



House of Commons  
Children, Schools and Families  
Committee

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# Training of Children and Families Social Workers

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**Seventh Report of Session 2008–09**

***Volume II***

*Oral and written evidence*

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## **The Children, Schools and Families Committee**

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

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Mr Douglas Carswell MP (*Conservative, Harwich*)  
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Mr Edward Timpson MP (*Conservative, Crewe & Nantwich*)  
Derek Twigg MP (*Labour, Halton*)  
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The following member was also a member of the committee during the inquiry.

Mr John Heppell MP (*Labour, Nottingham East*)

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# Oral evidence

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## Taken before the Children, Schools and Families Committee on Monday 18 May 2009

Members present:

Mr Barry Sheerman (Chairman)

Annette Brooke  
Mr John Heppell  
Mr Andrew Pelling

Mr Graham Stuart  
Derek Twigg

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### Memorandum submitted by Moira Gibb, Chair of the Social Work Task Force

As Chair of the Social Work Task Force I welcome the Inquiry set up by the Children, Schools and Families Select Committee into the Training of Children and Families Social Workers.

The role of the Task Force is to advise the Government on the content of a comprehensive programme of reform for the whole social work profession across children and adults services with the objective of developing and supporting a high quality and self confident profession which meets public expectations. An essential element of this work is to understand how best to prepare social workers to undertake the demanding and complex role they have in society and we view improvements to education and training at both initial and post-qualifying level as one of the essential building blocks to the holistic reform of social work.

As such, social work education and training has been one of the themes which has been central to our early discussions with a range of stakeholders and in our own Task Force meetings. We have been gathering and will continue to gather evidence from a variety of sources. We have established a key partners' forum composed of representatives from 50 delivery bodies, employer organisations in the statutory and PVI sector, HEI providers of social work education and training, unions, and other professional bodies. We have held seven out of 11 planned regional events hearing the views of over 1,000 front line social workers and other stakeholders; we have undertaken visits to local authorities, where we have talked to social work practitioners, managers, supervisors, practice assessors, people who use services, staff from HEIs, directors, lead members and other professions who work with social workers in both children's and adult services. I have also welcomed the opportunity to meet with key social work academics and researchers to explore with them what may need to change to improve the quality and effectiveness of social work education and training.

I am pleased to attach a copy of my letter sent to the Secretaries of State for Children, Schools and Families and Health on 5 May which outlines the initial advice of the Task Force to Government about the issues which currently present barriers to consistently high quality social work practice.<sup>1</sup> The letter sets out our emerging view of the challenges we will need to address and opens our Call for Evidence. It describes how we will work over the next few months, including actions we will take to ensure that we are hearing the views of front line practitioners, service users and members of the public as our recommendations develop. We are due to make our full recommendations in October. However, it is already clear to us that reform for the social work profession must be driven by a range of stakeholders as well as the Government. Employers, Local Government, educational institutions, inspectorates and regulators, other professions, members of the public, service users and carers, and social workers themselves all have important roles to play.

Our letter has played back some of the messages we are hearing. These fall into six key themes as follows:

- Theme one: We have been told that social workers feel they do not have enough time to devote directly to the people they want to help. They feel overstretched by staff shortages and tied up in bureaucracy.
- Theme two: We have been told that social workers feel very frustrated by some of the tools and support they are given to do their jobs.
- Theme three: We have been told that new social workers are often not properly prepared for the demands of the job. There are also limited opportunities and support for post-qualifying education and the current post qualifying framework does not effectively support ongoing development and specialisation.
- Theme four: We have been told that social workers do not feel that their profession speaks with a strong national voice or is well supported at national level.

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<sup>1</sup> Not printed.

- Theme five: We have been told that systems for managing the performance of social workers are not driving quality first and foremost.
- Theme six: We have been told that social workers feel that their profession is under-valued, poorly understood and under continuous media attack. This is making it hard for them to do their jobs and hard to attract people into the profession.

We are pleased that the Government has welcomed our early advice and recommendations.

We have more people to listen to and much more evidence to collect and analyse, including from our Call for Evidence launched on 6 May. However, from our work to date we have begun to understand some of the difficult issues to be addressed, in responding to the concerns about social work education. These include the need for clarity about what roles and tasks we are preparing social work graduates to undertake; the reality that the delivery of social work education and training currently depends on a partnership between employers and HEIs which is not working as well as it should, and that reforms need to be part of a whole system approach to supporting social work education and continuing professional development so that all social workers are able to develop and reflect on their specialist skills and practice throughout their careers.

As you will see the Task Force letter summarises the early messages we are hearing about social work education and training and our responses to Lord Laming's recommendations about social work education.

There is an increasingly forceful message that some newly qualified social workers are working in situations so difficult that no initial training programme could prepare them for, and that we would not expect other professionals to take on such complex work after only three years of training. This is why it is so important to ensure that the frameworks to support social work practitioners to develop through post qualifying learning and practice development are in place and effective.

In presenting these messages it is important to recognise the potential destabilising impact on current and potential social work students and ensure that they are supported to complete their training and move into the workforce appropriately.

Our work to date has also led me to conclude that an important next step will be to bring together social work educators and employers so that we can begin to establish a shared understanding of, and solutions to, the demands and challenges to which the social work education system needs to be able to respond.

The Committee may be interested in more detail about the messages which we are hearing from all our sources which highlight some of the key areas to be addressed about social work education as follows:

- Entry standards and selection.

We have heard from employers and practitioners that entrance criteria and selection processes for applicants to social work initial training should be reviewed. Although 25% of students achieve their social work qualification through master level programmes, the DCSF 2020 Workforce Strategy identified that academic entry standards to undergraduate programmes are lower than for other relevant professions. We have consistently heard from a range of stakeholders that students need to have both the intellectual capacity to develop into analytical and reflective practitioners and the interpersonal skills, personal qualities and resilience to manage the complex relationships and systems of their current role. Selection processes should reflect these important criteria and include an individual interview and the involvement of employers.

- Curriculum

The content and delivery of the academic and practice curriculum may need to be reviewed to ensure that it meets the changing roles of social work and new policy agendas, such as personalisation. This may include specifying in more detail key areas of knowledge and skills which some employers and students have said are not consistently delivered by initial training. Examples of this might include strengthening input and experience child development, communication and report writing skills.

- Specialisation

We are hearing different messages about when specialism should be introduced into initial training, but a majority view from Task Force members, academics and students that we must be cautious about early specialisation which may prevent social workers from gaining the full range of skills they need to work with adults, children and families. The Government's commitment to funding the NQSW year and postgraduate qualifications for social workers mean that there is scope for specialisation to happen later than in the second year of the initial social work degree. The Task Force intends to consider, carefully, the case for specialisation at different stages, to inform its recommendations about the shape of a reformed approach to social work education.

- Practice placements

There are particular and almost universal concerns about the availability and quality of practice placements which are essential to developing a competent and confident practitioner. Not enough NQSW have a good statutory placement before they begin high intensity frontline work. Many people have told us that students on placements should be supervised and assessed by

appropriately trained and experienced social work practitioners. Mechanisms should be in place to support employers in providing placements at a time when they are already dealing with capacity issues.

— Social Work academics.

We have been told by social work academics that the shortage of high quality social workers is mirrored by a difficulty in recruiting high quality social work academics and this needs to be addressed. There are also concerns from employers and students that those who become academics can lose touch with practice and should have opportunities to regularly refresh their own knowledge and skills in practice.

— Post-qualifying education and training.

We are hearing that there is support from many stakeholders for the Government initiatives to support NQSW and ongoing professional development. There are concerns about the extent to which post-qualifying training is supported by employers and by funding arrangements which need to be further explored. The Task Force welcomes Lord Laming's recommendation that children and families social work should become a postgraduate level profession. We also welcome Ministers' commitment to developing and funding a masters level qualification.

This should form a key part of the reform approach to social work education. It will be important that it is available to those working with adults as well as those working with children and families.

I am confident that your Inquiry will make an important contribution to developing a comprehensive understanding of the problems and possible solutions for improving social work education and training. Its work will assist the Task Force in proposing changes to develop a consistently high standard of education and training in order to prepare social workers more appropriately for practice in the future.

The Task Force will be pleased to support the work of the Committee in any way and await your recommendations with interest.

May 2009

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*Witnesses:* **Moira Gibb**, Chief Executive of Camden Council and Chair of Social Work Task Force, **Bob Reitemeier**, Chief Executive of The Children's Society and Deputy Chair of Social Work Task Force, and **Andrew Webb**, Corporate Director for Children and Young People, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council and Deputy Chair of Social Work Task Force, gave evidence.

**Q1 Chairman:** I welcome Andrew Webb, Moira Gibb and Bob Reitemeier to our proceedings. The investigation of training of social workers is something that this Committee takes very seriously. Indeed, we have just come back from speaking about some of those issues on an overseas visit. The strength of that is that we know a little bit more than we did and can compare it with some international practice. The bad news is that we might not be quite on the ball today, so we will see. We always give our witnesses a chance to say something to get us started, but they can opt to go straight into questioning. It is really up to you. Andrew, what is your wish?

**Andrew Webb:** I am happy to go straight into questioning.

**Chairman:** Moira?

**Moira Gibb:** It is probably worth saying that there is a deal of confusion about the Social Work Task Force. Certainly when we meet people out there and talk to journalists or others, there is an assumption that it is only focused on social workers who work with children and families. Obviously, the context of the Baby Peter case makes that almost inevitable, but we are very firmly looking at the social work profession across the piece. There is, of course, more concern around children and families, but that is part of our remit and we try to stress that.

**Q2 Chairman:** Moira, could you stretch the definition and tell us what you know your remit to be? How broad is it?

**Moira Gibb:** We have been tasked with setting out a programme of reform for the social work profession. My short version of it is creating a self-confident and effective profession, but there is recognition that there will be a number of aspects to that. One part of it, and what you are interested in, is around the training and education of social workers. Again, our concerns are wider than that, but it is a programme of reform. Our first report was particularly focused on a number of things that are within your area. We were asked to comment on Lord Laming's recommendations, which were focused on social work and social workers. We were also asked to comment on the ICS—integrated children's system—which was a particular concern to practitioners and which seemed to be hindering them in delivering quality social work. We were asked to report urgently on that. In our report, which came in the form of a letter to the two Secretaries of State, we also highlighted six themes that were, in a sense, playing back to those who talked to us about the concerns that exist. One of those is about preparation for the job; lots of the people we have talked to are very concerned about how good that preparation is. But we would want to say that it is rather more complicated. I am sure that you have found that in your work: you think you see the answer, but then you open it up and it leads on to other things. We have recognised and talked in the report about the need for better collaboration



between employers, who have different expectations from what the higher education institutes are preparing people to do, so that what newly qualified social workers should be able to do appears to be unclear, which is very unhelpful. We certainly see a need for those two sets of people getting together and being much more explicit about the newly qualified social worker—the training they should have received and the skills they should be able to demonstrate.

**Chairman:** Bob, I hope you do not mind that we slip to first names as it eases the conversation.

**Bob Reitemeier:** Just to add two quick points to what Moira said. One is that, in terms of a barometer of success for the task force, we are clearly tasked to look at the front line and to make sure that, whatever recommendations come out of the task force, the intention is that it will help to improve work and the situation on the front line. Secondly, there is acknowledgement that the status of the profession itself, with the public and in society at large, is also something that everyone wants to improve. Therefore recommendations that the task force can come up with, which address the public image and public understanding of social workers, are part of the remit.

**Q3 Chairman:** Thanks for that. Obviously, our focus is the children and families part of the remit, which covers an awfully large part of the social work sector. What is the social work area? The term social worker, for all sorts of reasons, good or bad, seems to have got a bad name. We were in the United States, talking to the New York commissioner. They talk about case workers there, but I looked at all their advertising—posters and so on—and social work and social workers were not mentioned. There are people in Essex who want to introduce social pedagogues, presumably to replace the title “social workers”. Is the social work/social worker brand so damaged that we need to rebrand it with a new name and a new focus?

**Moira Gibb:** We have not, as a task force, spent any time on that. Certainly, the comment has been made to us that the brand is now damaged. The issue of social pedagogues is different from what most people are generally thinking about when they talk about social work. The risk that anyone runs—this is my personal view; my colleagues may have different views and we have not talked about this—is that we would be accused of rebranding without having changed the core. We are focusing on what creates this effective and self-confident profession. Actually, if social workers were better able and enabled to explain what they do, there would not be such continuous and only negative coverage of them. A report could be made to Government, who would make the decisions, but they would face the criticism of having merely been superficial and rebranding without having changed the core. We want to keep focused on that core capacity and ability.

**Andrew Webb:** One of the discussions we have running through the task force’s work is about what is unique about social work and what is the unique contribution of social workers—they are slightly

separate things. The feedback we have been getting from stakeholders, employers, academic institutions, social workers and their managers is very clear: social workers carry out an essential role in society. Many of them operate to the very highest standards. They are well trained, well educated and highly skilled, and usually well managed. I am a director of children’s services in a metropolitan authority, so I am aware of the level of work and skill that goes into promoting the independence of families who require additional support and help—stepping in where families are no longer able to provide the sort of support and protection that a child needs and, occasionally, stepping in to protect children. Social work brings to the preventive and protective agenda a unique set of skills. I do not think that it would be in anybody’s interest to rebrand or even to move back from where the task force wanted to be, which is to create a much more professionalised profession. Our analysis of the recent history leads us to agree that one of the problems that we have had in recent years is that there has not been a central point of ownership for social work as a profession, whether across the children’s work force or with adults. Without that sense of ownership and leadership and the definition of social work as a profession, it is easier to pull apart and knock things when there is poor practice, as there has been—there is no doubt about that. There has not been a central point of defence of the core, which is very successful. I was involved in a multi-way discussion with some west coast American teachers of social work recently—we had a video link. It is clear that, internationally, social work, whichever label you give it, has set standards that are achieved by our best social workers; but our standards of educational attainment and practice are not yet transportable internationally. An area to look at is the standing of social work internationally and applying the best standard in the world to what we want in this country. Social work’s contribution to protecting the vulnerable is enormous and I would not want to see it changed. Social pedagogy is a different discipline and involves a way of looking at the needs of a child in the round. In Essex, they are bringing it into work in children’s homes. The needs of a child in residential care are quite specific and particular and are very different from the needs across the whole population of children and families at risk, and the same set of skills would not do for protective work in a local authority setting in the way that we use them at the moment.

**Q4 Chairman:** Who are the guilty men and women, if there is a lack of leadership in this area? What people and what organisational leadership have been guilty of not providing the requisite leadership? Who has got it wrong?

**Andrew Webb:** It is not a question of who has got it wrong; it is a question of there being too many cooks. The General Social Care Council, the Children’s Workforce Development Council and others all have a part. The bodies set up by Government to variously regulate, commission and so on all have a part in social work education,

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**18 May 2009 Moira Gibb, Bob Reitemeier and Andrew Webb**

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deployment and so on, but there is no single point of reference—as there would be in a medical discipline or psychology—to say, “This is the core of social work and the consequence of adopting that core would be this for that work force and this for this work force.”

**Q5 Chairman:** So you would like it to be much more hierarchical, like the British Medical Association?

**Andrew Webb:** I am not necessarily advocating a hierarchy like the BMA, no. I am talking about something professionally owned—owned by the profession as much as by any Government body. In that sense, it is like the medical model.

**Q6 Chairman:** May I ask all three of you this? It is a weak profession in a sense, is it not? I am referring to something that is not articulated in our briefing. Tell us about the pay of social workers.

**Moira Gibb:** There are probably others who are better informed about pay, because it varies considerably.

**Q7 Chairman:** You must know roughly how much social workers get paid, though.

**Moira Gibb:** Obviously, they compare themselves with teachers in particular, and they see that teachers have made considerable progress in their pay and in the wider conditions that surround them. From the people we have talked to, it is an issue, but it is an issue that also points to status and recognition. It is a continuing theme, but it is probably true to say that the conditions that surround them, the expectations of them and wider public disapproval cause them considerable angst as well.

**Q8 Chairman:** Usually if you have a tough job—everybody knows social workers have a really tough job—you get paid to compensate for it being really tough. Come on, Bob. How much does a newly qualified social worker earn?

**Bob Reitemeier:** Roughly, you are looking at the £20,000 range; £20,000 and a bit more is the range, but again, as Andrew was saying, you have so many different employers that it can change by geography.

**Q9 Chairman:** But someone must go round the universities saying, “If you’re a social worker, when you’re qualified, you earn about this much.” Surely that is the case.

**Bob Reitemeier:** You start in the £20,000 range and you work your way up.

**Q10 Chairman:** Does the £20,000 range mean £20,000, or does it mean £28,000?

**Moira Gibb:** In London it would mean more than £20,000, yes, but the issue is about how difficult it is to stay in practice and earn more, so in children’s services we often have the least experienced social workers and the worst paid doing some of the most difficult jobs.

**Chairman:** And the least trained.

**Moira Gibb:** There is not a mechanism for them continuing in front-line practice, or there are not enough mechanisms for them continuing in front-line practice and getting recognition, through pay, of their additional skills and experience.

**Q11 Chairman:** We heard this in America and it really was worth going to find it out. Someone said, “If you’re a teacher, you can carry on teaching. You get increments. You can increase your salary and do what you’re good at. You don’t have to go into administration, become a principal or go into management to have decent pay.” That is not true in social work, is it? Andrew?

**Andrew Webb:** It is true in some authorities. An awful lot of social workers are employed by the voluntary sector, effectively on contracts to local authorities, so it is publicly funded social work. There are examples where advanced practitioner status has been worked out. A lot of authorities have senior practitioners. You extend the top of what is traditionally a local government pay range from £22,000 to £28,000 up into the low £30,000s, so as a senior practitioner, you might earn the same or just slightly less than the manager. It is a relatively short set of pay scales. On your point about the worst trained, the task force is looking at the education of social workers throughout their careers, not just when qualifying.

**Chairman:** We will come to continuing professional development later.

**Bob Reitemeier:** From the evidence we have gathered from talking to thousands of social workers, the issues with pay are not just about career progression, increments and management positions, but about the responsibility that goes with the job. That is where the differences between the professions are being brought to light. For example, social workers sometimes have the responsibility literally to take a child away from the family. That is a big responsibility to carry as a professional. Other professionals do not carry the same responsibility. Social workers say that role should be recognised.

**Q12 Chairman:** Absolutely. The other side of that is that a child not identified as being in danger can lose their life in the most horrible circumstances. It does not take an advanced realm of human resources and management to understand that certain things make a profession attractive and retentive. What is the retention rate for social workers? On average, how long do they stay in the job?

**Moira Gibb:** About 12% probably.

**Q13 Chairman:** Is that 12% nationally?

**Moira Gibb:** Yes.

**Bob Reitemeier:** Yes. That is the turnover rate.

**Q14 Chairman:** It was a hell of a lot higher than that in Haringey, wasn’t it?

**Moira Gibb:** There were certainly a large number of agency staff working on the front line, I understand.

**Q15 Chairman:** I understood it was 48%.

**Andrew Webb:** It was about half.

**Bob Reitemeier:** People often look at three things: the vacancy rate, which shows how many jobs are not being filled; the number of agency staff who are filling jobs on a temporary basis because recruitment has not been successful; and the average turnover across the sector or within a particular area. We are referring to the turnover rate, which is almost 12%.

**Chairman:** In some authorities it is much higher. As a rule of thumb, that is usually in the toughest places. I've said too much, but I've warmed you up. I will hand you over to Derek.

**Q16 Derek Twigg:** Good afternoon. Does the fact that the Government have already announced a number of initiatives in response to the Laming report cause you a problem or inhibit you any way?

**Moira Gibb:** Obviously, we had a tight time scale for our first report. Responding to the Laming recommendations that affected social work meant that we had more to do in that short period, but we recognise that it was important. The Government have assembled a task force of people who are still in the business, or are related closely to the business, so their recommendations are practical and are based on the reality now.

**Q17 Derek Twigg:** But you have been asked to go away and do a report, and the Government are announcing initiatives while you are doing that. How does that work?

**Moira Gibb:** We understand the context of the Haringey situation—that Lord Laming is reporting and that the Government need to respond. That does not create a particular problem for us, but there is some confusion out there about which things are coming from where. There has been a lot of activity in a short period. The recommendations about newly qualified social workers, for example, are wholly to be welcomed. We have to work within those realities.

**Q18 Derek Twigg:** Do you think that has been clarified now, or is it still confusing to some people?

**Moira Gibb:** We still have a job to do in explaining what our task force is about and in communicating that to practitioners. We think we have done exceedingly well in talking to lots of social workers, as Bob said. We announced recently that we are setting up a front-line practitioner reference group with 16 people from across adults' and children's services. Within a few days of that being announced in *Community Care*, 116 social workers had volunteered. There has also been a massive response in a short space of time to the call for evidence that we issued with our first report. We are communicating with many people. We still have a considerable job to do with understanding among the public.

**Q19 Derek Twigg:** In your earlier remarks, you made the point that it was not just about children's social services, but about adult social services. What pressures have you had from the adult side of social services?

**Moira Gibb:** We have tried to make our work look across the piece at everything we do. Obviously, Laming was different, and ICS was different because that affected front-line practitioners in relation to children's services only. We have had more work to do to ensure that social workers in other settings, such as people with learning disability or mental health issues, are working with those people's interests in mind and understand their concerns. They feel caught up in some of the public concern, but I think that it has affected them less than social workers in children's services. Social workers are trained to work in very different settings, and we try to take that into account. I am talking about those employed not just by local authorities, but by different employers. Even that is a challenge, though. If anyone who is not closely involved wants to talk to us, they start from the child care issues.

**Q20 Derek Twigg:** Is there a clear understanding on the adult social services side that they can talk to you, that they are being looked at seriously, and are not being outweighed by the children's side?

**Andrew Webb:** It is clear that the opportunity is available but it is not being taken up quite as readily. We have had a series of regional events—10 now, I think—and the attendance of social workers from the adult side has been about a quarter of the total. The attendance of social workers overall has been just short of 50%. Managers and others account for the rest. Quite a few adult social workers and their managers are aware that the task force exists; they know what it is doing, and are engaging in the debate—but not as many.

