
- **a demand-led system of skill development** that connects the skills that are needed with the ones that individuals learn.
- **a simplified system of qualifications and funding.**

Current characteristics of the workforce

The workforce CWDC is engaged with is made up of over 520,000 employees and self-employed people plus an estimated 250,000 volunteers. These individuals work in a wide range of roles which, in the main, fall into three areas:

Occupational sub-sectors	Proportion of workforce
Children and Family Social Care	15%
Early Years and Childcare	70%
Advisory and Education Support	5%
Other occupational groups	10%

A full outline of the roles covered by the work of CWDC can be found on CWDC's website www.cwdcouncil.org.uk under 'What We Do', whilst detailed information about the roles themselves can be found on the research pages under 'Recruitment Retention and Reward'.

Children's workers are employed by a range of organisations including those in the independent and private sector, local authorities and other public service organisations and voluntary organisations. There are also a large number of individuals who are self-employed.

The workforce is predominantly female, although at management level there is a higher proportion of men. People with disabilities are poorly represented (approximately 1% compared with 10% across the working population). The proportion of the workforce coming from black and minority ethnic backgrounds ranges from 5% in early years to 12% in some social care occupational groups, whereas the total percentage of those from black and minority ethnic groups in work is 8%.

CWDC's earlier work on recruitment, retention and rewards suggests that qualifications are the principal barriers to moving between jobs in the children's workforce, as well as into the workforce from elsewhere. Career progression appears to be easier for those with higher-level qualifications, and those working in larger organisations.

What skills are needed?

Skills needed by managers, workers, the self-employed and volunteers vary considerably across different parts of the workforce and these will be discussed in detail in the SSA. However, there are a number of key generic skills required by the whole workforce. In addition, children, young people, their families and carers have a range of ideas about what skills they want those who work with them to have.

Generic skills required:

- literacy and numeracy.
- communication and interpersonal skills.
- information and communication technology (ICT).

In addition, the workforce needs skills to:

- ensure the safety of children and young people.
- raise aspirations and encourage children and young people to fulfil their potential.
- help individuals to work in multi-disciplinary teams which make connections between different agencies.
- prepare staff for work with children, young people and families.

Those in management roles need additional generic skills including:

- leadership and management.
- commissioning and negotiation.

Many of these skills are embedded in the Common Core of Skills and Knowledge for the Children's Workforce, which was developed by government in consultation with the sector. In future, the statements within the Common Core will form part of qualifications for working with children young people and families. Further detail on the Common Core can be found on CWDC's website.

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Provision of training and development

There are currently a large number of public, private and voluntary sector organisations providing skill development to the children's workforce across England. At the moment, there is a complex range of qualifications on offer, while the nature and sources of funding that are available are also unclear. This leads to confusion both within the sector and amongst training providers.

There is also a comprehensive range of training programmes across the country, however within this provision, there are regional gaps to be addressed. Many programmes lead to qualifications ranging from 'Skills for Life' to degree and postgraduate awards, although there are discrepancies in relation to which are nationally recognised and which are not. In addition, there is a wide range of training provision, often through 'short courses,' which does not lead to recognised qualifications but which addresses specific skill needs.

The SSA and the forthcoming Sector Learning Strategy (SLS), including the Integrated Qualifications Framework (IQF) will help employers and individuals work within a demand-led system. CWDC will work with partners to reduce the number of qualifications to those that are key to the sector and will pursue the simplification of funding arrangements for these qualifications. This will help those in the children's workforce to develop the skills and attributes they need to support their businesses and the services they offer, and achieve qualifications which endorse these skills and attributes.

Next steps

The challenges and ambitions for the workforce, set out above, will be explored in further detail through the different stages of the SSA. A comprehensive skills needs report as well as an assessment of the supply of training will be published in April 2007.

A formal consultation with employers and members of the workforce in May and June 2007 will begin to identify a number of solutions to the issues identified in these reports, which will then go on to form the basis of a shared action plan. The action plan will be published in July 2007.

Further information can be found on our website www.cwdcouncil.org.uk or you can email us on SSA@cwdcouncil.org.uk

CWDC's vision is to build a world-class workforce for children, young people and families.

CWDC exists to improve the lives of children, young people, their families and carers by ensuring that all people working with them have the best possible training, qualifications, support and advice. It also helps children and young people's organisations and services to work together better so that the child is at the centre of all services.

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For more information please call:

0113 244 6311

Or visit www.cwdcouncil.org.uk

Or write to CWDC, 3rd Floor, Friends Provident House, 13-14 South Parade, Leeds, LS1 5QS or email info@cwdcouncil.org.uk

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