**Moira Gibb:** But we recognise that there is more to do to ensure that, for example, emergency duty team social workers are involved. One of our members is making an effort to get together a group of such social workers who work across the boundary between adults' and children's services. I am meeting mental health practitioners who want to talk to us. We are trying to go out to meet other groups, and not simply rely on them coming to us.

**Bob Reitemeier:** Let me build on that. There are two perceptions that we are trying to work through, so that everyone has a clear understanding of what the task force is. One is that it is not just for children and young people, but that it is for adults, too. To complicate matters, it is not as simple as children and adult services, because as Moira was explaining, there are others who are concerned that the task force looks at the wide range of settings where social work takes place. For example, we have the criminal justice setting, the mental health setting, which has just been mentioned, and the broader health setting. So a matrix of activity takes place and we are tasked to take a fundamental review of all of it.

**Q21 Chairman:** Including care of the elderly?

**Bob Reitemeier:** Yes, absolutely.

**Andrew Webb:** Just coming back to the Laming report recommendations, we are clear that we have had to make some short-term recommendations, but mostly our job is to ensure that we make the right recommendations in October when our final report

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comes out. Between Lord Laming's report coming out and our final recommendations, we will have looked at a lot of evidence, so it is entirely probable that we will have moved further than some of his recommendations in our view of the long-term future. In the meantime, there are issues of recruitment and retention that are real now, and the Government had to respond to the pressures in the system right now and pick up some of the short-term recommendations straight away. That did not feel like a constraint, but rather a complementary piece of work.

**Q22 Chairman:** What Derek was trying to get out of you was whether this report was going to be unrestricted. If you want to be radical, you can be, because lot of us think that Laming did not go nearly far enough and that there was a strand of conservatism in his suggestions that might interfere with a fully fledged assessment of the social care work force.

**Andrew Webb:** From my point of view, Lord Laming looked at the whole system. We are just looking at the social work part of it. The resources that have been put into first finding out what the problem is and then analysing it feel appropriate to the task. It does not feel like a constrained exercise.

**Q23 Derek Twigg:** In terms of social work training, where does the problem lie? Is it more with the time social workers spend in training itself or with the early part of their employment? Where does the balance lie? Recently, I met a group of front-line social workers in my local authority. They said that the practical experience element was the key thing; and some of them were not getting much of it compared with what they thought they should have had.

**Moira Gibb:** We have held a number of discussions, but the task force does not have a view—we are working on this at the moment. The best courses probably get the balance right, but there is probably a problem just about everywhere, in terms of access to placements, and the training and skills development on those placements. How we ensure that good-quality experiences on the job are available to social workers will undoubtedly figure in our report. However, we must not forget about the quality of the education, because, actually, social work is not just a practical job; it is also a real thinking job. The opportunity of the academic part gives them not only a knowledge base, but the analytical skills that they need to do their job well. Social workers trained elsewhere—you will have had this experience—feel that they have had very good experience in developing their analytical, thinking and writing skills, which is one of the areas on which many concerns have been expressed to us directly. However, it is important that it is recognised as a partnership. A great deal of the education and training happens in the education institution, but a great deal also happens on the ground. There is evidence that, with the expansion of the degree

course, there has not been a commensurate expansion of good enough placements for social workers.

**Q24 Derek Twigg:** Do you have any comments on the analytical and thinking abilities—the ability to think through—and the intellectual quality of students on the courses? I would be quite interested to hear what you think.

**Moira Gibb:** One of the pieces of evidence put to the task force from Government officials in our first meeting was about the A-level point scores for those entering degree training in teaching, nursing and social work. Their evidence suggested that social work had fallen behind the other two. I think that would be unfortunate. Very significantly, the best universities do not have any problem recruiting the best applicants, but there may have been a suggestion that somehow academic ability is not important. I think that it is very important, alongside the ability to engage with people and work positively with individuals. You need both academic and emotional intelligence.

**Q25 Derek Twigg:** The age range of those entering training was a key area that we discussed when I met the social workers. Do you think that the age mix matters? Should it be different? Do you have any views? Are there too many young students coming in? Are there enough mature students coming in?

**Moira Gibb:** Strong views have been expressed to us, but as soon as you get a strong view from one direction, somebody tells you about the most brilliant social worker who entered training at 18. It is not typical for them to come in very young. Again, I think that it is about universities applying stringent tests on the maturity and experience of a student, rather than on their chronological age. Obviously, that was thought about when the degree was developed.

**Bob Reitemeier:** It is an interesting question, because at one level the modern work force are changing rapidly; people are changing careers much more rapidly and frequently than in previous generations. That is a fact of the modern work force to which we all have to adjust. With partnerships between the employers and the education trainers, it really comes down to what our aspirations are for social work as a profession. If we want to compare social work to medicine or law, all of a sudden that relationship between academics and employers becomes a lifelong relationship. It is not about the three or four years at university, but about how we can expect a social worker to maintain a state of the art understanding of social work theory all the way through their career, just as we would expect a doctor or a lawyer to do. I think that our aspirations need to be adjusted for that to be the case.

**Q26 Annette Brooke:** I have two questions that are slightly off the immediate agenda, but related nevertheless. I think that what you are doing should have been started in 2002 or 2003. It would have been better to have done that first—I have rather preset ideas about this. However, you are writing a

report in the context of the reorganisation within local authorities, and I am concerned that we get the basics right. In quickly reading through your interim report, I do not see it being applied to where we are now, with Every Child Matters and the multi-agency work. You said that other people are dealing with that, but I presume that social workers will now have to be trained to work in this multidisciplinary way. Can you tell us in what ways you are addressing that, and how you are getting social workers up to scratch and ready for the brave new world?

**Andrew Webb:** Moving on from Bob's last point, the academic core of social work applies across all age groups. There is no doubt about that. People need to have in their heads a knowledge base, a legislative base and a history of social administration, as well as the psychology of human growth and development. All the academic knowledge required has a large core element. We have not yet formed our conclusions, but we have been talking about the extent to which at some point people move away from the core set of skills that are common to all social workers and social work, and specialise in multidisciplinary working. This is not instead of multidisciplinary working with older people, it is slightly different from that. There are parallels in practice between social workers in the mental health setting who work with adults with psychiatric illness, and those who work with children on protection from harm and so on. We have not yet heard anything to suggest that we should move away from a single approach to social work, and then look at how best to apply it in the post-Children Act 2004 world. Once we get into issues of practice, the question is about whether that should be during the degree or whether the degree should be decoupled from the practice qualification. Academic knowledge is easily acquired by a bright 21-year-old, but perhaps the practice skills are not. We need to ask whether a person is sufficiently on top of their subject matter and has all the necessary relationships and communication skills to work independently in a multi-agency setting. Those for me are a post-qualifying set of questions that need to be picked up in the context of working alongside specific agencies rather than generally with other agencies. However, the starting point is the same.

**Moira Gibb:** Some practitioners say that they recognise the additional challenges of multi-agency working, whatever the client group, but that the better trained and more self-confident they are, the easier it is for them to work. They struggle when they feel that nobody understands their role or when they do not understand their role, and that is where we get into difficulties. That is why it is even more important that we train people well to understand their own contribution and the responsibilities of working in more complex environments.

**Andrew Webb:** The challenges of Every Child Matters apply equally to teachers, head teachers, psychologists and so on. The challenges are about working differently with co-professionals, as they do in social work.

**Q27 Annette Brooke:** Just to follow up on that, at the end of the day we want social workers to contact the police when they should be contacted. The police

often say that that is not the case at the moment. So you are suggesting that that recognition will come in during the placements. Secondly, on adult services, we now have a structure that separates adult social services and integrated children's services. We often look at a whole-family situation, and my concern is that we probably need adults' and children's social workers to come together. Some authorities have put adult social services all back in together again. I am sorry that I am going on about the structures, but you are training people to work in these new structures, and things have to link up one way or the other once you have got the initial degree right. Will you comment on that? Furthermore, many adults are now being identified with Asperger's, and there is a shortage of help from social services and mental health services in the community. How will we address those problems? They are probably tomorrow's problems, but they are definitely out there now.

**Chairman:** May I ask you to be very brief on this, because we have only a tight hour for this session and a tight hour for the next one, owing to circumstances in the Chamber.

**Moira Gibb:** If I may, I will start with the structure. It is important that we recognise that structures have changed and that the structures that existed when I was trained as a social worker have changed and may change again in the future. But our work is focused on a long-term reform programme that will help social workers to survive and to be able to adjust to the structures of whatever agency they work for and the statutory arrangements that the Government of the day put in place. Again, a core of understanding, clarity and confidence about their role helps social workers in their work. My expectation as a chief executive in a local authority is that my adult services talk to my children's services, and there are lots of areas of overlap and concern. On the whole, we do that well; sometimes we get it wrong. Again, there is the issue of multi-agency working. What we did not want to do was to pull up the drawbridge once those services had separated. At one of our events, a colleague talked about how important it is to use those resources. Social workers working with parents often need expert advice on mental health, and they have that on tap. We should be setting up permeable boundaries between our organisations in the interests of children and their families.

**Andrew Webb:** As a former director of social services, may I just say that the gap between adults' and children's services was not always small? The reforms of the early '90s, such as the Children Act 1989 and the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, led departments—even though they were single departments—to separate out their functions quite a lot. The structures did not solve the problems.

**Bob Reitemeier:** The second part of your comment was about today's problems maybe being much larger tomorrow if nothing is done, and you used Asperger's as an example. We are in a recession now, so it may be easier to introduce this sort of thinking, but it is not a new piece of thinking. It is cost-benefit

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analysis; it is about looking at whether you pay now or pay later and at some of the social issues that we are confronted with. Sometimes, you come to blocks when you try to present the cost-benefit analysis, because people are worried about today's budget—the current situation—and they cannot really afford to look at the long term in their long term. Of course, we would all say that that is the wrong way around. Part not necessarily of the Social Work Task Force's job, but of society's and the Government's job is to make sure that we look at the long term. Investment now will pay back over the years.

**Chairman:** Right, we are going to move on. John, you are going to take us to section 2 on the task force's work on social workers' training.

**Q28 Mr Heppell:** In the letter that you sent to the Committee, you mentioned the curriculum. You make the point that courses at present do not necessarily reflect current policy agendas and that key areas of knowledge and skills might be missing. What are we talking about? What is missing from courses at present?

**Moira Gibb:** As I said earlier, at the moment there is not enough alignment and understanding between employers and higher education institutions, or agreement on what social workers should be able to do when they are newly qualified. Expectations of newly qualified social workers sometimes seem to be more appropriate for social workers with five or six years' experience. That is because of the pressures and capacity issues that we talked about in children's services. There is clearly more variability in the social work training world in this country than in some other countries, and we think it would be helpful to have greater clarity and consistency about what people would learn on a particular course.

**Q29 Mr Heppell:** I am not sure that I understand. Are you saying that things may be missing in some courses? Are you talking about consistency?

**Moira Gibb:** Yes. There is general concern on some courses about academic ability and therefore written, presentational and communication skills, but that varies from course to course. That is part of the dilemma. The best courses cover those areas, and stay in touch with practice and understanding. There is pressure on universities in that there is less time for them to go back into practice and to keep in touch with practice. There are fewer good relationships—they occur in some parts of the country, but not everywhere—between academic institutions and employers, particularly local government. We certainly want more interest and two-way exchanges. For example, joint appointments have been routinely raised with us as an opportunity to ensure that they are not in parallel but different worlds. The fundamental issue is what people are being trained to do. The universities would say that it is important that they are training them to be social workers, not simply processors of referrals, which happened in the least effective authorities.

**Q30 Mr Heppell:** I think that that is what is meant by case workers in America. What surprised us more than anything was that the people who were referred to as case workers did all the work face to face, and it seems that when social workers qualified they immediately moved out of the field to do something else. That seemed very strange. I am not sure where the graph in our brief came from, but it is a little frightening that when people were asked whether their social work course prepared them for their current role, less than 2% said that it fully prepared them, 30% said that it prepared them quite a lot, but 52% said just enough, and 12% said not at all. That is worrying. Why does the task force seem minded to be more cautious about the idea that instead of generic training there should be earlier specialisation? For example, our brief refers to the possibility of people doing their training—on-the-job work and academic training—and becoming qualified without having done any child protection work, but immediately being given a large child protection case load. There must be something wrong with such a system.

**Moira Gibb:** Yes, I think that that is about access to placements. There has been considerable expansion in the need for placements, and people are getting placements that are not in the statutory sector but then going into the statutory sector unprepared. We were thinking in terms of Lord Laming's recommendation. Now that there is a more clearly recognised newly qualified social worker year, there are four years in which people can develop their experience, knowledge and skills. To specialise in only one client group after one year out of four would be too soon, and we think, as Andrew said earlier, lots of skills, experience and knowledge across the piece, whether working in a family setting or an adult setting, are required. We want to encourage and ensure that social workers have good practice-based opportunities to learn. We see that as slightly different from specialisation at the university, if you see what I mean.

**Mr Heppell:** Does anybody disagree with anything that Moira said?

**Moira Gibb:** Of course not.

**Q31 Mr Heppell:** Is there a case for specific training for children's social workers? It seems that you train people for the lot when somebody has already decided "I want to work with children; that is what I want my job to be" before they actually start the training, and yet they go through training for adult services, mental health and so on, and you think to yourself, "Isn't that a bit of a waste when there might be somebody who wants to specialise in the first place?"

**Andrew Webb:** Based on the evidence we have picked up—certainly the personal views I had going into this, some of which I have articulated already—to operate effectively, as in the role of a children and families' social worker, you need to understand children in the context of their family, their family in society and so on. You need a good knowledge of human growth and development and the other disciplines; you need a passing knowledge of

disciplines in medicine so that you know what is normal and what is not. That is the sort of background that you need, and a lot of that is child specific. In our view, that is the level of sophistication that you should get after you have got a basic grounding in all the other stuff. Moira talked about moving from three to four years, but we have not finished collecting evidence or analysing it yet. I would be very surprised if we were going to go against the Secretary of State's recent suggestion about moving to a master's level qualification. Our discussions take us to the view that you need to spend a lot of time both understanding what you are dealing with and then practising before you get your licence to go out and do it. And that is on top of, not instead of, some common areas.

**Q32 Chairman:** But you've got all these academics that we meet who would like this to go on and on and on. You used to be able to train someone in two years for a diploma. Add three years and then people are calling for a master's. You could go on for ever. Are these university courses intensive? Or are they like Oxford and Cambridge—two eight-week terms and a three-week term? Or is it just 30 weeks? Why can't it be done intensively? This is not a good use of taxpayers' money. Why isn't it all crammed into two years intensively? Come on. It doesn't seem to me that you are taking a very radical view on this. The conventional wisdom is "Make it longer". This is the only area that I know where you are going back to time-served apprenticeships—the longer the better. Forget the standards, forget the exams—time-served apprenticeships. What's it got to do with time? Why can't we have social workers who train in two years intensively?

**Andrew Webb:** The issue here is that the first basic level is degree level—bachelor's level. If you want to talk about radically changing the way we go about awarding bachelor level qualifications, that is a different set of questions. We are saying that the standard of underpinning knowledge should be at that level, and beyond that you have to go to get practice. It does not need to be about times. A competence assessment is required. In answer to your question "Should it go on for ever?", what is emerging is a qualified yes. Not education per se, but continuous professional development should be a much more central part of a social worker's life than it is at the moment.

**Chairman:** We would not disagree with that. That is a different matter.

**Andrew Webb:** We are seeing it as a single journey with maybe a couple of cut-off points.

**Chairman:** I am sorry, John, I cut across you.

**Q33 Mr Heppell:** I thought I was playing devil's advocate, until the Chairman came in. May I just ask one further thing? I was going to say the same thing as the Chairman. It seems we have moved from two years to three years. In terms of any structural changes for the future we seem to be saying, "We've got to do without it still. If we want to do more than that in terms of specialisation, we need to add it on the end." Have enough new options been thought

out, with us saying, "Hold on. Maybe there's a way to develop some of the training you would have at the end of the experience as part of the course"? I am an ex-apprentice. One of the things that changed dramatically part-way through my apprenticeship was that you used to go to college on block release or day release, but they changed it and tried to match the two things, so that you were actually doing the practical stuff and the not particularly academic technical stuff—in my case—at the same time as you went through, rather than having them split into stages. Is there not a possibility of doing that with this process and having the course built with the idea that people can get more of the experience on the coal face, so to speak, as part of the course?

**Moira Gibb:** But that is how it works at the moment: 200 days are spent on placement, although we don't have good enough placements in sufficient quantities to ensure it. They are spending quite a lot of time doing it, but the ones who are dissatisfied probably feel that they have not had the placements in the statutory setting that they then go to work in. We had evidence to support the idea that those who had had a statutory placement were much more satisfied than those who had to take placements in other settings. We are concerned, too, that you don't have to have a trained social worker as your practice teacher and supervisor throughout your placement. So, again, in respect of your apprenticeship model we would want to see people learning from someone who is doing the job. But it certainly is not a matter of a wholly academic activity over there and then some experience on the job over here. Those things are inextricably linked.

**Bob Reitemeier:** It is also really important, in this discussion, to keep in mind the other problem that we are trying to look at, which is that, as the Chairman mentioned earlier in one of the previous questions, you have high turnover, loads of vacancies, a large percentage of agency staff working in settings and people leaving the practice all time. So it is not just an academic question in isolation: it is about trying to address the education and partnership of employers in a situation where something clearly needs to shift in order for social workers to remain in their posts and make a career of it. Part of that context is to do with the significant pressure that social workers feel. They feel that in their jobs, where they are making life-changing decisions for children and families, they are taking on a role far too soon. In other words, the toughest cases are coming to some newly qualified social workers far too soon in their careers. You would not accept that in any other industry. Part of our work is not just to look at these aspects of social work in isolation, but to make sense of the total picture. There is something clearly wrong that needs to be fixed.

**Q34 Mr Stuart:** Are you excited about the opportunities? We are relatively new to this Committee, which is rather bigger than the previous Education Committee. There are horrific cases and we get more information that tells us about children. We spent a year on looked-after children, an area

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related to social work. An awful lot of children, who are our responsibility, are being let down. A nuts-and-bolts reappraisal of the whole social work profession should be a tremendously exciting opportunity and you ought to have high aspirations—just as we want for our teachers and social workers—to change it. Do you have high aspirations? Will your work force create the political climate in which whoever is in government will have to start taking this issue more seriously and which will lead to the graduated career for social workers and the focus, from our point of view, on making children's social work an area in which people stay, without all this churn, and with experienced, talented, clever people going in and dealing with the most difficult cases? Because that does not happen at the moment.

**Chairman:** I think he is asking if you are up to the job, Moira.

**Moira Gibb:** Well, others will have to be the judge of that. But I was excited to be asked, because it's a fantastic opportunity that won't come around very often. Therefore we must work hard to ensure that our recommendations deliver what you just described. I was proud to be a social worker. I share the concern of many colleagues about the current public understanding of social work and what it achieves, which is inaccurate, because of course the highlight is always on the failures. Social work needs to step up to the plate, as do the Government, employers and the higher education institutions. We have a very lively and interested task force that is certainly engaged on this and in touch with lots of other people, so this a spreading discussion—a virus, if you like—around the place. We certainly hope that that will contribute to creating a better climate for high-performing social workers and social work

**Q35 Mr Stuart:** Bob, are you going to change the world?

**Bob Reitemeier:** We are going to change the world. We have very high aspirations.

**Q36 Mr Stuart:** Good. Before I move on from training, if I may, Chairman, I did a survey, following evidence that we have from earlier sessions, of universities that provide social work training, to find out about placements. Basically, they said that the local authorities, for which two of you work, do not provide the placements necessary, and they end up—somebody said—sending them off to what can be inappropriate placements with agencies. Are you going to get that sorted out?

**Andrew Webb:** It is certainly in our sights. The issue has come up regularly. Why the profession does not make space in its daily delivery to bring on the next generation is a question that we are looking at—any good profession should do that. Is it to do with the constraints of the workplace and the funding, and constraints of the way the work is being done? It all links to other bits of the task force activity, to look at how social workers spend their time. If they are spending their time doing X, they cannot be teaching and bringing on the next generation. It is part of the package that we are looking at. The paragraph in

Moira's letter, referred to earlier, about the partnership between employers and academic institutions is sharply in our view. There is a third element apart from teaching and practice, which is research. They all need to be looked at in partnership between employers and academics, to ensure that the profession continues to grow and be more effective in improving outcomes.

**Q37 Mr Stuart:** Just going narrowly back to getting the placements, what will you do to make sure that we stop this? According to the people who have responded to my survey, there is just no incentive for local authorities. More than three quarters of the universities I surveyed say that there are not enough places. You will have to do something to change the culture and the rewards. Basically, there is nothing for the authorities, nothing for the professional social workers—they are not given the time off, and already have crippling case loads. There is no other professional boost in place. To add to that, for local authorities, the Government have apparently changed the key statistics and measures—they no longer have to report on them. Is this not a pretty straightforward thing for you to make absolutely clear recommendations to the Government on and to get fixed?

**Moira Gibb:** We will make recommendations around placements. We understand that the changes that have been made have not helped to deliver the quality and quantity of placements that are needed. We may be making recommendations about quantity, as we make recommendations for quality as well. It certainly is important that it is taken much more seriously, particularly by local government—they have to be in the business of training the future generation if they want to be able to do this kind of work. But I think social workers themselves also need to step up. At the moment, it is not seen as core to the business to be able to teach and bring on the next generation. But, fundamentally, there is an issue about capacity overall, particularly in the children's field. We don't want simply to give a recommendation that we don't think people can understand and work through delivering.

**Mr Stuart:** On a positive front, I asked them to tell me about any local authorities that they thought offered particularly good placement learning opportunities, and Camden was one of them.

**Chairman:** Any more questions?

**Q38 Mr Stuart:** I will ask one more question on this subject. I want to ask about the practice teacher award. It has been said that the current five-day award is totally unsatisfactory. Would you comment on that and explain what you might be doing about it?

**Moira Gibb:** Changes have been made to practice teacher training, and different views have been expressed to us. It certainly does not appear to us that it is satisfactory at the moment. We made a particular point of bringing a practice teacher on to the task force so that we can focus on those issues. It is essential that social workers are training the next generation and that that is not separate and



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different. The previous training was very considerable and quite a commitment for social workers to make, so getting the balance right is important.

**Chairman:** I am sorry that the session has been short. Our time has been truncated for very special reasons, as you know. May we remain in touch with you, because we want to make it a good report? There are disturbing things. It is time for a change in this world. We have already heard evidence that a third of university departments are not up to scratch, probably a third of local authorities are not up to scratch, and the social work profession needs a

change. I don't know what those changes are until the wonderful report from you—and from us—comes along. We would like you to remain in touch about the things that we should have asked you about today or answers that you should have given us. We would be happy to share information with you.

**Moira Gibb:** We would be happy to do that. Thank you very much.

**Chairman:** I warned you, Bob, when we were at the conference in Cambridge that I would get you in front of the Committee. I have delivered on one promise.

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### Memorandum submitted by the British Association of Social Workers

The British Association of Social Workers is the professional body for social workers in the UK. We represent social workers across the workforce. We are a member of the International Federation of Social Workers.

#### SUMMARY

1. Government, employers and universities need to work together to address the needs of mature students and re-entry programmes.
2. We want a two stage process for education of social workers.
  - Stage 1 is a generic degree with a final statutory placement in a quality assured setting. This should be linked to specific university based teaching.
  - Community based practice learning has made a significant contribution to student learning on social work programmes, but we would like reconsideration as to whether there are better ways of evaluating these learning experiences outside the current assessment framework. This could result in fewer assessed practice learning days being appropriate in the degree programme.
  - The graduate route to this level of qualification should stop being called a Masters Degree as this confuses the Continuing Professional Development routes.
  - Stage 2 is the Newly Qualified Social Work programmes which should be for all social workers. We would like to see these only in the same places as the final year statutory placements as this creates the close link between universities and employers for quality assured learning environments.
  - We would like to see employers expecting to interview students for their final placements with the intention of keeping them for the two years. This will help to address the “shortage” of statutory placements.
3. University social work programmes should have 50% of their lecturing staff as registered social workers, whose workload should include a minimum of two weeks a year in a partner agency to update themselves on front line practice in their area of teaching.
4. Consideration should be given to a national benchmark for A level entry to the profession.
5. The key agenda for all involved in social work education now has to be to drive up the consistency of the quality of teaching and learning in universities and in agencies. This should be part of a “contract” or “service level agreement” between universities and agencies to replace the current ideas of partnership.
6. We would like further consideration on the number of social workers which are needed. We want to find a way whereby the popular content of social work programmes can be available to large numbers of students, while not putting inappropriate burdens on agencies across the adult and childrens services to provide placements for people who will not be going on to work as social workers. We believe that the statutory placement and NQSW requirement for registration can be the lever to control entry to the profession, while leaving universities freer to develop parallel opportunities for non-professional routes.
7. We would like to see a major programme of increasing the skills of all existing staff that do not have the new degree in social work. This can be linked to a qualification or specifically written standards. This will address the lack of take up over many years of continuing professional development programmes and could lead into any proposed new Masters Degree programmes.

8. We would like to see the development of a range of Masters Degree programmes for social workers, and that those who achieve the degrees then become eligible to be appointed as advanced practitioners or front line managers. We strongly hold to the view that front line social work managers need to be expert practitioners and maintain their practice expertise.

9. Local authorities and other organisations which provide a social work service need to employ registered social workers in their top management structures and maintain a clear dialogue with their front line social work staff.

10. Each organisation should identify one of these senior social workers as the lead social worker to be responsible for working with the universities and other education providers concerning social work education issues and CPD for all social workers.

To respond to the specific issues identified by the Select Committee in more detail:

### 1. *Entry routes to the profession*

1.1 Social work has traditionally attracted mature students. These were primarily existing staff in social care who wanted to get the professional qualification, people wanting a career change, and women who had raised their families and wanted to become social workers. While local authorities have been funded to provide schemes to support entrants to social work and there are bursaries for people on social work degrees, we know that many of the above groups still find it difficult to fund themselves on a degree programme and there has been a drop off in local authority secondments.

We get regular contact from people wanting to re-enter the profession, particularly after career breaks undertaking caring responsibilities. The only nationally available programme has been recently established by the Open University. This is a gap in the market.

### 2. *Structure of training*

The format we want to see is:

#### 2.1 Stage 1

Route 1: Honours bachelor's degree for initial education for those for whom this is their first degree.

Route 2: For graduates in other disciplines—a 24 month intensive initial programme leading to a graduate diploma. Our experience is that it is unhelpful to call these awards “Masters degrees” as this confuses Continuing Professional Development for these students and for employers. This is done in other professions (eg law).

In routes 1 and 2 there should be a “statutory” final placement in a quality assured location, with associated specific teaching and practice educator support.

#### 2.2 Stage 2

We strongly believe that all new social workers must complete a Newly Qualified Social Worker Programme in specified “statutory” work locations that are quality assured and meet specified standards. These work locations should be the same as the final placement locations for the degree—and we would encourage employers and students to normally expect that the student/employee should stay in the same place over these two years.

This change would radically alter the relationship between employers and education institutions:

Employers would have to be approved that they met the standards to provide a “statutory” work environment.

Employers would want to select their students as potential and then actual employees. This would replace the “placement finding” industry which has developed for these final placements and would help to spread demand and opportunities round the country as students would be more willing to move if they know they are to stay for two years.

### 3. *Content of initial training*

3.1 Our members are totally committed to the principal of a generic first degree for all social workers. This is because our children and families workers say that they rely heavily on their learning about family functioning, mental health and substance misuse knowledge. Increasingly they are also drawing on knowledge of older people as issues like kinship care and the role of grandparents in caring for children is developed. All our members believe strongly in the prime focus being on the individual, family and community functioning of all with whom we work. This is true for social workers in children's services, adult services, mental health services, youth justice services—and the myriad of other services where social workers now make an important contribution to the workforce.

3.2 Thus we believe that there does need to be a generic core of knowledge to the degree. This could be in the form of a “foundation” or as a “spine” of knowledge across the whole the degree.

3.3 The importance of placements with service users and in wider community settings is significant to ensure that social workers understand community and group dynamics and to ensure that they can communicate with people across society, regardless of age and other barriers to communication, outside of a hierarchical and/or statutory relationship. However, the systems which sometimes have to be created to make sure they are assessed to meet the national occupational standards for the degree have had to be creative, and we would like exploration as to whether they have to be assessed in this way. We could see a value in them being not formally assessed, but just reported on and not counted within the formal placement days for the degree. We know that the funding has been important in the development of these learning opportunities for students, but we would like consideration of reducing the number days in these placements, and that the assessment regime is radically altered. For students straight from school they are invaluable as an entry into the workplace. For those supported by their employer they can be an opportunity to experience a new way of working with a different group of service users and carers. For everyone it can be an opportunity to reconnect with people within a local community and understand the range of formal and informal support networks which exist for people in that community. This is invaluable learning and must be preserved—but the current assessment regime is often manipulated to make the learning experience fit into the NOS. This is unhelpful when students then move to their final placements or work, and have to re-learn what level of work is expected in those settings.

3.4 However, we do accept that there need to be changes to the current arrangements for the final year of initial degrees. We strongly believe that all students must have a final, quality assured “statutory” placement where they learn to exercise key statutory duties under good supervision by a registered social worker who is competent in that area of practice. This can then be supported from the university with good teaching of the law and practice specific to that work environment, and encourage reflective learning by students from their peers, practice educators and university staff.

3.5 This is because we recognise that the use of the legal framework, alongside their knowledge of sociology and psychology, within families and local communities is a key component of the contribution of social workers into the multi-professional work environments—so we want all social workers to be clearly grounded, confident and competent in these areas of work.

3.6 Creating the link between the final placement and the NQSW programme is a key lever to ensure that employers and universities work closely to ensure that the curriculum in the university and on placement is working well together.

#### 4. *Quality*

4.1 Like many regulators the GSCC was encouraged to develop a “light touch” regulatory approach at the point where universities were also experiencing a lighter touch approach from the Quality Assurance Agency. This has left many programmes quite isolated within their institutions and subject to the whims of university and employer demands. More now needs to be done.

4.2 Many social work departments are quite small within their university. The GSCC has a system to approve university institutions, but they have not refused approval to anyone who has asked to run a social work programme. This needs to be revisited, to look at the impact of a new programme in an area as well as the institutional support for the specific demands for social work programmes—for instance over employer and service user engagement—and the expectations for research on university staff.

4.3 We believe that the language of “partnership” between universities and employers now needs to be replaced by the more common language of “contracts” or “service level agreements”. This should focus specifically around the statutory placements and NQSW requirements. It should include the responsibility on employers and universities to enable a nationally determined percentage of the lecturers on a social work degree programme (we suggest 50%) to be qualified and registered social workers, and to have as part of their university workload identified time within a contracted partner agency to help them to stay up to date with their teaching content and social work practice. We suggest a minimum of two weeks a year for this.

4.4 We want the current requirements about service user engagement with the degrees to continue as we know this has given enormous added value to the students and many service users. However, it is expensive in time and money and universities must not penalise social work programmes on this basis.

4.5 Entry to social work degree programmes has been at the discretion of each HEI. The history of attracting mature and career change entrants with non-traditional qualifications has been seen as a major strength of social work programmes, which developed in response to the demand from employers to take people from the social care workforce who were under-qualified and yet who employers wanted to train as social workers. The introduction of the degree and the entry of school leavers required the setting of entry grades as A level, a new experience for many programmes. The grades are now out of kilter with other professional programmes and so it is right that consideration be given to whether a national benchmark should be established.

4.6 When the degree was established it ran alongside the demise of the Diploma in Social Work. Thus the resources for the diploma had to be maintained for those students, and were released as the diploma students finished. There is a view that this, with the entry of school leavers for the first time, led to the first year of the degree becoming a “pre—diploma” year, rather than boosting the quality of the output in the final year. This is not clearcut—but we share concerns about the quality of some of the degree programmes. We get

involved through our Advice and Representation service in supporting students who are BASW members where they have concerns—and we know that there are areas of poor practice in some university departments. We would support the GSCC taking action against programmes which are not delivering a good standard of education to their students.

4.7 Practice education—teaching and learning. The Social Work Development Partnership between Skills for Care and the Childrens Workforce Development Council have been working with the General Social Care Council to produce and launch this year a new Quality Assurance tool for Practice Learning (QAPL). This is the first attempt to give a national quality assurance standard for all placements.

4.8 The new degree set out to increase the number of social work students, and with the approval of new programmes, and the growth of existing programmes this growth in student numbers has been achieved—but the impact on placements has been detrimental. The Practice Learning Taskforce was set up to develop new placements and was very successful—but the focus on numbers was without any quality assurance. This now has to be rectified. The QAPL tool is a start. The work currently being undertaken by the GSCC and the Social Work Development Partnership to redefine what is meant by “statutory” placements is a second strand of this work. We also need to explore whether we should now reduce the demand for assessed placements by reducing the numbers of courses and/or students and changing the type of “assessed” placements (as set out above).

## 5. *Supply of initial training*

5.1 There is evidence that social work courses are popular with some universities. They tend to have a good track record of diversity in the student population, are successful in supporting to completion students from non-traditional educational backgrounds, and it’s a popular subject content. These are all wins for universities and other colleges when looking to fill their student numbers and meet government targets. There can therefore be significant central university pressure for courses to take more students.

5.2 The downside is that this increase in university students is not linked to workforce demands—and certainly not to placement opportunities—and this puts unacceptable demand on employers at a time when social work teams are themselves under pressure. This is why we have ended up with students having too many placements in non-social work environments, and are not adequately prepared for statutory social work roles.

5.3 We believe that the generic content of social work degrees should be made widely available through university programmes, but students should then be able to complete university programmes which are not called “social work” (names like “applied social studies” have existed for some time for these non-professional programmes). The social work degrees would build on this generic foundation or spine—to provide the specialist social work content and placement experience—and the numbers on these programmes should be limited to those who can complete statutory placements and move into NQSW jobs. This sort of structure would allow social work teams to contribute to meeting the university targets, while not overburdening employers. It would also enable students to be clearer about the “social work” content of their programmes.

5.4 University staff have many pressures on their time. They need to be qualified and competent university lecturers, some need to be registered social workers and keep up to date in practice, some also need to be active researchers. They need to engage with employers, service users and practice educators. They need to be active within their university schools or faculties. This is a tall order, and evidence should be sorted as to whether there is a minimum and optimum size of department to make this tension of demands workable.

5.5 The demand of some universities for all staff to be research active to international standard is difficult for most universities running initial social work degree programmes. These universities may be better placed to only run the post graduate programmes and professional doctorate programmes—but demand for these is not developed yet, so few exist.

5.6 The creation of the childrens workforce is very new, and the remodelling of the workforce means that it is very early days to know what the demand for social workers will be. The current workforce figures and quoted shortages are not based on any agreed workforce data or protections. It is therefore difficult for DCSE, DIUS or CWDC to make meaningful predictions. CWDC has therefore been funded to promote specific workforce initiatives—currently about 12 different strands within social work. This has put enormous pressure on local authorities when they are already overstretched to deliver services to the public. The NQSW, while welcomed by BASW and most social work professionals, has nevertheless put real pressures on employers for proper supervision and reduction of workload which have proved difficult to meet. How to develop capacity in a sustainable way is a real challenge at this time and not helped by an overload of competing short term initiatives and pilots.

## 6. *Post-qualifying training and career paths*

6.1 The social work profession has benefited from people who have moved to work with different service users, and between different sorts of employers, including universities. This flow of workers has enabled individuals, many of whom are women, to maintain flexible working opportunities and to respond to changes in the market demand for social workers. Thus the profession encompasses people who work within

local authorities, private sector, and third sector organisations—as well as establish their own business as independent practitioners and consultants. One large local authority has recognised that it employs social workers in three of its four departments and is exploring establishing a Chief Social Worker post reporting to the Chief Executive as the way of supporting its social work staff. This analysis is crucial in any discussion of post qualifying opportunities for social workers and career pathways.

6.2 There is a major staff development gap which has not been addressed. This is the up-skilling of existing staff. To establish a programme like Nursing 2000, to require all existing social work staff to gain a degree level qualification would be a major contribution to the enhancement of social work services. This could be done in many ways—but could give a real lift to existing staff—who can feel neglected in the focus on new staff.

6.3 It would also give the platform for developing the new master programmes for all front line staff. We agree that these should be specific to the work being done—so that people do become expert practitioners. Thus we can envisage that social workers could gain a Masters in Childrens Social Work, a Masters in Youth Justice Social Work, a Masters in Social Work Practice Education, etc. These could then be linked to pay—and maybe different registers with the GSCC. This does imply a major change from the current GSCC post-qualifying framework.

6.4 Once people have achieved these qualifications, they could then become eligible to apply to become managers or advanced practitioners in specified posts. We believe that managers should be expert practitioners, especially in child care teams and required to maintain their practice skills as part of their GSCC registration requirement.

6.5 Some social work students are very clear about their preferred area of work during their course. This can change through experience on placements or the experience of others on the programme. However, how this links to employment depends on what jobs are available when they are looking for work. This is why we would like to see a close link between final placements and NQSW.

6.6 Further development is very dependent on the opportunities made available through the employer. Most professional courses require the support of the employer and may require access to information about work experience, often observed practice, and can therefore only be undertaken with employer support. At times of work pressure or funding problems this support may not be forthcoming—or there is a long wait—so workers may have to move employers or just not get the further training they want.

6.7 This has fitted with a mindset of only educating people for the job they are doing today—not for the skills and knowledge they may need tomorrow. It should be possible to devise professional modules and programmes which can be taken by workers even if they are not in a job where they can currently show competence. Universities do put on programmes like this—and social workers do attend them, but they are not recorded as professional development, as they are not competence based programmes. This is a short sighted approach—but one which is well embedded in agency thinking and planning.

6.8 Employers vary widely in the support they give to new staff. This came through clearly from the CWDC enquiries. However, we believe that all staff should receive a minimum standard of support and development, which is why we support an NQSW programme for everyone, linked to registration.

6.9 At times of shortage, staff are promoted too quickly into management roles. Then where they have not received good supervision, they are unable to give it to their staff. Many front line managers give good supervision to their front line staff, but for their career and credibility they also have to deliver a good account of their work to their managers—who may or may not be social workers and sympathetic to the job they are doing. Thus for new managers the pressure to meet organisational targets can become the key message they give to their front line staff, even if it means poor social work practice and poor service to the public. This can then be exacerbated by organisational training for new supervisors by central training teams who reinforce the corporate message. The only counterbalance is if there is a strong social work voice in the corporate senior management team.

6.10 We want to also argue for a strong front line practitioner voice within organisations. We are concerned that the alliance between employers and service users has too often been at the expense of a real dialogue between employers and their front line staff. Education staff have been represented by trade unions in this discussion, but we have heard from DCSs that their social work staff are not so unionised and therefore they do not know how to talk to their front line social work staff. This is a major problem of perception—and one where BASW is able to help, but this should not replace the requirement on directors to engage with their front line staff directly.

6.11 We want every local authority and other organisations delivering a social work service to identify a lead social worker to be responsible for social work education issues and be responsible for the CPD of social workers in the organisation.

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### Memorandum submitted by UNISON

1. UNISON is the UK's largest public sector union and represents 40,000 social workers in the UK. We welcome the opportunity to make a contribution to this Inquiry.

2. We believe that in terms of initial training the biggest priority is to improve the supply and quality of practice placements. We believe that all student social workers should be required to undertake a placement in a statutory setting in order to qualify. This will however require additional resources to allow local authorities to deliver this to a high quality. It will also require more support and training and development for practice teachers.

3. UNISON is strongly opposed to specialisation in the initial degree. Social work must retain its cohesiveness as a profession in the face of the current bureaucratic split between adults and children's services in order to preserve the ability to respond effectively to the whole family. It has always been a strength that social workers have exercised mobility across this interface in the course of their careers, and their initial training should provide a platform to do so. Specialisation should occur at post-graduate/post-qualification level and through ongoing professional development.

4. UNISON believes that there may be unrealistic expectations about how equipped newly qualified social workers (NQSWs) can be following initial training. Employers appear to have unreasonable expectations about how NQSWs can be deployed, driven by the acute staffing shortages they often face. In a recent survey by UNISON of members working in children's social work (copy enclosed)<sup>2</sup> nearly 60% of our respondents say that staff who do not have a social work qualification, or are newly qualified, are now more likely, compared with 2003, to be doing child protection work for which they are insufficiently trained or experienced.

*"Previously child protection cases were only dealt with by experienced workers. Newly qualified staff with no previous experience are now taking on these cases."*

5. UNISON is very supportive of the concept of Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) status. Many NQSWs are thrown into deployment without sufficient support and supervision, leading to stress, burn-out and loss of social workers to the profession because of bad early experiences. A guarantee of a reduced caseload and structured additional supervision would address this along with opportunities for wider professional support such as mentoring and NQSW networks.

6. While we welcome the Government's commitment to rolling this out across the board we are very concerned about the resourcing implications. The current pilots are revealing variations in the effectiveness of the programme from the point of view of the NQSW. Resourcing and support from team managers, supervisors and senior staff are vital. We are concerned that the NQSW programme will fail unless local authorities receive additional funding to resource it properly.

7. UNISON believes that there should be stronger requirements for employers to fund and support their staff to complete post-qualifying awards. Too many of our members say there is a waiting list to do the awards and when they do them they are often unable to complete because of workload pressures. This reflects a failure by employers to give them the necessary release time and support. We believe reduced caseload and protected time are also needed here.

8. We strongly support the move to give a revised Code of Practice for Social Care Employers statutory force, and we believe that employers must be held to account for how they support, train and develop social workers throughout their careers.

9. We have concerns about lack of career progression opportunities, and particularly in multi-agency teams we are finding that authorities are deleting senior posts and therefore removing opportunities for social workers to gain seniority and pay progression as they acquire post qualifying awards and experience. Access to adequate supervision and support for social workers in multi-agency teams can also be particularly challenging.

10. UNISON believes that social work has been relatively successful in introducing greater diversity into the profession. We are concerned that the current tendency to portray social workers as people with worse A levels than other professions is quite unhelpful. A level scores do not tell the whole story. There are strong arguments for people coming through into social work from a wider range of educational backgrounds and with diversity and different types of work experience. Service user organisations have also stressed the importance to them of having social workers from diverse backgrounds, and who have direct experience of the issues service users face. We are very clear that social workers must through their training be able to achieve the exacting intellectual standards required, but we do not want to see a reductive attitude to this debate focusing solely on A level scores.

11. UNISON has achieved some very successful outcomes through its partnership with the Open University delivering part-time work-based social work degree programmes for social care staff which involve a formal local partnership between employers, the OU and UNISON to provide enhanced support for students. This provides a supported route for staff who are experienced in roles such as care assistant or family support worker to progress and achieve qualified social worker status. This model can provide the basis for strong post-qualifying support structures and networks.

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<sup>2</sup> Not printed. See [www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/B4416.pdf](http://www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/B4416.pdf)

12. We believe that as part of any “national supply strategy” there must be a debate about systems for modelling how many social workers the country needs. This needs to look at population data, levels of deprivation and other factors, and must be informed by agreed norms around acceptable workloads. This in turn can inform planning for how many university places are needed.

May 2009

*Witnesses:* **Bridget Robb**, Interim Manager (Professional Services), British Association of Social Workers, and **Heather Wakefield**, National Secretary, Unison, gave evidence.

**Chairman:** May I have the next group of witnesses please. I am delighted that Heather Wakefield and Bridget Robb are in front of the Committee. I cannot detect any Yorkshire inheritance from Heather’s CV, although she bears a proud name.

**Heather Wakefield:** Absolutely none.

**Chairman:** The county town of Wakefield must be there somewhere.

**Heather Wakefield:** Irish, Italian and Scottish, but no Yorkshire.

**Q39 Chairman:** No Yorkshire? It is a puzzlement. You have heard most of the first session, and we will apologise to you as we did to the other team for our session being short today. It isn’t usually this short, but it’s really short today. Heather or Bridget, do you want to say anything to the Committee before we get into question mode?

**Bridget Robb:** No, other than to say that I am pleased to have the opportunity to be able to share ideas with you. I am a registered social worker. My background is in local authorities as training manager. I then ran a university department. I now work for the British Association of Social Workers and manage our England office where my specialism is work force development. I do a lot of work as a member of the board of Skills for Care and a member of the Children’s Workforce Development Council. I chair its joint committee on social work development with the General Social Care Council.

**Q40 Chairman:** Are you happy with how things are? Do you think that this is time for a substantial change?

**Bridget Robb:** As there is the political will to change, there is a great deal of change that will make a great deal of difference. We spend a lot of time trying to co-ordinate organisations that have social work as part of their remit and to support social workers who are working in what are often fairly hostile environments, so we are looking forward to the fact that there seems to be the political will to take a serious look at this. I am pleased to be part of the task force, as well. We need to capture this moment, which feels fairly unique. Comment was made earlier about if only this had been done some years ago and that is right, but we are where we are. At least there is now the willingness to look at a quite radical change.

**Q41 Chairman:** Were they right about the pay? They seemed to be a bit fuzzy about how much social workers got paid.

**Heather Wakefield:** Are we worried about the pay?

**Chairman:** I am asking Bridget.

**Bridget Robb:** We are in the sense that we know that the salaries deter people from coming forward and that part of the reason for the turnover in people doing the job is that they have to move around to get extra pay because employers are not supporting them in extra pay within their job environments. For things like practice teaching or extra qualifications, there is no extra pay around so that adds to the churn that is going on. People are moving around employers, not because the job is not what they want the job to be, but because that is the only way to get the financial recognition of what they are trying to do.

**Chairman:** That is a common theme that we found here and when we went for our visit.

**Heather Wakefield:** I am also a social worker by background, although I have not practised for about 30 years—I was a practice supervisor, so I have a comparison point, I suppose. I come at this from a slightly different angle in that I am the lead negotiator for the group of local government workers within which social workers fall, which is grandly known as the National Joint Council for Local Government Services. The whole pay structure is in our view undervalued, and therefore that is true of the social workers within it. There is clearly a specific issue affecting social workers at this moment in time, but there are many others within the pay structure who are also undervalued. I think that you have received the Unison survey results, and from that you will see that pay is only one of a number of issues that is causing the current recruitment and retention difficulties and the general demoralisation in social work. While we think that pay could and should be improved, it is not the main issue, and training is obviously key. Also, speaking in my role as a Unison negotiator, training generally for local government workers is an issue of great importance. What is very clear is that resources for work force training and development in local government are very poor indeed. The average for a local government worker per annum is around £220, with 90% of that going on management training. There is very little indeed for the front-line work force, and of course we also represent the whole range of social care workers—home care workers, care assistants and so on. We have growing evidence from our members that it is increasingly difficult for those in unqualified positions to gain access to secondment to train as qualified social workers, and we are being told that they have to resign from their jobs and apply for bursaries, if that is what they want to do. That is an issue about the resources available within local government generally and, therefore, for social workers within that context.

**Chairman:** Thank you very much for those opening responses. We are going to rattle through this session, because we want to get maximum value out of two very expert witnesses. I think that Annette is starting this one.

**Q42 Annette Brooke:** We have heard quite a lot about the relatively low A-level scores for entrance into the initial degree. What qualities and attributes do you think that entrants should have? How should that be assessed?

**Heather Wakefield:** If you talk to academics, they will tell you that A-level scores are not reliable predictors of degree results and that what makes the difference between those who get good degrees and those who do not is attendance at lectures and working on the course. So, I don't think we should be overly concerned about A-level scores, although obviously a sufficiently high degree of general education is important. What we feel is that it is equally important that the social-work work force reflects the composition of the population—diversity is an important issue. There are very many people with relevant experience who could, and arguably should, be trained as social workers—they don't have A-levels at all, but would make excellent social workers. From my own experience, I certainly know that that is the case. Some of the best social workers and probation officers are people who have lived and don't necessarily have A-levels at all.

**Q43 Annette Brooke:** May I ask Bridget for her take on that? Should we have national benchmarks?

**Bridget Robb:** We come at it slightly differently because I think there is a challenge to us. As we have highlighted already, social work has traditionally been part of the adult and children's work forces, where the front-line staff have initial qualifications—NVQ 2 and NVQ 3. Therefore those working in social work were seen as exceptionally qualified—right from the word go, to have a higher education qualification was exceptional. Therefore employers did not see that it was worth while investing even more money in those people, because they were among their highest qualified workers anyway. But, the world has changed around us. Social work is no longer exceptional, and to be part of a graduate work force is becoming more of the norm and an expectation. What happened when we did the degree was that we lowered the age range. That was partly because of the assessment that the social work force was an ageing work force. There was a real challenge. The average age of entry was 32 at the time, and there was thought to be a need to encourage younger people, who were looking at nursing and teaching as alternatives, to consider social work as an option—a career. Universities had to wrestle with A-level grades for the first time. They had not had to do that before, because older entrants came in normally without any prerequisite educational requirements. We are learning, and we have learned, that there are challenges for young people coming in. Universities see that social work is an incredibly popular degree. Because there are bursaries and it is a subject matter in which many

people are interested there has been a very high demand. Therefore universities have seen the subject as a cash cow. University departments have been under great pressure to take more and more students. Those involved in social work are used to taking on non-traditional students, so they have been very good at supporting people from non-traditional educational backgrounds and helping them to succeed in getting qualifications. For universities, it is a win-win situation—more people are coming in, and they are supported by social work staff to get their degrees. It ticks all the boxes for university outcomes, but what is not taken account of is the pressure that that puts on placements and the question of whether people are then prepared and ready to enter the work force, which we now need. There is a real challenge to us, which is why in our submission to you from BASW we said that we think we should be exploring whether there should be some sort of national guidance or benchmark statement about A-level entry. That is particularly the case because we are now moving to an expectation—particularly on the children's side—that people should not only be able to get their degree, but be capable of getting a masters degree. That changes your entry requirements as well. These are the things that we need to learn about together and do more analysis about.

**Q44 Annette Brooke:** This is probably just the news, but I have the impression that certain universities at least are closing down their social work departments, which is slightly at odds with what you have just said.

**Bridget Robb:** Yes. That is right. We know of programmes that are closing down, but that is not because there is not the entry demand; it is because of other economic factors within universities and the tension on university staff, who have to put a lot of time into finding placements and running the inclusive partnership programmes that we require—partnerships with service users, employers and other members of the community. We require university lecturers to run a very time-consuming course. That puts pressures on research and therefore on how economic these courses are seen to be by universities. Like everyone else, universities are strapped for cash, and they have to consider whether social work is coming up to the research ratings that they need. If social work is not cost-effective, is it a programme that they want to run? They ask that question not because the course isn't popular but because of other economic reasons facing universities.

**Q45 Annette Brooke:** Right. There are a lot of matters one could consider when thinking about how universities should be working with the placements. But, perhaps I could move more on to the Unison side. There has been a lot of discussion about students not getting satisfactory placements, and it has been pointed out that it is a bit wishy-washy to say there must be a statutory element to the placement, rather than requiring placements within



the statutory system. Will you comment on the most important things to improve the quality of placements?

**Heather Wakefield:** It is not possible to look at the issue of placements outside the general context of social work. I am sure that you know that there are very high vacancy rates. There are high levels of agency staff, with even higher turnover, in most social work departments in most local authorities across the land. That is a general picture. There are people out there working under absolutely enormous pressure. I absolutely agree that there should be a high statutory component within placements for student social workers, but I think that to expect departments—given the pressure that many of them are under—to give the requisite degree of supervision and adequate time and space to social work students is a very big ask indeed. I am sure that it is not unwillingness on the part of local authorities, which are struggling to meet, as we know, their own statutory commitments. Therefore, to devote the time necessary is extremely difficult and, until we crack the wider picture, I don't feel the issue of placements is going to improve significantly.

**Q46 Annette Brooke:** So what is the answer to improve the quality and quantity of placements and to get the right amount of practice into the initial degree?

**Bridget Robb:** This has been the challenge to the Social Work Development Partnership Board. Our funding through Skills for Care and the Children's Workforce Development Council has been directly to employers and local authorities to help them develop their placements, because we are of a mind that every student should expect a statutory placement. We need to think about how "statutory" doesn't mean "local authority"—statutory means a placement where you are using social work law. Every student should be entitled to that and expect that as part of their degree, but we are a long way from that. It was partly because of the recognition that we needed to train more social workers that when the degree was formed there was an increase in not only the number of placement days, but the number of students coming into social work programmes. The Government then put a lot of money into sending people out to create placements to meet the need, but they created the placements by going to all parts of the children's and social care work forces. We have seen the results of that and have learned about the disadvantages, so now we are challenged to rethink how we support local authorities. What Heather has said is absolutely right. Local authorities in many areas are very stretched and just to put in more students does not help. We have to find a solution, whether it is through placement units, which used to exist in some places, or otherwise. There has to be a mechanism, because students coming off courses have to have this type of experience.

**Q47 Chairman:** Isn't your thinking too narrowly focused, then? We are doing, totally independently, a panel inquiry into the training of teachers. What has

happened in teaching is that you have broken the mould of just one way of getting into the teaching profession, through teacher training, the three-year degree at primary and the degree-plus for secondary. There are now many more mature people coming through. You have really changed the nature of the work force. There seems to be a resistance here; you have gone away from more mature entrants coming in, as Heather said, at a later stage. Isn't that one of the problems? I read serious case reviews all the time, and one of the criticisms is that many young social workers who have been to university aren't literate—if they write, you can't read it anyway, because their writing is illegible.

**Bridget Robb:** Your point about the routes becoming narrower is correct. That hasn't been by design, because the Government have been encouraging local authorities to take on trainees, but local authorities aren't doing it. That perhaps involves performance indicators, stretching money and—when you have teams that are under such pressure, they sometimes turn in on themselves just to cope with the pressures of the day-to-day job—the feeling that taking students is a burden, rather than part of the solution. That is the challenge that we are faced with, which we have to crack. You are quite right that we need to explore different ways of providing the education and training model. There isn't just one way.

**Chairman:** Heather, if you answer my question when you are talking to Graham, it will make me look good in his eyes.

**Q48 Mr Stuart:** One thing that I remember from our trip to New York is that the commissioner, or deputy commissioner, there said that the most important single thing is to get case loads down to 10 to 12 per worker, so that you stop being dedicated to processing cases and become interested in supporting families and children. Do you think that the overload of cases is having a major impact on the ability to support placements? In other words, even if you put it back in the performance indicators and give money and status, if you do not get the case load down it will be impossible to do this work.

**Heather Wakefield:** I think that that is absolutely right. All the evidence that we have gathered from our members says that there is a much greater likelihood now than in 2003 of unqualified or newly qualified social workers having very difficult child protection cases on their work load. Let me quickly answer the Chair's last point. Unison has developed with the Open University a very interesting course that enables front-line home care workers, who assist social workers, to undertake on-the-job and academic training to move into social work. I think that that is a very important route. One of the things that has happened is that the separation of children's and adult's social work, which we have significant reservations about, has divided people in home care—who used to work alongside social workers in the home and carry out some very important detective and caring support work—from social workers. People in home care have extremely valuable experience, and we need to take a more

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whole-family approach to the whole issue. Encouraging those people to enter social work is something that we very much want to see and are actively promoting, but there is absolutely no doubt that high case loads are one of the reasons why people are leaving the profession, because they are huge stress generators.

**Q49 Mr Stuart:** You both support the new, newly qualified social worker status. Why has it not been more successful?

**Bridget Robb:** Because it is so challenging. For some authorities, where they had good supervision and had a handle on the work loads of people, they could begin to get their heads around questions such as, “What does a 10% reduction in work load look like?” and “Where do we get the supervisors from?” But for authorities that are struggling, just having money does not actually help them to solve those problems, so that has been part of the challenge. To bring in external supervisors has a place, but then there is the issue of whether they are practice-competent and up to the job themselves to be able to support newly qualified workers. We passionately believe that this is the way that we have to go, but it isn’t a quick-fix solution. Talking about work loads coming down, there has been a mindset—this used to concern me as a training manager—of people saying, “We’ve got to have work load relief to be able to do training and take on students.” No; that is part of your work load. The change of mindset involves saying that doing professional development and taking students is part of people’s work load.

**Q50 Mr Stuart:** What sort of jobs should be given to newly qualified social workers? Do we need stronger rules in order to stop such jobs being inappropriate? For instance, Unison’s survey says that inexperienced people are more likely now than six years ago to be given acutely difficult children’s cases. Given the backdrop of public concern, that is scandalous.

**Heather Wakefield:** I think that they need fewer cases. They don’t necessarily need not to have complex cases, but they need fewer of them and much better supervision. Another of the findings of our survey is that the level and nature of supervision is simply inadequate. They need to have a protected case load.

**Q51 Mr Stuart:** How do you think supervision could best be improved?

**Bridget Robb:** Front-line managers are themselves often in a difficult position. Some of them have been promoted very quickly, and they do not have an adequate history of supervision. They do not have the modelling to know what it is that they are meant to be offering their staff. That says something about how we prepare front-line managers, and how we support them in that role. Too often, however, the assumption is that once you are a front-line manager, you stop being a practitioner. That is the bit that we want to challenge; advanced practitioner status is just as important for front-line managers as it is for those who are not front-line managers. We

need our front-line managers to be expert practitioners. They need to be able to know how to work the cases; they need to be able to work alongside their staff; and they need to be able to work in case conferences and so on. They need to be able to model that on front-line practice. There is a real challenge for those front-line managers, and that is difficult in a local authority culture—this is particular but not exclusive to local authorities—where targets are the name of the game. We hear from front-line staff and managers that, putting it crudely, their job is to complete the computer information, because it gives the performance indicators, which give the stars, which give the money, which gives the jobs. As long as that mindset is there, it makes it really hard for managers to resist that, as well as supporting their front-line staff in doing the front-line job. It is really important how we support managers in being expert practitioners, as well as just giving them management training to take them away from the front line.

**Q52 Mr Stuart:** I’m sorry, what does that mean? You say it’s important to support them. I want to turn that into something that we can include in our report.

**Bridget Robb:** For me, expert practitioner development isn’t an alternative to managers; managers also need to be expert practitioners. That advanced status, qualification or role—however we develop it—needs to be the expectation for both roles.

**Q53 Mr Stuart:** My expectation is that people who come up through social work are probably quite good practitioners. Although they may be quite good practitioners—this is what we heard in New York—no one has taught them how to supervise. They don’t have the management skills; they get moved up because they are good practitioners. You seem to suggest that there might be some who have neither skill.

**Bridget Robb:** In organisations where the work force is stretched—that is one thing that has come out of the research by the Children’s Workforce Development Council. There are supervisors who are a couple of years into practice, which puts enormous stresses and strains on them as supervisors. The danger is that once they are identified as managers, they are put into centrally run local authority management schemes. That does not help them build on their social-work skills, or to know what is different about supervising in social work as opposed to libraries or public health.

**Q54 Mr Stuart:** Are you saying we need specialist social work supervision training rather than generic local authority training in management?

**Bridget Robb:** People need both. I would never dismiss general management training, because there is a role for it. That crossover and cross-fertilisation can be really important, but it doesn’t negate the fact that people need to be able to supervise social work and build on their social work practice.

**Mr Stuart:** Do you agree with that, Heather?

**Heather Wakefield:** I do, but I return to the point that I made earlier about the absence of resources for training in local government generally. Very few people have access to training—25% of the work force has no access to training at all—so the resources are very scarce.

**Q55 Mr Stuart:** Is that general, or is it variable? Are there some authorities where they do?

**Heather Wakefield:** Some are undoubtedly better than others, and obviously not all local authorities are social services authorities, as you know, but resources are few. I fear that they will get fewer, for reasons that we all know well.

**Q56 Mr Stuart:** Bridget, you have proposed that students should complete their newly qualified social worker year with the same employer with whom they did their practice placement at the end of their final year. What would be the advantages and pitfalls of such a requirement?

**Bridget Robb:** There are a number of issues. One is the quality of that final statutory placement. How do we engage employers fully in taking ownership of that and get a better relationship between universities and local authority or statutory employers around that? It is also that the newly qualified social worker year—that crossover and transfer—is so crucial. We know that that is where people really struggle, even if they have had good experiences as students. It is really important when they first go into that year. At the moment, the way that it is set up, it is not quality assured either. The expansion into all newly qualified social workers means that it will be even less quality assured unless we try to do something about it. It was trying to think through, “Well, this could be a powerful lever for establishing a really good final experience for students and a really good experience in their first period in work.” It goes back to the point you were making about how we can loosen up some of the models and whether there is another way of thinking about this relationship, because the—

**Q57 Mr Stuart:** A huge number of the people who take a social work degree do not go on to practice, so in a sense, if commitment is required on both sides, would they not be obliging themselves? Obviously, they could walk away, but in some way they would be obliging themselves to have a placement and then work there. Is that realistic?

**Bridget Robb:** I don’t know, but I think there are a number of challenges. Challenging students will have to be part of the agenda as well, but we were also suggesting that universities might like to think about how they run non-professional programmes. We have always said that there should be clear exit routes out of the professional programme for those who do not want to carry on to be social workers, either because they are deemed not to be competent or because they have made the career choice that being a social worker is not for them. At the moment, there are not always routes out for people, and we are very clear that there should always be

routes out for people. At the moment, the issue is the pressure on placements. In five years, we have more than doubled the requirement for placement days in England. It is a nonsense; it is out of control, because nobody can say stop. How do we pull it back and say that statutory placements are a scarce resource? If we are going to require all students to do one, we have got to know that they will actually follow it through and go into the work force.

**Q58 Mr Stuart:** Should the Government limit the number of degrees? Medical degrees are limited by the Government. They dictate exactly how many people can do a medical degree each year.

**Bridget Robb:** I think that we are in such a stage of change and development in the work force that we are not quite able to do that at the moment, but our thinking was that if you said to employers, “How many newly qualified social workers are you going to need in two years’ time?” and say that that bit should be the statutory placement requirement, it will begin to give you a mechanism at least a couple of years ahead as to how many social workers we are actually going to want. We are all looking for mechanisms to pull tighter the relationship between employers, universities and the student experience.

**Q59 Chairman:** Has anyone compared your profession with others? There are other professions where places are scarce: I am thinking of law, for example. It is dreadfully difficult, especially in the present situation, to get a placement with a law firm when you have finished your initial training. There is a different way of meeting that demand. People defer or work in an aligned profession for a year or so. There are other ways of doing something about this. Graham is quite right. Should there be a God-given right to take on as many social workers as there are people who pitch up at the university door to do social work courses?

**Bridget Robb:** There should be.

**Q60 Chairman:** There must be planning about that. The funding doesn’t flow from the Higher Education Funding Council ad lib. There is a plan. This Committee’s predecessor used to deal with higher education, and I know that no university has an open-ended number of social work places. They don’t.

**Bridget Robb:** No, but what has been happening, as we were saying, is that for universities to get their performance indicators they are taking on more students, so they have seen social work programmes as a very easy way of helping people to meet the targets. There has been pressure from universities, as well as from students, which has meant that social work numbers have gone up.

**Chairman:** Bridget that is very valuable evidence. Heather, do you have anything else to say on Graham’s point?

**Heather Wakefield:** No.

**Q61 Mr Stuart:** Heather, you just said no, but I noticed that in your submission you talked about the fact that we need a debate about systems for

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modelling how many social workers the country needs and so on. If we did that, implications could arise from it. The suggestion from your submission is that, contrary to what you think, in a sense, there is no such modelling now and no one is making that assessment.

**Heather Wakefield:** I don't think they are from the point of view of local authorities. I think we feel very strongly that, in general, few local authorities engage in anything that you could call work force planning. That goes for anybody, but for social work in particular, there is a real need to look at demography, levels of deprivation and the composition of the local population—to think ahead and look much more precisely at what and who is needed.

**Q62 Chairman:** One thing that really worried me in your earlier evidence was that it seemed as though you were saying that it is just as important to reflect the social make-up and diversity of the community in which the local authority sits as to have qualified people. Are you suggesting that people from different minority ethnic backgrounds don't have to meet the same tests of qualification as others?

**Heather Wakefield:** No, I am not saying that at all. I was saying that social workers should be as qualified as they can possibly be—[*Interruption.*] I apologise—I think that was probably my phone pinging away.

**Chairman:** There's a £50 fine for doing that.

**Heather Wakefield:** We need to think beyond the social work degree and look at the sort of training that we have developed with the Open University and some local authorities, and we need to look at life experience as well as A-levels. There is endless research to show that A-levels are not predictors of degree outcomes. I would think that you could extrapolate that to social work degree outcomes. There are many people out there from all ethnic communities with huge amounts of experience in their personal and professional lives who could well become very, very good social workers if encouraged through a different route. I suppose that I am saying by implication that while we support the social work degree route and the newly qualified social worker status, there are and should be alternatives and equivalents.

**Chairman:** As a distinguished member of my family was a very good social worker who came to it in a later part of her life, I think I might agree with that—but that is personal prejudice towards my mother-in-law.

**Q63 Mr Heppell:** On post-qualifying training, the task force noted that there was not enough support from employers—or at least that there were concerns about the level of support and funding. In terms of professional development so that you can specialise, that is something that I would feel fairly strongly about. What can you do to make that work better? I know Unison would like to impose greater requirements, but besides imposing greater requirements, what could you do to make it easier to facilitate access to post-qualifying training? Is there

a difference in the training between statutory bodies and other employers? Could you say that it is better in one place and worse in another?

**Bridget Robb:** I wish we had an easy answer. Part of it has been the mindset that said, "Well, to have a degree was a luxury anyway, so you didn't need to do anything else." However much we have tried to shift that, it has remained a very prevalent view among employers, and indeed social workers themselves, who did not put themselves forward for ongoing training. It isn't just blaming one side—this is a challenge to the profession. Other things came in with that, sometimes linked to work load. People who put themselves forward for the post-qualifying child care award, which was widely taken up, often found that they didn't get the work load relief to which they felt entitled. They therefore had to do the course and the rest of their day job. Such pressures and people's experiences of further qualifications and continuing professional development were not always easy. They felt that they were doing it in their own time and at their own leisure, and many felt that was an unreasonable expectation from employers, when it was actually a work requirement. The other thing is that people took the qualifications under those pressures, but then there was no extra money for them at the end either. The climate has not been conducive, therefore, to employers or workers putting time and energy into doing some of these programmes. A different one, of course, was the mental health award, where there was a legal responsibility. Even then, however, the pressures didn't always change, which is partly why it was difficult to get people to come forward and be approved as social workers in mental health. The question is about how we change the educational climate. One of the things that has changed significantly has been working more closely with health and education colleagues, whose attitude towards ongoing education is so different. That is partly driven by funding, but also the professional attitude is so different. That has made social workers sit up and wake up to the fact that some of the systems and processes that we have been involved in have not necessarily been very healthy. It has also been a career wake-up, because if you want to do well in a career in these new, broader organisations, you have to be able to stand up educationally against your colleagues from health and education, for whom further programmes and continuing professional development are an automatic part of their professional thinking. We are in a climate where there is the opportunity to build on this changing mindset. It doesn't take away the real financial stresses and strains and the real issues about professional development and pay, but at least we are in a climate where there is growing awareness that social workers have to be educated and undertake continual professional development to be able to call themselves professionals alongside colleagues from other professions.

**Q64 Mr Heppell:** Is there a difference between statutory and other bodies? Are those working for the council directly more likely to be offered training?

**Bridget Robb:** I think there are some variations—it depends. In organisations doing work under contract—some of the statutory work—there is more of an expectation that people do training.

**Q65 Mr Heppell:** I have a feeling that you have answered this already, but do you agree that the arrangements for postgraduate training do not address the possible gaps in the initial training or in the support for full specialisation?

**Chairman:** Can you be brief, because we are coming to the end?

**Bridget Robb:** Before we came in, Andrew Webb, who was speaking for the task force, showed me the list of the training that his authority offers its staff at post-qualifying level. The list of opportunities for continuing professional development is impressive, and his organisation is not alone in offering all sorts of opportunities. But—this is no criticism of him, because this is very common—local authorities provide a lot of one-day and half-day courses that don't build up to anything.

**Chairman:** They aren't "Death by PowerPoint", are they? We learned that from the teachers—we are fond of it.

**Bridget Robb:** I really hope not. But there is also no external accreditation of courses. If people want to state publicly what development they have undertaken, you can list a whole series of things they have engaged in, but there is no evidence of continued learning or professional development. There continue to be challenges about the different ways the money is put together and the different ways we recognise qualifications.

**Q66 Mr Heppell:** There are a couple of other things. One thing that really surprised Professor John Carpenter, from the University of Bristol, was that, in contrast to doctors, who would just be expected to train people under them—that is a requirement on more qualified staff—there is no such requirement on highly qualified people in social work. He said that people may take somebody on to train them only a couple of times in their whole career. Is there a way in which we can build an expectation into existing staff that they would automatically be involved in training junior staff if they had a certain level of competence and experience?

**Heather Wakefield:** Yes, I think that that is absolutely right, although not all very good social workers will necessarily be very good trainers, as is the case in any profession. But what you say has to be true; otherwise, how do we transmit knowledge and experience?

**Q67 Mr Heppell:** I think that you have already answered the questions that I was going to ask about front-line supervisors, the management, and keeping the skills of the social worker, but what about the idea of a chief social worker? I know that that is

happening. Is it necessary for there to be somebody in the corporate body who speaks for social workers specifically? Is that a good idea?

**Bridget Robb:** As you may know, we think that it is a good idea and we are interested by the different models that are being explored. We know of one local authority that is looking for a chief social worker for the whole local authority, because it recognises that its social work staff are scattered throughout a series of its departments. It felt that that was one way of bringing things together, or at least of exploring the issues. The question is how we get recognition of social work right the way up the system. We have a chief medical officer at Government level and we have chief nursing officers, but we do not have anything that describes social work in the same way—it has always been subsumed under social care or children's services. One thing that the task force is looking at is what we need to show that social work has a presence in its own right at employer level and Government level.

**Q68 Chairman:** Is the situation of the social worker exacerbated when the head of a children's services department is not a social worker by background, but has a schools background?

**Bridget Robb:** We were concerned when so many directors of children's services seemed to come from education. That went partly back to perspectives and experience, but it also went partly back to the educational background of directors of social services, which did not necessarily put them in the running for these top jobs. The issue of education is not just about newly qualified staff, but goes right through the system. How do we make sure that social workers are educated in such a way that they can compete for these top jobs? There is more of a balance now, as things have gone on, but this is a real challenge for anyone. A director of children's services has an enormous brief, and it is an enormous challenge for one person to incorporate the responsibilities of that full brief. But if they haven't got the expertise themselves, they have to make sure that that expertise is in their senior management team. That is where a chief social worker, or someone to lead the social work knowledge, who has maintained their front-line knowledge and skills about social work, seems so important to us, because it is expected that there is someone who leads the education thinking in that department. That is what we would expect for social work as well.

**Chairman:** Bridget and Heather, we have to pull stumps now. I don't often say this to witnesses, but I found the evidence from the two of you absolutely fantastic. We have enjoyed it, you were very succinct, and we learned a lot, which is amazing. May we remain in contact? We're sorry that this session was shorter than usual, but if we're going to write a good report, we need people with your clarity of vision to help us. Thank you.

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**Monday 1 June 2009**

Members present:

Mr Barry Sheerman (Chairman)

Mr John Heppell  
Fiona Mactaggart  
Mr Andrew Pelling

Mr Edward Timpson  
Derek Twigg

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**Memorandum submitted by Universities UK**

Universities UK is the major representative body for the higher education sector. It has 133 members who are the executive heads of the universities in the UK, and it works closely with policy makers and key stakeholders to advance the interests of universities and higher education.

**INTRODUCTION**

1. Universities UK welcomes the opportunity to make an input into the Committee's work in this area. Universities UK will also be contributing to the work of the Department for Children, Schools and Families Social Work Task Force via a seminar on 21 May 2009. Any additional issues identified by Vice-Chancellors at that event will be passed on to the Committee.

2. Key issues for universities are: content of initial training, quality, and supply of initial training, which are outlined in this submission. This submission also covers the issue of social work research, because Universities UK is concerned that this is not omitted from the Committee's review. The profession's underpinning knowledge base must continue to develop, and should be linked with wider perspectives on research methodologies and experience/expertise.

3. Since social work education has been brought into the university mainstream, supported by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funding, student numbers have increased, and it appears that the profession has become a more attractive career option. There are now 71 accredited universities offering social work degrees. Over 64% of social work students are enrolled as full time undergraduates.

**CONTENT OF INITIAL TRAINING**

4. This is clearly a matter for universities, in consultation with employers. It will be important not to interfere prematurely with the degree structure which has just been embedded—the first graduates from these programmes entered the workforce in 2005, so assessment is still at an early stage. The timescales for major changes to education programmes mean that careful planning is necessary to co-ordinate with relevant partners, and ensure that the appropriate number and range of placements is available for students. Planning and managing placements is one of the most challenging parts of the new degrees, but without that opportunity, it will not be possible to ensure that students are able to gain early experience of the sort of tasks they will be asked to undertake when in employment.

5. While there is clearly a need to develop suitable knowledge and skill sets for social workers dealing with children and families, early specialisation may not necessarily provide the versatile workforce that will be required in the future. Students need to form an holistic understanding of people, families and communities.

6. The balance of knowledge, skills, values and experience is likely to vary in programmes, since they will reflect links with local employers and the types of placements available. This helps with ensuring the necessary diversity in education provision across the country.

**QUALITY**

7. Universities work closely with the General Social Care Council (GSCC) to ensure that programmes meet the necessary requirements, and the current arrangements, which emphasise the institutions' own quality assurance and monitoring processes are preferable to some of the more burdensome mechanisms in other professions. The GSCC has exercised its functions appropriately, for example by withholding approvals temporarily, in order for quality benchmarks to be met.

8. UUK has given priority to working with HEFCE and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) on arrangements for quality assurance in England following the current round of QAA institutional audits. It has established a Quality Forum which is considering issues including: greater student involvement eg in audit teams, and sector-wide terms of reference for external examiners. Mechanisms that focus on addressing any identified problems quickly, at the institutional level, are essential for both students and their future employers.

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## SUPPLY OF INITIAL TRAINING

9. One of the key issues for universities in assessing the scale and type of provision to be offered is the availability of placements. As there is currently no requirement for public agencies to provide placements and limited funding available for universities to support the administrative processes around placement provision, consideration should be given to how employers can be incentivised to offer placements.

## RESEARCH

10. One of the benefits of moving to a degree qualification is the opportunity for students to come into contact with professionals who undertake research, and who can help them develop an enthusiasm for new ideas and the necessary critical skills to underpin use of research outcomes. This is an essential aspect of the wider development of the social work profession, and is a key benefit of the recent changes in professional education. By being based in universities, underpinning professional knowledge can continue to develop, and be linked with research methodologies and developments in related subject disciplines as well.

May 2009

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## Memorandum submitted by the Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee (JUC SWEC)

### COVER NOTE

JUC SWEC is a membership organization of 70+ Universities offering social work education at qualifying and post-qualifying (PQ) levels and engaged in social work research linked to professional practice. Its members come from across the UK and JUC SWEC have contributed for many years to committees and developments in social work practice, education, research and strategic policy in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales.

This document has also drawn on joint work with SWAP,<sup>1</sup> the Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Social Work and Policy, as submitted to the DIUS/DCSF enquiry on “Levers for Change”.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this call for evidence. JUC SWEC will be pleased to contribute further to the taskforce and to the Commons Select Committee’s review, and to assist in any way with the shaping of the future for social work education.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Of key importance to social work training for children and families’ social workers are:
  - Retaining the generic degree for initial training.
  - Considering in collaboration with HEIs, employers/practice teachers and service users, whether the degree requirements need to take into account further aspects of children and families specialist knowledge in initial training.
  - Strengthening employer responsibility for training and support of staff: make the employer Code of Practice mandatory; reintroduce key performance indicators for practice learning placements.
  - Reintroducing practice teacher/educator qualifications for social work.
  - Embedding the Newly Qualified Social Worker status into a confirmatory year.
  - Making Post-qualifying training mandatory and linked to working in specialist children and families knowledge areas.

### ENTRY ROUTES TO THE PROFESSION

2. Social Work has responded positively to the call for widening participation in higher education and offers a range of routes to qualification at both Masters (24% of England students) and Degree (64%) level. A further 12% are sponsored Employment Based Route students and part timers.<sup>2</sup>

3. “A” level standards are not necessarily the best indicators of success at degree level and ratcheting up admission requirements may have unintended consequences, such as slowing the flow of more experienced mature students into the profession. If admission requirements are raised, robust APEL systems need to be in place. It is possible to continue to have parallel systems of entry based on academic achievements and alternative qualifications/life experience, which will also then attract service users or carers who wish to enter the profession.

4. In order to recruit the best candidates to social work programmes, the career and pay structure of the profession may need to be addressed at the same time, mirroring those of health professionals, from basic grade social worker through to consultant social worker, with appropriate financial remuneration, and a culture shift in expectations of further training.

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<sup>1</sup> SWAP—[www.swap.ac.uk](http://www.swap.ac.uk)

<sup>2</sup> GSCC, *Raising Standards: Social Work education in England 2007–08 Summary*, London: GSCC, 2009, p 7.

5. It is very much welcomed that recent comments from ministers have focussed on the difficult and complex, but valued and important job that social workers do. This change in respect for the profession is likely to be a significant motivator for career changers, unlike the damaging effect of recent media coverage on the morale of student social workers and recruitment to local authorities.<sup>3</sup>

## 6. STRUCTURE OF TRAINING

While the introduction of the three year bachelor's degree was welcomed in 2003, bringing parity with other professionals (psychology, teachers), it has rapidly become clear that the demands of social work have increased. JUC SWEC welcomes the introduction of the NQSW (Newly Qualified Social Workers) schemes this year into children's (and adult's) services with the emphasis on good induction, supervision, a managed workload and time for specialist training. Social Workers would benefit from this becoming a confirmatory year in practice (3 + 1) (similar to teachers, and to social workers in Northern Ireland), followed by a further one to two years undertaking specialist training alongside practice (3 + 1 + 2). There may be even stronger parallels with medical training, where an intensive generic degree is followed by two years of placements in a range of specialist settings and then 2 further years of supervised and managed work/learning—equating to 3 + 2 + 2.

7. Qualifying routes in other countries compare with the current generic UK approach. Australia<sup>4</sup> offers Masters and degree (three or four year) routes to training with 140 supervised practice days. Denmark<sup>5</sup> has 3.5 year undergraduate or two year Masters programmes with a four month placement (approx 90 days) and a two month practice based study/project.

8. Concerns have been expressed at suggestions that a “fast track” route similar to that for teachers might be suitable for social work. The difference with teaching is that students have already completed their first degree in the subject which they are proposing to teach, while social work students (whatever their first degree) are required to cover a significant and new combination of applied areas of theory, law and social science, as well as completing the current 200 days of practice and all the practice related skills such as communication, assessment, planning and interventions. The development of Foundation degrees in Children's Social Care might enable quicker qualification of support staff working alongside social workers and offer differently qualified but supervised support to families.

## PREPAREDNESS FOR WORK

9. The evidence base drawn on to underpin the current 2020 Children's Workforce Strategy (2009) is based primarily on the 2008 DCSF/CWDC Joint Priority Review (JPR) rather than on the three year DH funded Evaluation of the Degree.<sup>6</sup> Many HEIs have grave concerns that some of the statements about the preparedness of newly qualified workers may be misleading in that 54% of those who contributed to the study (502) said that they felt prepared “just enough” for the job they were in. Along with the 32% who said they felt “fully” or “quite a lot” prepared, this equates to 86% feeling reasonably equipped, comparable with the 85% of 2,357 newly qualified teachers questioned in 2005, who either “strongly agreed” or “tended to agree” their programme had prepared them to be effective. Notwithstanding concerns about the relative methodology for the JPR evidence, it appears expectations of newly qualified social workers by employers have increased and levels of work been allocated<sup>7</sup> that would be completely unacceptable in other professions such as teaching. First teaching loads are monitored and limited and would never include risky or problematic groups taken on unsupported. As with all other professionals after initial training, newly-qualified social workers should be equipped with the further skills and experience they need through a systematic programme of development (see paragraph 25 onwards) to promote an ongoing interest in research and curiosity for learning.

## CONTENT OF INITIAL TRAINING

10. The extensive body of evidence about the lived experiences of those using or needing social work services has demonstrated that families, individuals, and communities do not neatly fit into current adult/child service divisions. 80% of children known to children's social care services have an adult in the family with difficulties (eg addiction or substance misuse, mental health, disability, and experiences of family violence and/or poverty). Good social work practitioners need the generic body of knowledge that crosses service boundaries, and while being specialists in their role, can understand and be knowledgeable about the issues of risk, vulnerability and behaviours affecting children in their families or communities.

<sup>3</sup> LGA (2009) *Putting People First: Respect and Protect: respect, recruitment and retention in children's social work*, p 5, 12.

<sup>4</sup> Australian Association of Social Work: [Accessed 7 May 2009] Available: <http://www.aasw.asn.au/>

<sup>5</sup> The Schools of Social Work Denmark: [Accessed 7 May 2009] Available: <http://www.dsh-aa.dk/ECTSInformationPackage.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> DH, *Evaluation of the New Social Work Degree Qualification in England*, London: The Stationery Office, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Unison, *Still Slipping Through the Net? Front line staff assess children's safeguarding progress*, 2009; [www.unison.org.uk/aspresspack/pressrelease\\_view.asp?id=1328](http://www.unison.org.uk/aspresspack/pressrelease_view.asp?id=1328): Accessed 10/2/09.



11. Initial social work training needs to develop practitioners who are critical, reflective, self-aware, articulate, listening and evidence based decision makers with sound knowledge of relevant social policy, law, child development and lifespan psychology, and the basics in procedural competences. A fourth year in practice as an NQSW would build on this, further developing specialist practice skills, competences and knowledge in work with children and families.

12. The DH funded Evaluation noted that “‘Children and families’ appeared at the top of the list of 25 topics which were seen to relate strongly to working in practice settings and came joint fourth overall in terms of student satisfaction” (p 10). The development of specialist elements (“specific knowledge”) in initial training to enable social workers to be prepared for first posts in specialist settings such as children’s and families’ needs to be carefully considered in the light of an overall curriculum and students’ preference for keeping their options for employment settings open. It would be better to retain staff in social work than lose them by specializing too early, restricting their career choices and potential contribution to integrated services.

13. The degree requirements were defined by knowledge areas specified by DH, practice competences defined by National Occupational Standards, GSCC standards and the Code of Practice, and the Benchmark Statement for Social Work approved by QAA and revised in 2008. It may well be that DCSF should be involved in ensuring that knowledge areas specified by them are also included in the rules and requirements for the degree. Scotland funded the development of “Key Capabilities” by the point of qualifying for children’s and families’ workers (following the death of Caleb Ness in 2003) and this was achieved successfully by a collaboration supported by the Scottish Institute between universities, employers (practice teachers) and service users working together on knowledge areas for child care.<sup>8</sup> Such an approach would be welcomed by HEIs in England.

14. By comparison, the content of social work training in Denmark is defined as strongly traditional knowledge areas of social work, applied social sciences, law, psychology and psychiatry, placement competences, and specialist practice based projects. US Masters programmes sometimes offer Year 2 specialist Children and Families modules, but only because students already have a first degree.

15. Practice learning constitutes 50% of the degree in England (200 days). This increase from 130 days, together with the removal of the Local Authority (LA) Key Performance Indicator for practice learning since 2003, has produced pressures for universities and employers in delivering quantity of placements and maintaining quality. Fitting 200 days into two rather than three year Master’s programmes is especially tight. However the benefit of the additional time in practice is particularly relevant to students entering social work training at 18–19.

## QUALITY

16. The regulatory oversight of Social Work training has been conducted in an atmosphere of constructive criticism and development between GSCC and HEIs and has usefully built on the quality assurance systems developed in HEIs by the QAA. It has been much appreciated that, since the introduction of the degree, valuable time has been saved by removing duplicated quality assurance systems. JUC SWEC is committed to continuing work in partnership with SWAP, GSCC and other stakeholders for quality enhancement of social work training and has already been active in collaboration on Suitability guidance for Social Work, Admissions, PQ, External Examiner standardization and JSWEC (the national social work conference for research in learning, teaching and practice).

17. Areas that need improvement and/or development are:

- arrangements, pay, recognition and approval of suitably qualified External Examiners for each social work degree could be improved by more rigorous GSCC oversight (formerly these were approved by the regulatory body);
- literacy standards of some students: 75% of programmes were judged to be providing good quality programmes,<sup>9</sup> but it is clear some employers have expressed concerns and HEIs have limited resources and time to offer remedial education;
- social work academic career and pay structures, including keeping academic staff research active and up to date with practice—comparisons with medicine show that where professional development is embedded and practice and the academy consistently interact, it is everybody’s business to develop the professionals of the future and keep engaged with practice; and
- the numbers of students qualifying and the numbers of courses offering social work education, which have both increased, but not necessarily evenly across England. It may be that a better overview of workforce planning is needed to ensure that supply, demand and spread are more evenly matched.

<sup>8</sup> IRISS, *Student Focus on Child Care and Protection, 2008, Scotland* [Accessed 7.5.09] Available: <http://www.iriss.ac.uk/search/node/key+capabilities>

<sup>9</sup> GSCC, *Raising Standards: Social Work education in England 2007–08 Summary*, London:GSCC, 2009, p 14

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## HOW CAN THE QUALITY, SUITABILITY AND SUPPLY OF PRACTICE PLACEMENTS BE ASSURED?

18. Strengthening the priority and standards for practice learning would enable HEIs to clarify with employers their respective and shared responsibilities for placement provision and support. Practice placements need good quality practice learning environments, sufficiency of well-qualified practice teachers/assessors (and competent in the setting), leadership and coordination from employers (practice development and operational managers), and good systems of support, management and quality assurance in the university.

19. Overall, many more students want to work in Children and Families than there are placements available. The DH Evaluation found that 90% of students had at least one placement in a setting linked to children and families; many were in day centres, the voluntary and private sector. Where Local Authorities provide placements they usually provide good learning experiences but these are often fewer in quantity because of pressures on operational services and because agencies are less willing to take students on first placements into children's teams.

20. Some Local Authorities (LAs) have dedicated "Practice Learning Coordinators", others have no-one within the organisation to oversee placements. In addition, some LAs choose to pay their Coordinator to focus on a particular area, such as Children & Families, to the detriment of Adult services, or *vice-versa*. Some practice learning/development coordinators are placed within HR teams where there is less knowledge of social work training requirements. Without someone knowledgeable and specific to liaise with, it is virtually impossible for HEIs to arrange placements. Stronger partnerships between employers and HEIs assist the managing of the joint responsibility for practice learning and its integration with the academic programme. Reintroduction of the Key Performance Indicator for employers and a Practice Teaching Qualification requirement, together with making the Employers Code of Practice (GSCC) mandatory would improve the situation.

21. Significant research has been conducted in HEIs throughout England on practice learning<sup>10</sup> and the outcomes of training and education,<sup>11</sup> which would be useful to contribute to the thinking of the Taskforce and the Select Committee.

## SUPPLY OF INITIAL TRAINING

22. Social Work is seen as a positive subject for HEIs to offer for a number of reasons:

- it accords frequently with mission statements to provide students with professional training opportunities to contribute to the economy and to local communities and employers;
- it was judged to be among the top 10 subjects for applications<sup>12</sup> and the top 12 for financial return;<sup>13</sup>
- the Universities UK policy group for health and social care courses supports the provision of these socially beneficial courses, though highlights that practice placements are a concern; and
- the combination of HEFCE and bursary funding has been a very effective way of reducing student debt and attrition.

23. Factors that may affect the supply of initial training include:

- variation in numbers from year to year;
- availability of practice learning opportunities of sufficient quality and quantity;
- removal of HEFCE funding;
- commissioned models of funding allocation; and
- shortages of sufficiently well qualified, experienced and research active academic staff (due to demographic change).

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<sup>10</sup> See for example:

Doel, M. (2006), *Improving Practice Learning in Local Authorities 1: Developing Effective Strategies*, London: Skills for Care, "Capturing the Learning" series.

Parker, J, Whitfield, J and Doel, M. (2006), *Improving Practice Learning in Local Authorities 2: Workforce Planning, Recruitment and Retention*, London: Skills for Care, "Capturing the Learning" series.

Doel, M. (2005), *New Approaches in Practice Learning*, London: Skills for Care, "Capturing the Learning" series.

Doel, M, Deacon, L and Sawdon, C. (2004), *An audit of practice learning in the first year of the social work degree*, Sheffield/ Practice Learning Taskforce.

Doel, M, Hollows, A, Pengelly, H and Nasr, N. (2004), *Workforce Development Needs in South Yorkshire*, Sheffield Hallam University/TOPSS.

Parker, J, Doel, M and Whitfield, J. "Does practice learning assist the recruitment and retention of staff?" to Research, Policy and Planning. (accepted)

<sup>11</sup> See for example:

Carpenter J *et al.*, 2005, *Evaluating Outcomes in Social Work Education*. SCIE/SIESWE and ongoing research project for DH: *Evaluating Outcomes for Interprofessional Training to Safeguard Children*, 2006–08.

<sup>12</sup> *Times* report on Universities for 2007–08.

<sup>13</sup> *Independent* 30 April 2009.

24. There is no coordinated model for workforce planning of social workers linked to training/education. JUC SWEC works nationally, regionally and locally with employer groups and Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) and Skills for Care and would be pleased to contribute to the development of such a model, and to working with employers (and DCSF/DIUS/CWDC) on planned and committed numbers for qualifying and post-qualifying students. We have been involved in the discussion and development of the Children's NQSW and the Early Professional Development and Advanced Practitioner proposals as part of the DCSF/CWDC Children's Advisory Group.

#### POST-QUALIFYING TRAINING AND CAREER PATHS

25. JUC SWEC strongly supports a holistic reappraisal of the career pathway for social workers, linking well-supported first positions for newly qualified workers (with good supervision and induction, and protected caseloads), with opportunities to remain in practice and continuing professional development opportunities embedded in the workforce arrangements.

26. Post-qualifying programmes have been developed since 2005 in children and families, adults and mental health, practice education and leadership and management to offer consistent awards across England. Take up has been limited: employers need backfill and social workers need time allocated to ensure they can be equipped with specialist skills and knowledge alongside supervised practice experience. Where social work teams are stretched, opportunities for accessing PQ programmes are curtailed. Removal of ring-fenced funding directly affected numbers of social workers taking up PQ training—conversely ring-fencing improved numbers of social workers taking the Child Care Award and PQ1 (Stage 1 of the 1995 PQSW, Post-qualifying Award in Social Work).

27. The link between post-qualifying training, continuing professional development, NQSW and PRTL (Post Registration Training and Learning—required for re-registration with GSCC every three years) is not clear cut. It would be useful to make this link clearer and more specific and linked to PRTL requirements and to provision of time in the workplace for study.

28. The new PQ framework has engaged HEIs in collaborating with employers to develop robust assessed and research informed programmes that offer the benefits of fully integrated academic and professional awards. Now, the framework would benefit from further development for:

- integrating requirements for practice teachers/educators to the framework;
- greater clarity for accessibility to employers and practitioners;
- strengthening research elements and awards;
- opportunities for professional doctorates; and
- higher awards available to research academics or lecturer/practitioners, researcher/practitioners.

JUC SWEC is working with a GSCC led development group on improvements, which could be more effectively introduced with government support.

29. Making social workers feel valued and supported in their continuing professional development would improve retention. Retention of social workers would be more valuable for children and families who could forge long-term relationships with them. In this instance the provision of a charter for continuing professional development,<sup>14</sup> protected learning with perhaps the introduction of "Balls/Johnson" days for social workers (similar to in service "Baker" days for teachers introduced in the 1980s) could enable access to high quality programmes of study, developed jointly with employers and accredited for awards by higher education (not just training). This would contribute to engagement of practitioners, transferability and credibility of awards, and ensure that social workers in both children's and adult services would share access to a common framework for career development and practice improvement.

30. HEIs deliver post-qualifying supervision, mentoring and management programmes to some senior social work staff alongside employers, the Skills Academy, Skills for Care and CWDC. This is an important area still undergoing significant development to support front line practice and the professional development of managers. They need suitable training and preparation for these roles and time to ensure social work practitioners are supervised, mentored and managed (not necessarily all by the same person). Opportunities for development of managers' roles to avoid losing touch with practice would be helpful. Workers in teams that cross over between children's services and other interdisciplinary specialist services such as CAMHS may need more complex supervision and access to different expertise.

*May 2009*

<sup>14</sup> DH, Options for Excellence Recommendation, London: The Stationery Office, 2006.

### Memorandum submitted by the Association of Professors of Social Work

The Association of Professors of Social Work (APSW) is a membership organisation open to all those eligible in the United Kingdom. Currently, it has a mailing list of 102. This submission is based upon discussions held at a meeting with approximately 30 members in March, 2009.<sup>15</sup>

APSW welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this call for evidence and would be pleased to contribute further to the work of the committee.

#### SUMMARY

- Academic entry requirements to social work training need attention and good practice in relation to selection processes needs to be disseminated.
- A qualifications framework is offered as a possible way forward.
- It is important that initial training retains a generic focus.
- Post-qualifying training should be based upon recognised academic qualifications and should contain research training.
- There is a need for investment in the social work academic workforce and the research infrastructure in social work and social care.

#### 1. ENTRY ROUTES TO THE PROFESSION

1.1 The evaluation of the social work degree commissioned by the Department of Health and carried out by Kings College (2008)<sup>16</sup> found that flexible approaches to achieving a social work qualification have been maintained since the introduction of the degree.

1.2 There are a range of entry routes to social work training which allow for mature entrants, re-entrants and those considering a career change. The GSCC's analysis of the composition of the intake on social work programmes for 2007–08 indicates that 24% of students study at Master's level, 64% at degree level. A further 12% are sponsored on employment based routes and/or part-time.<sup>17</sup> Mature students continue to make up the majority of the intake with students over the age of 25 accounting for 61% of total intake.

1.3 An issue which has been of concern to members of the APSW concerns the variability of the academic requirements for entering degree programmes. There are concerns that students with good A Level grades are not applying for courses and that entry requirements for some programmes are very low. A complex array of factors may be at play here including the relentless criticism of social work in the national media, pressures on HEIs in relation to student numbers and a lack of recognition of the need for social workers to have the intellectual skills to engage in contemporary practice.

1.4 However, it would be unwise to focus on A Levels, given the variety of entry routes to training and the commitment to widening participation which we support. We note the difficulties there appear to be in assessing the quality of Access programmes or the quality of a student's overall performance on Access courses. Universities have developed a range of imaginative selection procedures in order to assess potential and capability. There is a need to share "best practice" in this area and the APSW would wish to work with other organisations on this. For example, we note the existence of the SWAP website for admissions tutors which offers the opportunity to share good practice.

1.5 Overall, it is imperative that the evidence base is strengthened in order to better understand the links, for example, between academic ability and being a "good" social worker. The Association considers that the lack of a substantial evidence base in this area reflects a wider issue which is the historic low level of resourcing of research in social work and social care.<sup>18</sup> This has had implications at a range of levels including supporting the teaching of research skills to social work students, thus encouraging them to be "research minded".

#### 2. STRUCTURE OF TRAINING

The following framework has been developed by members of the APSW as a way forward.

2.1 Build on the Foundation Degree in social care, making it the qualification route for those who may not have the critical thinking capacity and conceptual skills to be social workers who undertake complex assessments and care planning, but who can make a strong contribution within direct care roles, building relationships and transferring skills, and as social educators with children, young people and families, and with disabled people and people with mental health difficulties, similar to social pedagogues in Europe.

<sup>15</sup> The authors are indebted to the following colleagues for their help in preparing this submission: Ray Jones, Richard Pugh, Jonathan Parker and Hilary Tompsett.

<sup>16</sup> *Evaluation of the New Social Work Degree Qualification in England Volume 1: Findings*, King's College London: Social Care Workforce Research Unit.

<sup>17</sup> General Social Care Council (2009) *Raising Standards: Social Work Education in England, 2007–2008*, London, GSCC.

<sup>18</sup> *A Social Work Research Strategy in Higher Education 2006–2020*, <http://www.swap.ac.uk/research/strategy.asp>

2.2 Require a higher intellectual capacity for those admitted to the three year undergraduate, or two year post-graduate, degree in social work, recognising the critical analysis and appraisal skills required by social workers in collating dispersed and diverse information, making complex and crucial decisions based on sometimes incomplete and possibly conflicting information, managing risks whilst also seeking not to be unnecessarily restrictive, and being able to present judgements logically and cogently, based on best knowledge, in discussions with resource holders, and with decision-makers in legal proceedings and within their own and other agencies. They would also be the leaders of the future within social care and social work, promoting its value and competence base, and ensuring its contribution is developed and safeguarded for the benefit of children, families, and disabled and older people.

2.3 Keep the initial qualifying degree, as well as the recognised MA route, as the basic qualification for all social workers, where core professional values and ethics, and core generic professional skills (such as interviewing; collating and critically evaluating information), are developed. Knowledge about development across the age range, the needs of children, and the nature and impact of mental health difficulties, drug and alcohol misuse, and disability would underpin this education. We need to recognise also that qualifying social workers should not be required to restrict their decisions about future social work employment too early. Decisions about future work choices are likely to be influenced by availability of employment, and its location, at the time of completing the initial qualifying degree. If at this point newly qualifying social workers are already constrained in the work they can seek we may see very early leakage from the profession, compounding workforce scarcity. Mid-career professionals may also want to re-orientate their role and work, moving from, say, children's or adults' social work, and this would be facilitated by having an initial generic qualification with a requirement and opportunities for subsequent specialist training re-training. The danger otherwise will be a drift away from the profession as the only relief from work which has become overly stressful or less satisfying.

2.4 Require a newly-qualified worker year where specialist education and training is initiated, with successful completion of this probationary period being required for recognition as a qualified social worker entitled to registration.

2.5 Have an additional year of experience and education leading to a Master's degree in specialist social work for those who have the capacity, capability and competence to move into advanced practice and supervisory and training roles.

2.6 Overall, we consider that these proposals would not only strengthen current training and underscore the complexity of the tasks social workers engage in, they would also help strengthen the standing of social work with other professionals. The latter is vital. Social workers need to have the capacity to interact and communicate effectively with a range of senior professionals, such as medical consultants and judges. This cannot be achieved simply by aspiring to a common-language, but must be rooted in a thorough education, which includes the nurturing of an ability to research and assimilate new knowledge on an on-going basis, for example, in response to understanding the medical needs of a child with a complex genetic condition and their family.

2.7 These proposals also offer a framework for building up the capacity of the social care workforce. There has been some discussion about the possible utility of a social pedagogy model as used, for example, in Denmark and Germany. This model has considerable potential and could create exciting possibilities and we recognise that interest in this has emerged partly as a result of concerns about the experiences of children and young people in residential care. We share the concerns to improve practice in this area and to raise the status and qualifications level of residential workers. However, it should be noted that in Germany social pedagogy is a graduate profession, indeed the education of social pedagogues takes place in the more prestigious academic institutions, with opportunities to study to doctoral level. These institutions have academically challenging curricula, incorporating, for example, social theory, alongside more practice-oriented aspects. The population of children in care is also very different to ours. Thus, it is important to consider carefully how the best features of this model may be developed, which need to take account of the intellectual underpinnings of the German system and the differences in the care populations. Our proposal to develop Foundation degree level key workers with children and families may be the place to start from to take account of current workforce and demographic factors.

### 3. CONTENT OF INITIAL TRAINING

3.1 Kings College (2008) found that social work educators are teaching to the DH requirements for the degree and that most research participants reported positive experiences of teaching and learning on the degree. However, the CWDC argue that based upon their work with NQSWs and employers in Spring 2008 and a "deep dive" activity in 2008 that the current arrangements for training of social workers are not "fit for purpose".

3.2 We would suggest that it is important that a careful and considered look is taken at the research evidence which exists and that the notion of "satisfaction" is interrogated rigorously. For example, "satisfaction" levels can relate as much to low as to high expectations of what good practice should consist of. We would suggest that examples of "best practice" in relation to employer-HEI partnerships are collected as part of the call for evidence of the taskforce chaired by Moira Gibb.

3.3 The APSW has considered the call by Lord Laming for the introduction of specialist training after the first year. As outlined above, it considers that it would be problematic to introduce specialist and separate education for children's social workers and adults' social workers so early within the initial social work qualifying degree.

3.4 Within the initial qualifying degree the focus should be on the skills and knowledge required by all social workers, in terms of interviewing, analysing, assessing, care planning, and working with people to make changes in their situation or behaviour. Students need to learn about the resources which can be mobilised to assist individuals and families, and the powers and processes which can be used to protect when necessary. They need to develop "research mindedness" in order to engage effectively with the complexity of contemporary practice.

3.5 Specialised training in children's and adults' services is also important and necessary. This is why there should be a post-degree probationary practice year following the initial qualifying degree, focused on the specialist area of work within which the newly-qualified worker is then employed.

3.6 It is important to recognise that current training incorporates 200 days of practice learning (50% of the degree). The removal of the Key Performance Indicator for practice learning in 2003 has contributed, alongside the increase in placement length, to serious difficulties in some areas.

3.7 There is a sense among members of the APSW that relationships between employers and HEIs need to be strengthened in order to carry out our joint responsibilities in relation to social work education. The Association has written to Moira Gibb, the chair-person of the taskforce, suggesting that a small working group is established as a sub-group of the taskforce in the context of addressing the priority given to practice learning particularly.

3.8 Overall, we would note that the social work academic workforce has received little explicit investment in relation to meeting a complex number of demands (for example, demands arising from the Research Assessment Exercise, expanding student numbers, keeping in touch with contemporary practice and ensuring that good quality professionals emerge from the universities). Research carried out on its demographic composition has pointed to the fact that it is an ageing workforce (47% of social work academics are aged 50 or over) and that low levels of investment have been apparent in terms of building up its research capacity for the future.<sup>19</sup> We would draw the committee's attention to the Social Work Research Strategy, mentioned previously which, based upon a range of studies of resourcing, demographic profile and other dimensions of the research/practice interface, outlined the need for action in areas such as the following:

- Increasing the spend on social work R&D.
- Establishing practice posts with responsibility for undertaking research.
- Increasing the proportion of social work educators in HEIs with post-graduate research qualifications.
- Improving the visibility of social work research and developing its public profile in a positive way.

3.9 We also recognise the need to break down the barriers and boundaries between social work teaching and practice. Skilled practitioners are currently involved in selection, training and the assessment of practice, but further encouragement and support is needed from agencies to recognise and consolidate these roles. Similarly, we also recognise the need for social work academics to continue to involve themselves in practice. This would be an area we would wish to take forward in a number of arenas such as any working group set up with employers. However, it is also imperative that social work academics engage their own employers in discussions about this and this is happening in some institutions. The APSW will continue to take this forward.

#### 4. POST-QUALIFYING TRAINING

4.1 There is an urgent need for the current post-qualifying framework to be simplified and rationalised. Our strong preference is for a framework which is based upon existing, internationally well-recognised qualifications such as Masters and PhD, including professional doctorate, programmes. The current system does not have international recognition and is not easily understood by practitioners or HEIs. Moreover, research training is not embedded in the current framework and this is a serious obstacle to developing "research minded" practitioners. Employers need to be challenged and supported to recognise the value of a highly skilled and well-educated workforce. It is not clear that the current systems are working to deliver coherent packages in regions. There has been a proliferation of programmes in some areas and in some specialisms resulting in gaps or over-provision.

4.2 Moreover, the benefits to agencies of staff undertaking good quality post-qualifying training are often poorly understood. For example, dissemination of the learning of those doing post-qualifying programmes in child welfare and protection is not routinely undertaken in our experience. Thus opportunities are not always taken to build learning organisations. We would welcome the opportunity to develop strategies in this area based upon our local experiences. For example, some of us have been involved in supporting local

<sup>19</sup> A Social Work Research Strategy in Higher Education, <http://www.swap.ac.uk/research/strategy.asp>

safeguarding children boards in the wake of the death of Baby P and have offered resources to support training and research. We would also draw the committee's attention to the Making Research Count partnership between universities and employers and the work currently being carried out by universities on mentorship and support for the CWDC practitioner research projects.

## 5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

5.1 Once again, can we state that we welcome the opportunity provided by the Committee to offer some of our views on this important topic and we would be pleased to contribute further if required to do so.

May 2009

*Witnesses:* **Professor Lena Dominelli**, Universities UK, **Professor Stephen Scott**, Universities UK, **Hilary Tompsett**, Chair, Joint Universities Council Social Work Education Committee, and **Professor Sue White**, Chair, Association of Professors of Social Work, gave evidence.

**Q69 Chairman:** Let me welcome Professor Sue White, Hilary Tompsett, Professor Lena Dominelli and Professor Stephen Scott. It is a pleasure to have you all here. I apologise that the Committee is a little thinner than usual because of the imminence of the European elections, but that will be made up entirely by having such quality. There will be a £50 fine for anyone else who speaks behind the Chair. We usually keep that for people whose phones ring, so would everyone turn their mobiles off, please. That reminds us all that we have to do it too. This is an extremely important inquiry for us. As you know, we are doing it in parallel with inquiring into the training of teachers, and we have our special advisers—our home team. As has been said, it is a small world, so you are going to know most of the people behind you and to the side of you. I am going to whiz through things quickly, so do you mind if we do not use titles, and go to first-name terms early on? That cuts down the cross-questioning. Is that all right? Jolly good. I shall give everyone a chance to encapsulate where they think we are on training social workers. We think that we can add value by having a serious inquiry into this topic, but you might feel that we are just wasting time and there is no added value in it. Do you have a view?

**Professor White:** Obviously not the latter; it is very important. Social work is particularly under the spotlight at the moment—and about time. People might know that I am sitting on the task force as well, which is exercised with, at least in part, similar issues. This attention to what we believe is an extremely difficult job that requires complex analytical skills and particular personal qualities that not everybody has is extremely welcome.

**Hilary Tompsett:** I just wanted to say thank you very much for this opportunity to contribute to the Select Committee's thinking. I am here in my role as chair of JUC SWEC, which is a member organisation of 70-plus universities.

**Chairman:** Which means what? *Hansard* suddenly looked panicky, so would you tell us what that means?

**Hilary Tompsett:** JUC SWEC is the Joint Universities Council Social Work Education Committee—the universities that offer social work education. I am also here to speak from my experience as a registered social worker. I have worked as a practitioner and manager across children's services and adult services—including the

elderly and mental health—and with renal unit problems. Obviously, I am also a lecturer and a researcher, so I am speaking as a product of a generic post-graduate degree, but also showing that people who are committed to the values and principles of social work can stay in engagement with the social work profession, so it is a tribute to the profession, I hope. I am grateful to be able to contribute to the development of the profession at this critical time, because I think it is a critical time.

**Professor Dominelli:** Thank you for giving me this opportunity to address the Committee. I am here on behalf of Universities UK. To deal directly with your question about whether the inquiry can add value, I certainly hope so because for far too long social work education and practice in this country have been in the doldrums, and I see this as an opportunity to give the profession some new vision, resources and strength, building on a foundation that is already stronger than it used to be but which still has to be rooted in universities and research and evidence-based practice, and in understanding where new developments come from. There has to be critical capacity to think and innovate to provide the best possible services for all services users, which could some day be any one of us in this room.

**Chairman:** Thank you. Stephen, you are very welcome. This is new territory for us and we had a session last week in which we exemplified again our breadth of interest in children, schools and families. We had the two Secretaries of State talking to us about health and children, and schools and families, and about how teams can work better together. So, you are welcome indeed.

**Professor Scott:** Thank you. I do come from health. I am a doctor, but wearing one hat I work with social workers in an adoption and fostering team, and we train social workers from a number of London boroughs in their post-qualification degrees. So, I have views about the quality of people who come into it. Wearing my other hat, I am director of research and development at the National Academy for Parenting Practitioners, which the Minister, Beverley Hughes, set up because she was persuaded of the argument that the good news is that there are things that social workers can do with parents and children that work—for example, in stopping abuse and improving child outcomes. The bad news is that those things are not yet well enough taken up by a number of work force organisations and in training,

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so we are there to be an independent academy pushing up standards. There are things there that work and perhaps academics like me have not been good enough in getting the story out in the past 20 years. There is lots there that works.

**Chairman:** Thank you. Should we get straight into the questioning? I will ask John to set us off because we are going to start with quality assurance in social work education.

**Q70 Mr Heppell:** There now seems to be a gap that has developed between the academic view and the employers' view of competence. I think that there is a fair amount of criticism from employers in terms of the degree not delivering what it is expected to deliver: social workers who are highly competent when they have finished their degree. The consultation with newly qualified social workers showed that one in seven newly qualified social workers said that they thought the degree had not prepared them at all for the roles they were going to have as social workers. Why has this gap developed? The Association of Directors of Children's Services—ADCS—has come up with a list of things that it says are missing from the current training. What are your views on that?

**Chairman:** Who wants to start? Sue?

**Professor White:** I can start. It is a very complicated picture. I am sure that you do not want me to say that, but it is. I do not think that we can separate out the issues about the different perceptions—for a start I am not sure that there are different perceptions. I think that we probably agree with employers that it would be very difficult to prepare newly qualified social workers for some of the tasks that they are tasked with as soon as they qualify, unless they were coming into qualifying training with perhaps many years of working within statutory social work and knew a lot about it. There is an endemic shortage of practice learning opportunities and a pressing need for employers and higher education institutions to work together. It sounds very social worky and wishy-washy, but there is a need for some real involvement of employers with HEIs, which paradoxically did exist in a much stronger form in the diploma in social work days, when directors would often sit on programme boards, for example. There has been a significant change in the demands on newly qualified social workers in child care. You will know all this already. There are high vacancy rates in some areas. There are issues about support. It is not something that lends itself to a simple answer. It is part of the general problems that had arisen systemically over a number of years in children and families work. There are also some challenges for higher education. There are some very contradictory imperatives around, all of which have their own logic. One might be widening access, creating more diversity in the social work work force—we can see the arguments for that—but if we are going to widen access there must be robust assessment processes. If we have a low barrier, we have to have tight criteria to make sure that only the people who can do the job get through. At the moment, because of the target regimes in HEIs, there

are targets for widening access and targets for retention. Clearly, if you are trying to educate a professional work force there could be some issues there, particularly for institutions that may be taking people with lower entrance requirements. People are caught in a bit of a double bind as a result of that particular target. There are the pressures in the employing agencies themselves and also for some employers in children's services: people at high levels do not necessarily understand what social work tasks are. So, maybe expectations are very high. We know that social workers are very unhappy with the levels of supervision that they are getting in some employing agencies. I do not think that we get very far and it has gone on a little bit. "It is the HEI's fault." "It is the employer's fault." It is very difficult to attribute blame and it is very complicated, but it is much easier to see what we might do to try to make a more productive working relationship between employers and educating institutions.

**Chairman:** Anyone else?

**Hilary Tompsett:** I just want to add to that because Sue has given a really good overview of the complexity. Sometimes it seems as though we spend a lot of time thinking about the difficulties and how we find a way through. I do not think that HEIs are complacent about the fact that some qualifying social workers feel under-equipped. We would always be seeking to improve that. One of the big questions is whether there is a bit of a mismatch. Sue touched on the mismatch of what we expect people to be able to do as a beginning professional. Some of the developments that have been happening in relation to thinking about what kind of preparation people such as newly qualified social workers are getting when they get into the workplace might be a key to helping bridge this gap between our expectations. We want people to be out there who are competent. We do not want anyone who is not able to do the job. It does not help the service users, families or carers. It certainly does not do the universities proud. It does not do the individual workers any service because they do not stay. If they feel out of their depth, they are likely to move, not stay and commit to the social work profession. It is in all our interests to work together to solve this. We have some joint work going on with agencies and employers and with HEIs, which is very productive, but it could be that we need to strengthen some of those relationships between employers and HEIs. That may be one of the ways in which we could make suggestions about future change. The other important thing to remember is the activities in the social work degree. It might sound as though we have gained much more time, because until 2003 it was a two-year qualification—a DipHE. With the introduction of the new degree came an increase in the practice learning days. All students have to complete 200 days in a practice environment, which leaves you with much tighter constraints on what you can achieve in the academy. That is where it is really important to see this as a shared responsibility to make the practice learning experiences really good and testing, and to help people to understand the job, but also to make sure that the HEI meets their intellectual and conceptual needs.



**Chairman:** John?

**Mr Heppell:** Lena wanted to add something.

**Chairman:** You are not all going to get a go at each question, but never mind. I will be generous in the first round.

**Professor Dominelli:** There is an issue about different expectations. They are variable across the country, depending on universities and employers and their partnerships, but, by and large, employers are expecting specialist skills as a result of a qualifying programme.<sup>1</sup> That is a crucial difference between HEIs and employers. I would also like to add to what Sue and Hilary said about the partnership. A number of employers have not understood the degree of support that is needed in practice teaching and they need to take that much more seriously than has been the case to date. There is a huge shortage of placements across the country and the ones that exist are also under-resourced. I am happy to answer more questions about that. A partnership is only as good as the people in it and the resources that come along with it. I think those are the two crucial points.

**Q71 Mr Heppell:** I find that to be a very worrying response, to be quite honest. Effectively, what you seem to be saying to me—I am sure they would say exactly the same—is that the directors do not really understand what social work is about. We were saying that employers do not have a real grasp of what social workers actually need to do. I would have thought that most directors would have come through social work and would have a fair degree.

**Professor White:** It certainly was not meant as a generalised statement; it is something I have been hearing as part of my research and partly through engagement with the taskforce. Some social workers say that they are not supervised directly by somebody with a social work qualification. It is probably the exception, but there are then issues about decision-making very high up in children's services departments where, perhaps, directors do not have a social work background. It is, again, possibly a minority, but it is something that social workers on the ground talk about.

**Q72 Mr Heppell:** How do you ensure that social work educators have a good knowledge of current front-line practice? How do you keep track of that to make sure that it is not you that is out of touch with what is happening at the coal face, and not the employers?

**Professor White:** I can tell you how I do it. I do it by doing detailed research, which involves spending large amounts of time observing front-line practice. I feel that that enables me to speak quite authoritatively about what is going on in those organisations, but obviously the different experiences of different social work academics will reflect a variety. In both the submissions we have suggested that, along with improving the relationships between HEIs and children's services, we look for building-in opportunities for people from both practice and management to contribute

more to programmes—they do contribute to programmes—and for academics to be seconded to undertake research relationships. There are ways of doing it that do not necessarily mean going in and having a joint post, but it would be really good if we could build in systems that actually ensured that people were, in whatever way, knowledgeable about what was happening in organisations.

**Q73 Mr Heppell:** When you say you can tell us how you would do it, that seems to suggest that there is not a standard and that people do it differently.

**Professor White:** There is a requirement for people in higher education institutions to undertake research that is related to practice, but obviously that might be about a particular intervention in relation to children where they spend most of the time talking to the children or researching that intervention.

I think I had better hand over.

**Hilary Tompsett:** I was going to say that I was not sure about your question, because you were asking about practice educators and, in our terminology, "practice educator" has a particular meaning. I just wanted to clarify that. When we talked about partnership and the different people who are involved in training for social work students, we thought of the academic team in the university as being part of that practice education team, but each of them, when they are out on placement, would be attached to someone who would either be a practice educator or a practice assessor. So, your question was very interesting in thinking about how we both keep in touch with those joint and shared responsibilities. I think that I would come at it from a slightly different way, which is to say that the engagement with employers obviously takes place in a number of different ways. It takes place in the planning and the arrangements for the provision of social worker training, but it also takes place in terms of joint teaching—bringing practitioners in to teach the students and then perhaps working jointly with an academic member of staff. We are obviously also engaged in the training and development of those people who become the practice educators in the workplace. That is particularly interesting, because I think that we are in a good "win-win" situation. If we are working together to develop the practice educators in the workplace, they then become, if you like, the interface between the academy and the practice environment. Actually, it sometimes means that we can facilitate research; it facilitates access to understanding of how people learn, as well as understanding of what is going on in the service environment. So, the engagement with those practice educators in the workplace is really important. It is one of the changes that took place with the introduction of the new degree. To solve the problem of there not being enough practice placements, some of the criteria and requirements for practice educators in the workplace were changed to make it more like everybody's business to be involved in the education of the future professionals. However, what it meant was that the expectations, if you like, of those people were lowered, so that there would be a single module of

<sup>1</sup> *Note by Witness:* Employers are expecting specialist workers from a qualifying programme.

five days.<sup>2</sup> That is one of the things that we would look to the task force or this Select Committee to seek to challenge. Have we lost something that was really strong, which was about people who understood the interconnection between the knowledge and understanding, and the practice requirements?

**Chairman:** Lena is nodding there. Do you agree?

**Professor Dominelli:** I agree with that. I would also add another element. A lot of practitioners are coming to the university to teach and a lot of academics also teach and practise, and we have service users coming in as well. So, if we are giving the impression that we are not in touch with what is happening on the ground, that would not be correct; there are many models whereby we keep in touch.

**Hilary Tompsett:** One of the things that obviously changed with the 2003 new degree was that the General Social Care Council required the engagement and involvement of service users and carers in every programme that was approved. I speak as a member of the GSCC, so I am particularly proud of that kind of achievement. I think that it has brought about a sea change in HEIs and the delivery of social work education.

**Q74 Mr Heppell:** Hilary, you were quite proud at the beginning when you were telling us that you are a product of the generic degree. In all the evidence that we have had from people so far, everyone defends the idea of the generic degree. Lena said that that is part of the reason why there is a difference involved. What you said was that sometimes people expect—I cannot remember what the words were.

**Professor Dominelli:** A specialist worker at qualifying level.

**Mr Heppell:** Why not? Why cannot we talk about that, instead of a generic degree? There is a certain amount of criticism from local authorities about the fact that the generic degree does not prepare social workers for dealing with children's services or multi-agency work. So, why cannot we have a degree that is not generic and that is more of a specialist degree?

**Professor Dominelli:** May I reply to that? I think that the reason why we cannot have it is that there is an awful lot that social workers have to learn and three years is a very short time, although it sounds like a huge amount of time, to learn what I would argue is one of the most difficult professional tasks in the world. I think that I can back that up in terms of the complexity of the work that has to be done and because there is a wide range of knowledge that social workers have to grasp hold of, which the best social workers learn. That varies from social policy right through to skills around communication, interviewing and so on. I think that if we had longer, maybe we could specialise. Now, there are different models where we are trying to do a little specialisation in the final year of a degree. However, I think that if we look at some of the models of our competitors in the broader world—the US, for example—their specialisation occurs at masters

level, after students have had three years of generic training and time out in the field. Then they are brought in to specialise at MA level. If we are asking, as we should, that social workers should practise at the highest level when dealing with the most complex, contradictory personal and human relationships, that is a much better model than saying that we need to rush the training and that we expect social workers to cover economics, management, communication skills and all sorts of other areas of knowledge. We would do better by having a longer period in training, then arguing for specialisation. Otherwise, I would like to see some kind of ladder where our expectations of qualified social workers are that they would be able to involve themselves in holistic interventions, supporting families and individuals, doing analysis and assessment, but that the specialism around the highest, hardest end, which is child protection, mental health work and a range of other things, should require a higher-level qualification, post qualifying. I would argue that it should be at masters level.

**Professor Scott:** Yes, if you take a medical or psychology model, which are kind of analogous, they have to do basic training first and then specialise. You cannot become a child psychologist straight off the course.

**Hilary Tompsett:** May I say something about the nature of social work with children and families? I think it is really important. We recognise that we are in a difficult situation: shortages can sometimes make us feel more anxious to get people out into the workplace, and we need them to be taking on very difficult cases at the first level. However, we also need to be aware that in order to do a good job with children and families, it is clear that we have to recognise that children live in families, they live in communities. The needs of the adults around them will be absolutely critical. The assessment framework obviously took a particular angle on parenting capacity and also environmental factors and considered that it was really important for social workers to take account of them. I refer to two things that were really interesting. When the impact of the assessment framework was reviewed in 2003,<sup>3</sup> it was identified that where initial assessments were taking place, two thirds of them had identified that there were family environmental factors, and three quarters identified factors affecting parenting capacity such as mental health problems and domestic violence. If social workers did not understand what the issues were for the parents, and the law in relation to mental health and child care, they would not be able to give such good service to children and families. Two studies were produced in 2008.<sup>4</sup> Marion Brandon et al<sup>5</sup> looked at the 2003–05 serious case reviews, which obviously post-dated the

<sup>2</sup> *Note by Witness:* "Enabling Learning"—now an element of Specialist level post qualifying awards, replacing the Practise Teachers Award, phased out by September 2008.

<sup>3</sup> *Note by Witness:* Cleaver H, Walker S, Meadows P (2003) *Assessing children's needs and circumstances: the impact of the Assessment Framework* London: DH Publications, p11.

<sup>4</sup> *Note by Witness:* Two studies in relation to serious case reviews.

<sup>5</sup> *Note by Witness:* Brandon M et al (2008) *Review of Serious Case Reviews 2003–05*, London: The Stationary Office, p46, Appendix 2.

Victoria Climbié inquiry, and identified that parental mental health problems were present in 55% of the intensive sample, and domestic violence in 66% of the sample. So it is absolutely critical that not only do social workers understand the environment, the social science and the economic context in which families are growing up, it is also really important that they have a strong knowledge and understanding of the issues that might be relevant to the parents.

**Q75 Mr Timpson:** That leads quite nicely on to the issue that I want to discuss briefly, which is to do with qualities that we are looking for when as HEIs we are looking at the applications in front of us. The driving force behind the whole degree is to try to ensure that we churn out excellent social workers year after year. Unfortunately, we know that although there are excellent social workers—there are many very good social workers—we also, as we have heard, have those social workers who find themselves out of their depth and taking on cases that are too difficult for them, too early in their career. I would like to ask about the qualities that universities should be looking for. Sue touched on the particular personal qualities as well as the intellectual and academic qualities—both the intellectual and emotional intelligence that are needed. How far are our universities able to judge whether prospective students have those qualities right from the start? We are asking an awful lot of someone to show all the exceptional qualities that are needed to be an excellent social worker.

**Professor Scott:** There have been several studies in general on interviewing, which look at whether people can make predictions. They show that they are not particularly good. They can weed out the bottom 10% or 20%—those who are sort of autistic and not very social. Individuals privately think, “I’ve got a rather special skill at interviewing,” but that is not borne out by the evidence. You need to interview people to weed out those who are not there because they want to be and who do not have a realistic view. I return to the issue of intellectual capacity, which is very low. I do not know whether the Committee has the data on the GCSE, and I take the point about widening things, but I think that it is a very difficult task. Some local authorities now do aptitude tests before hiring social workers because they are so worried about that ability. In medicine, we have more or less given up interviewing: people are interviewed, but it is not considered a big weight and some medical schools take people just on A-levels, which I do not support, but it is an example.

**Professor White:** There is some work taking place at the Social Work and Social Policy Higher Education Academy on innovative approaches to admissions procedures, and I think that we need to share that kind of information. There are, for example, simulations—we have actually made one as part of a piece of our research—that can be used to create complex case material, which people are asked to analyse and think about. There are probably some more innovative ways in which we could at least test the analytical skills. We are kind of stuck with either

psychometric tests or the interview for the personality traits, but I think that there is an opportunity for higher education institutions to think carefully about imaginative ways in which we can try to assess more accurately the sort of people who might be able to perform not only academically, conceptually and intellectually, but also practically and emotionally.

**Professor Dominelli:** I would like to add another thing to that. There are some innovative examples of good practice that combine interviewing individuals with group exercises looking at how social workers perform under the simulated conditions of a case study. They are then asked to explore certain questions and operate as a team when they have never met each other before. Those who observe that interaction use particular criteria to evaluate each individual’s performance as an individual and in the context of the group. In that sense, I think that you are trying to assess people’s capacity to think on their feet when using evidence where decisions need to be made very quickly, and their capacity to ask probing questions to get at what is underlining some of the things, such as what people really mean. I think that you can do a lot better than simply apply psychologicistic aptitude tests which may give you an idea about somebody under fixed conditions, but do not actually simulate the dynamic way in which social workers have to practise with people at the other end who always respond differently from the way that they<sup>6</sup> might think. For social workers, we have to aim at three different levels of competences. First, their personal skills as individuals: how do they relate to others and how do they understand how others operate? Then there is what I call the emotional dimension: how are they affected by really complicated and sometimes devastating situations that people have to respond to? Finally, there are the intellectual, knowledge and practical skills. I think that those things have to be co-ordinated to produce a good social worker. If you handle only one of them—either the intellectual or emotional, for example—without the practical and without bringing them all together, you are not going to make it as a social worker. The only other comment I would add is that, for many of us who have been in the profession for some time, as I have—I have also seen places across the world in one of my other guises—it is really important to ask ourselves what kind of social workers we want to produce and who we are producing them for. As a service user, would I want a particular person to work with me if I could not trust them enough to give me the best service? I would not want such a person to pass. I am clear that the fitness-to-practise test has to meet the criteria that I would set for myself if I was a service user wanting the best that we<sup>7</sup> can give.

**Q76 Mr Timpson:** How do we therefore best measure whether a student is fit to practise? Some of the skill areas you have mentioned are quite easy to measure, particularly intellectual ability and performance. Other aspects of the skill base required to be a social

<sup>6</sup> Note by Witness: They meaning the experts.

<sup>7</sup> Note by Witness: We meaning as a society.

worker are much more difficult to measure, such as personal and emotional skills. How can you be confident that universities can guarantee that students who come out of social work degrees are competent to practise?

**Professor Dominelli:** That is why we observe them. They are observed at the very beginning during the interview stage and we see how they act under simulated conditions. We then spend 100 days each year observing people at qualifying masters level and in the last two years of bachelor level. Additionally, three formal assessed direct observations are required by a practice teacher and a minimum of one is done by somebody else in the practice team. Social work students have to demonstrate that they are competent to practise by the way in which they work with people. Some people have asked whether we fail enough students. Perhaps we could tighten up there and fail more students than has been the case. We do fail students on the programme that I head at Durham. If they fail a placement, they have one more chance to resit it. Once that happens, that is it. We do fail students, but more could be failed. That relies on the observational capacity in observing people practising.

**Hilary Tompsett:** This is not just an assessment event with people saying, “You are the right person (for the profession),” or “You are not.” There is a process. We hope that people who apply for social work will have enthusiasm and commitment for the principles we think are important to keep them going through some difficult times. We try to find ways of assessing them that involve service users and carers, for example in interviews. They give feedback on whether the student comes across as respectful and conveys the qualities that we are looking for. That is only to decide whether students are eligible to come on the course. Students are not allowed to go out into placements until they have met the Assessed Preparation for Direct Practice.<sup>8</sup> Thresholds are built in to every programme as part of the requirements for approval. They cannot go out into a practice environment until they have shown themselves to be academically fit and have been assessed doing simulation activities. Those are done throughout the first year of undergraduate social work courses and in a slightly shorter time scale on masters programmes. They simulate activities that are relevant to practice such as interviews, writing letters to service users, analysing cases and being videoed and getting feedback. There is a chance to evaluate and to be evaluated. There is a threshold in that process. Before the final threshold at the end of the programme, students have two or three practice placements, during which certain aspects of their development are identified as meeting or not meeting the requirements. Some might be required to take a second go at their practice placements. The assessments at each stage are organised with a practice assessment panel, which combines people from the academic and practice environments. All the time, we are not just checking whether we think the person is okay, but asking whether they will be fit to carry out the duties of a social worker when they get there.

**Q77 Chairman:** A more general intake would allow you to refine, because students will all go into different areas of social work with different pedagogues. Surely having a foundation level would allow you to sort people in that way. After all, every child in this country knows that if they aspire to go into higher education but are not that clever, they should apply for a social work degree because it is the easiest way to get into a university.

**Hilary Tompsett:** No, it is not.

**Chairman:** Oh, it is. Come on, we have had evidence in this Committee that said it is. It is much easier than getting in for an education degree. We were told by your colleagues that it is the easiest subject in most universities to get into.

**Hilary Tompsett:** I don’t think I can accept that. When you look at the UCAS points for social work, they vary enormously. For some universities, they are very high and for others, they are not as high as they are for education.

**Chairman:** They vary between departments.

**Hilary Tompsett:** I have looked at the studies.

**Q78 Chairman:** So you totally disagree with the other evidence that we have had?

**Hilary Tompsett:** No, no, I am just saying that there is a huge variety. What we are dealing with is the fact that A-level points and UCAS points are not the same thing. When universities look at entry requirements, it is about not only those points but all the other requirements that social workers have to meet. They have to meet the maths, English and literacy requirements. They have to be checked by the Criminal Records Bureau and have an occupational health clearance.

**Q79 Chairman:** Hilary, they won’t have five A\*s at A-level, will they?

**Hilary Tompsett:** Some will.<sup>9</sup>

**Chairman:** Very rarely. Everybody who goes for a medical degree has three, four or five A\*s at A-level. Let us live in the real world. You know that you have a very mixed bunch coming into this. How do you sort out those who have the appropriate skills and those who do not?

**Professor White:** I have to make it clear that I am speaking as me now and not as chair of the Association of Professors of Social Work. I agree and disagree. I do not agree with the global statement that it is easier to get into social work than any other course. There are issues about that.

**Chairman:** I am trying to stir you up a bit.

**Professor White:** Yes, I know. If I had to nail my colours to the mast, I would say that I want to raise the entry requirements for a number of reasons. First, A-levels are a poor proxy, but they are something. Secondly, there is this issue, to which you have alluded, of bringing people into something that may result in them qualifying as a social worker, but which they may exit before that, perhaps because of some aspect of the role of social work as we probably mean it here—critical work with people in

<sup>8</sup> Note by Witness: Part of the DH/GSCC Requirements 2002.

<sup>9</sup> Note by Witness: 28% of students on social work training entered in 2006–07 with a degree already (GSCC, 2009, Raising Standards Full Report, para 28, p 6).

vulnerable situations that is about not only promoting and protecting but a whole range of other things to do with improving people's ability to make choices for themselves and so on. It is difficult work, so there needs to be some kind of process. If we are going to have a low barrier, we absolutely must have really rigorous and fiercely enforced assessments and routes. You do not want to exclude people who would be very good at certain caring roles from coming into the social work and social care work force. However, it is not the same job. There are different levels of intervention. I am in the fortunate position of being at a university where we have quite high entrance requirements, but there are universities that do not. It is not a straightforward matter. That does not mean that universities with low minimum entrance requirements are not producing some extremely good social workers, but I agree that there is probably some sort of correlation. It is, to invoke the much-used phrase, common sense.

**Chairman:** Sorry, I cut across Edward's question. Back to you, Edward.

**Q80 Mr Timpson:** To put it in a way that is perhaps palatable, would it be fair to say that the pressure put on HEIs to widen participation in higher education has meant that social work degrees have not been able to provide a strong voice for social workers, and that people are going into it thinking that it is not quite the level of profession that they were expecting it to be, and universities are willing to accept them because they want to widen their higher education portfolio?

**Professor White:** As Hilary said, it is extremely variable.

**Hilary Tompsett:** I did do a bit of research on UCAS points just to compare between social workers and teachers because I was interested in answering this question of whether we are accepting people with too low requirements. As I said before, it does not do us any favours to be taking on people who are not up to the job. It is distressing for them. It is not good to fail people who should never have been allowed in. The UCAS points for social work range from something like 128 to 371, which is a massive difference, but the majority of courses are between 200 and 300. When you look at education and teachers, the range does not go down so far at the bottom and goes up much higher at the top. Cambridge asks for about 450 points, but the middle band is roughly the same. We have this notion that people are making assessments beyond the UCAS points (system) in some universities. There could be a challenge to that by saying, "Are we sure that it is rigorous enough?" I think that that is a fair question. Maybe we will go back as a community to say that it is not acceptable to have those lower levels. There are other qualities, issues, attributes and thresholds of behaviour so we do not want to exclude people who could come into social work training and grow into the qualities that we want. If they do not develop those qualities, they will obviously not get through.

**Q81 Mr Timpson:** May I pick up on Stephen's point about intellectual ability. One of the complaints that I get about social work reports when I practise in the family courts is the poor standard of spelling and grammar. I know that they are under a lot of pressure to write the reports quickly so there has to be some leeway, but you would expect students of this calibre to be literate and numerate—basic skills. Is that under the radar too much? Are we being rigorous enough in assessing the level of ability?

**Professor White:** I think that that must be true because it is spoken about so regularly, but some students' work that I see is publishable, particularly at masters level. I have sent things to the Social Care Institute for Excellence and said, "This is the best thing that I have ever read on attachment theory. You should publish it." However, clearly family court judges are not making it up. There are issues, about which my views are well known, over the quality of information technology and support, and whether that is possibly producing the illusion of literacy problems or exacerbating problems that would not be as bad if the support systems were better.

**Professor Dominelli:** May I come in on that? I think that there is wide variability and that is part of the problem. You have excellent people at one end and very poor ones at the other. I think that it is to do with who is coming through to university and the training that they are getting in schools. I have a young son and I am appalled at the lack of concern in schools about spelling and grammar. They are not taught grammar as we were when we went to school and that is an issue. They arrive at university and are not able to—kind of like—string sentences together. I have found that at both bachelors and masters level—I have taught both at different universities. It then becomes the task of the university to bring them up to scratch, which I think is wrong, but that is variable as well because it is not the university's job. There are people at the lower end that Hilary was talking about admitted on to social work courses, but it is also true in natural sciences. I have worked across the divide and have seen many dreadful spelling in essays in the chemistry and physics departments, so it is a broader issue than just social workers.

**Q82 Chairman:** Perhaps that matters less. I have read the serious case reviews of some of the more high-profile cases recently and seen the level of illiteracy and illegibility—illiteracy on the part of some of the social workers and illegibility on the part of some of the health professionals, I have to say, Stephan.

**Professor Dominelli:** I agree and I think that that is where we should raise the bar. At the lower end, I have no doubt about the importance of raising the bar to raise the standards so that the norm is much higher than the lowest point.

**Q83 Chairman:** In a sense you are missing the point I was making when I intervened on Edward's question. Why not go for a more generic intake and then funnel people off? People might not be able to

become the highly professional social worker that you want to finish up with, but there might be other tasks in the social care area that are more appropriate.

**Professor Dominelli:** Then I think we should have a different degree for those. That is the separation that I would want to make.

**Q84 Chairman:** But the way you are playing it, you take in all these people with diverse qualifications, and, presumably, a significant percentage end up as failures, because you fail them and they do not go on to do anything else.

**Professor Dominelli:** No, they fail to qualify as social workers, but they get an academic qualification that does not allow them to do social work—that is the current distinction. I certainly would not disagree that we could allow for other elements, but then I would not want them to be called qualified social workers because that means something very specific about their capacity to intervene in people's lives.

**Hilary Tompsett:** That is the issue about the protected title that was introduced in 2005, which means that you cannot qualify as a social worker unless you have completed the honours degree as a minimum.<sup>10</sup> We have default awards for social care, but there is not a matching role or professional category.

**Chairman:** We found exactly these difficulties when we looked at this question in New York recently.

**Q85 Derek Twigg:** Is the funding system distorting best-practice approaches to recruitment and in relation to giving incentives to universities? Is there a problem there? Would we do things differently if that were not set up as it is?

**Hilary Tompsett:** May I say something to start? In a funny sort of way, we have a good news story to tell about social work because until the 1990s and 2000, applications for social work had been going down, so there was already quite a serious problem in the workplace, but the introduction of bursaries and the new degree<sup>11</sup> were recognition of the fact that we wanted to up the standards, and applications to universities trebled. In some cases, there were five times as many. That meant we could begin to be more choosy. That ought to be a good news story that we celebrate. Perhaps one reason why we are sitting here today talking about this is that it is still early days on the degree and whether it has had time to bed down and get over all the other problems. Perhaps your question about financing is broader because of the issues about ongoing recruitment in the workplace. Perhaps we also have to take into account the context of the vilification of social workers in the public press. That does not help to attract people to the work or to the degrees.

**Q86 Derek Twigg:** I read a comment by Bridget Robb, of the British Association of Social Workers, who told the Committee that universities have seen the subject as a cash cow.

**Professor White:** That is how I interpreted your question. We are going to have to invoke that word “variability” again. We know, from some of our academic colleagues, that some programmes are under pressure to increase student numbers. Again, that probably is not an issue for any of us sitting here, but there are pressures on institutions to increase student numbers, and social work is recruiting well, and it attracts the bursary. It seems to me that that is probably introducing perverse incentives, but it requires proper investigation. It all comes back to my original point, which is that that may be all right if there are not then disincentives for failing students who are not able to do the course. We have contradictory targets—increase numbers and widen access, but do not fail anybody, because there are financial penalties for that. One can always see the rationale for targets and terror when somebody is setting them, but when they are operationalised in organisations, they usually produce some kind of perverse effect. It does not take an awful lot of working out to see what effect that might produce.

**Q87 Derek Twigg:** Have they changed the root of the funding?

**Professor White:** No, it is more that universities, like other public sector organisations, need to keep their income streams robust. Some universities are very dependent on teaching income—they all depend on teaching income, but some more than others—and may be pressurising programmes to take more social work students, perhaps because their number of social policy students is falling. So, they get one set of falling admissions being offset against something that can recruit well, but then we have the question of whether they are the right people.

**Professor Dominelli:** May I come in?

**Chairman:** Remember to speak to the Chair. When someone asks a question in the corner, your voice goes that way, and we cannot hear.

**Professor Dominelli:** Sorry. I agree with what Sue said, but I would like to add a couple of other points. The idea that the bursaries are adequate to deal with student issues is wrong. There is a lot of student poverty with the bursaries, including in social work. We tend to have older students, who have a lot more commitments, so most students are actually working when they should not be. There is an idea that this is a cash cow, but it depends where you are at. For many universities, research is an important source of income—it means that they are not limited just to increasing student numbers—but income is variable, as Sue said. The other thing that is important in relation to funding, but which is grossly inadequate, is the amount of practice placements. There is not enough support and funding to produce high-quality practice placements so that students can learn how to be the best social workers that they can

<sup>10</sup> *Note by Witness:* You cannot register as a social worker either unless you have completed the honours degree as a minimum.

<sup>11</sup> *Note by Witness:* The new degree introduced in 2003.

be. So there is a huge issue around funding, which goes way beyond the simplistic view that some universities can make up numbers to get funds.

**Q88 Derek Twigg:** So is the logical argument that there should be more central planning and that employers should have much more say over numbers, rather than just relying on universities to recruit whatever numbers they can at the time?

**Professor Dominelli:** I would be reluctant to put the emphasis on employers, because we have been through employers being in charge of practice funds. That involved ring-fenced funding through the rate support grant, but it never came down to the placement level. Universities are better custodians of practice placements because they ring-fence them, and this is not going to work unless there is ring fencing. With the university, there is an audit trail, and you can check whether the money that was allocated to practice placements went that way.

**Q89 Derek Twigg:** I am sorry, but there is a slight contradiction in what you just said. A few moments ago, you said that there was a problem with placements and that there were not enough good placements, but now you are saying that universities are best placed to deal with them.

**Professor Dominelli:** I am saying that universities currently get the funding for placements and that they distribute it to the practice agencies at an agreed rate per day, depending on whether those placements are statutory or otherwise. In the past, that was not the case, but that is a separate issue from the overall lack of sufficient funding to provide the high-quality placements needed by the numbers of people in social work training today. So there is a shortfall between the number of placements that we have and the number that is needed, particularly in the statutory sector, which each student is now required to go into.

**Q90 Derek Twigg:** So isn't the system failing now?

**Professor Dominelli:** The system is not providing enough high-quality placements.

**Q91 Derek Twigg:** That's failure, then, isn't it?

**Professor Dominelli:** Yes, in that sense.

**Q92 Derek Twigg:** What is the solution? On the one hand, you are saying that it is not for local employers to deal with this, and on the other hand, you are saying that universities are best placed to do so, but we have a gap here.

**Professor Dominelli:** What I am saying is, first, that we need more funding to go into practice placements to provide the numbers that are required. Secondly, that funding should be held by universities, not employers, because employers have not been able to allocate it to practice placements in the way that universities have.

**Q93 Chairman:** Who are the employers, apart from local authorities?

**Professor Dominelli:** Voluntary sector agencies, private sector agencies—there is a huge diversity of employers, and that diversity is growing bigger by the year.

**Q94 Chairman:** Should we have something like a teacher development agency for this area? Is that not what is missing here?

**Professor White:** We have discussed this in various forums. The problem is that it is difficult to sustain a viable social work academy, because the numbers keep going up and down. With that model, it is virtually impossible to plan for the social work academic work force to make sure that there is somebody there to teach people when there is suddenly a huge surge in need. I can see why it might look attractive, but it would cause tremendous difficulties in terms of planning and the retention of staff in the social work academy. That is another problem—we are all getting old, and there might not be anybody there to teach anybody. The issue of research capacity in the work force, right the way through so that you have research-informed practitioners who can then become practitioner researchers and move into the academics, is very important, and all that would be jeopardised by a kind of feast and famine approach to funding.

**Q95 Mr Heppell:** On course content, it seems to me that at the moment there is no curriculum as such and that it is very much a case of the GSCC looking at things with three considerations: the Department of Health's requirements, the national occupational standards and the requirements of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. How different are courses at different universities at the moment, and should there be an agreed core curriculum that everyone should stick to?

**Hilary Tompsett:** Whether they cover the same ground is an interesting question, because when you unpick those requirements you will find that they are quite detailed. It is not as if they are giving carte blanche, saying, "You can do what you like, so long as you tick the boxes." One of our challenges is how to integrate those different sets of requirements, because currently when you devise a programme you have to go through each set of requirements and show how your programme will meet them, so you usually have about six documents addressing all those issues. It could be argued that we would gain from pulling them together and integrating them into some sort of core agreement. That would be something we could usefully do by bringing together all the key stakeholders, such as the employers, the HEIs and some service users and carers, so that we actually did not lose anything in that. In fact, I think that we can probably look at our Scottish colleagues because they have already done that, and they obviously took the view that it would be more beneficial to have an agreed kind of integrated set of requirements. I think that we would always hesitate before saying that we want a core curriculum, because actually it is not like a kind of French school where you want to walk in on a Monday morning and say, "You will be teaching law for childcare,"

because the models of delivery allow quite a lot of innovation and creativity, so we have distance learning programmes and programmes that are taught part time, so people are coming in and out. We have work that has been done on simulations that use all sorts of different materials and resources, so there is not necessarily one way to teach, and that would perhaps make it less possible to meet some of the needs of the cohorts of students we are identifying, because sometimes we can tailor the structure of the programme to address, for example, people who are in employment-based programmes. They often spend quite a bit of time in the workplace. Their needs might be different from those of some of the others.

**Professor Scott:** I cannot talk about the details, but it seems to me that there are certain common principles to use things that have been made to work, and certain people I see coming to my clinic do not know that there is a body of knowledge out there about what works. There is a great over-reliance on asking, “Why do you think that?”, rather than stating that there is a range of interventions for children, such as trauma-related cognitive behavioural therapy. They are told that they need psychoanalytic psychotherapy five times a week for two years—I am exaggerating only slightly—when there is no evidence that it helps children. In fact,

children come to me and say that they did not want to talk about the most painful bits of their lives. In the parenting practice there are programmes that reduce abusive parenting, such as hitting, shouting and demeaning, from say 50 % to about 20 %. I think that there does need to be a culture shift where people actually ask, “Well, gosh, what is working the best?”, rather than saying, “That suits me because I learned it 30 years ago and am comfortable with it.” They need to ask, “What is going to work the best for my clients?” I think that there is a real lack of that sense of inquiry about what will work and make a difference. In the States there have been six deaths due to various old-fashioned therapies, such as rolling people up in a carpet to try to get through to them. It is not quite that bad here, but there is some pretty bad practice. I think that modernising the content of the curricula, however it is done—

**Chairman:** Sorry, but I am going to pull the plug on this now, because we have another panel of witnesses to speak to. I am embarrassed that we do not have more time, and with four such talented witnesses we could have gone on for much longer. Will you remain in contact with us, because we will think of questions that we should have asked you or could not get through today? It is in all our interests that we write a really good report, so communicate with us and we will communicate with you.

### Memorandum submitted by the Children’s Workforce Development Council

#### SUMMARY

CWDC welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence to this review. The following comments reflect discussions with employers across the sector and build on evidence from recent research. Our evidence suggests that the system is complex, not easily understood and lacks clear levers for driving up the quality and flexibility of provision which is essential to meet the needs of employers and children and young people.

#### INTRODUCTION

1. The Children’s Workforce Development Council (CWDC) is an employer-led organisation, set up in 2005 to support delivery of the Every Child Matters agenda. We are an Executive Non-Departmental Public Body, sponsored by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), and part of the sector skills council, Skills for Care and Development.

2. CWDC aims to improve the lives of children, young people, their families and carers by ensuring that those who work with children and young people have the best possible training, qualifications and support. We help organisations work together more closely so that children and young people are at the heart of what they do.

3. Since 2008, CWDC has led a wide-reaching programme for social workers who work with children and families, funded by the DCSF, that aims to:

- improve the way social workers are recruited and supported to work with children and families in England;
- encourage talented and committed people to join and stay with the profession, and
- help the public understand better what social workers do.

4. This means piloting:

- measures to address the shortage of social workers and high turnover rates in local authorities;
- support for social workers embarking on a career with children and families, to make sure they have the confidence and skills the role demands;
- support for experienced frontline social workers and their leaders and managers, and
- support for organisations that want to reshape their social work teams to meet changing needs.



5. Our work is being developed and delivered in partnership with local authorities and voluntary sector bodies that employ social workers who work with children and families. These relationships give us a strong understanding of the challenges that employers face in recruiting, retaining and developing a high quality social work workforce.

6. We also work closely with other national bodies that support or represent social workers and oversee social work training. This includes the establishment of a national advisory group to oversee all our social work projects and the creation of partnership arrangements with Skills for Care, who lead on developing skills in adult social care, specifically to support the provision of practice learning placements and regional commissioning of post-qualifying awards.

#### ENTRY ROUTES TO THE PROFESSION

7. The recruitment and retention difficulties facing employers of children and families social workers, particularly in relation to front-line child protection work, are well-publicised. Market conditions are inimical to attracting high calibre people into the profession, and especially into front-line services. Action is needed to both encourage and enable highly able people to become social workers.

8. Starting in June 2009, CWDC will be running a recruitment campaign for children and families social work that will target both people at the start of their working lives and those looking for a change of career. This will encourage people to consider social work as a profession. To enable them to take this step, CWDC believes that the number of entry routes to the profession should be increased, so that it is easier and more attractive for a wider range of talented and committed people to qualify as social workers. Such an expansion of entry routes should include opportunities for groups of employers to work collaboratively and take the lead in training new social workers. However, this may need to be medium term aspiration as the current vacancy position could impede employers' capacity to lead the regeneration of initial training. Our work to widen entry routes currently includes:

- piloting a post-graduate course aimed at high achieving individuals who have not previously worked in the social work field. Around 100 graduates began their studies in autumn 2008, and a second cohort of 200 will be recruited in 2009. The pilot will be evaluated to identify whether targeting high achieving graduates leads to more capable social workers and better outcomes for children, young people and families, and
- developing options for introducing a fast track to social work that enables mature graduates with experience in allied professional areas to qualify and develop as social workers on an accelerated pathway.

9. There has been no nationally co-ordinated support to enable social workers who have left the profession to re-enter with confidence and updated skills. CWDC welcomes the Government's indication that it wishes CWDC to establish a national programme to support 500 social workers to return to practice. We believe this provision will need to include refresher training, and flexible working packages offering part-time working, term-time working, compressed hours and childcare provision. The provision will need to be sufficiently flexible to be attractive to recently qualified social workers who are not currently employed in social work, those who have taken a career break and those who may have retired early.

#### STRUCTURE OF TRAINING

10. Both the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes are generic and train candidates to work with children and adults. As set out in Lord Laming's report, CWDC would support a greater degree of specialism in the initial training programme. The current arrangements are not providing newly qualified social workers in the children's sector with the skills and competences required by employers.

11. The 200 days of work-based training are essential aspects of the initial degree. These must be relevant to the career aspirations of individuals; and they must be of high quality. CWDC recognises that employers and higher education institutions are jointly responsible for these placements; however we believe that the higher education training providers must be held accountable for the quality and relevance of their arrangements. We also see these placements as much more than work experience; we would wish them to be periods of assessed, work-based learning where individuals are involved in a structured and well-organised programme that builds their confidence and competence.

12. The demands on social workers are such that CWDC believes it is important that social work is a graduate profession where subsequent training and development is both a right and a responsibility. Because of these demands, CWDC would advocate a more rigorous recruitment and selection process, with high expectations, for entry to the initial training programme. The processes should involve a full and genuine partnership between training providers and employers.

13. The current training opportunities (undergraduate and postgraduate entry) are limited; to attract a broader range of capable candidates there should be additional training opportunities which meet the needs of individuals. More flexibility on the design of training programmes would be welcomed.

14. Following initial training, all social workers should receive additional support in their early years of employment. CWDC launched in September 2008 a three-year pilot programme for newly qualified social workers (NQSWs) that offers a package of support in their first year including:

- 10% of their time set aside for training and development;
- access, through their employer, to additional funds to support development activities;
- a reduced caseload;
- regular supervision, and
- the opportunity of support from other NQSWs.

15. The design of the pilot programme was informed by consultation with 500 NQSWs and 47 employers. When NQSWs were asked what specific factors had contributed to their confidence as a social worker, nine out of 10 of them identified “working alongside more experienced colleagues”. Three quarters selected “supervision”, two thirds “training” and three in five “knowledge of policies and procedures” and “building on learning from the social work degree”.<sup>1</sup> These findings informed the development of CWDC’s 2008–11 pilot programme for NQSW, and give us confidence that it is meeting the needs of employers and candidates.

16. 970 NQSWs, working for 89 employers, are participating in the first year of the pilot, with more due to join from September 2009. We welcome the Government’s recent announcement that all social workers employed to work with children and families in a voluntary or statutory service will be offered the NQSW programme from September 2009. With the NQSW programme’s strong focus on child protection, we believe this expansion will help to improve outcomes for more vulnerable children and families.

17. We are currently working with 45 local authorities to develop an early professional development programme that will provide support for social workers in their second and third years of employment. This programme, which begins in September 2009, will provide additional support for up to 1,000 social workers through enhanced supervision and structured arrangements to meet a set of national expectations. Taken together, the NQSW and early professional development provide scaffolding for social workers to build a successful career based on a set of national expectations, bespoke training and entitlements to support.

#### CONTENT OF INITIAL TRAINING

18. A key challenge in determining the appropriate content of initial training in relation to the tasks that social workers are asked to undertake when in employment is that there is not a clear, shared understanding of the role and tasks of social work with children and families. Significant social changes, and developments in the way services to children, young people and families are conceptualised and delivered, mean that the day-to-day business of social work has altered considerably in recent years. A range of different views is held—across and between employers and higher education institutions—about where qualifying training should end and on-the-job learning begin. This can be highlighted by differing perceptions about whether the qualifying period is best described as professional training or education. In this highly vocational area, it is important for candidates to be professionally competent as well as capable and informed in order for them to make rapid progress once they gain employment.

19. Our 2008 consultation with 500 NQSWs and 47 employers provides some evidence regarding their views on initial training. One third of NQSWs who responded to our questionnaire thought that their course had prepared them “fully” or “quite a lot” for their job, but over half thought it had been “just enough” to allow them to get by, and one in seven did not feel it had prepared them at all. In discussion groups (attended by 415 NQSWs) the overwhelming majority of participants reported that the training provided by their social work degree had failed to prepare them sufficiently to embark on professional practice.

20. Evidence from employers through the same research suggests that they feel NQSWs are insufficiently prepared for the complex task of working with children and families in difficult circumstances or able to anticipate the challenge of working with some very challenging families. They did not think that NQSWs were always clear on the role, purpose or task of the social worker. Several employers made the distinction between an “academic” view of competence and that of employers.

21. Of the 47 employers we consulted, 11 considered that the degree had prepared their NQSWs for “most of the role”, while 35 said that it had only prepared them for “some of their role”. In relation to specific tasks, one in four thought the course had failed to prepare NQSWs for decision making and one in five thought this to be the case in relation to analysing information and understanding social work within the wider context of children’s services. Many commented that they felt there was an over-reliance on the placement experience to provide the depth of knowledge required to practise. In discussion groups, employers highlighted a lack of understanding of child development and poor skills in analytical assessment and writing court reports.

22. In our recent submission to the Social Work Task Force, we suggested that the three year degree should be adjusted so that the third year is focused on specialist training relating to the population group with whom the social worker intends to work. This final year should have a specific focus on preparing students for undertaking assessments, analysing complex and conflicting information, planning and decision making. This part of their training should include developing their knowledge base in relation to

risk factors in child protection cases This would help to ensure that no NQSW who wants to work with children and families could graduate without having been assessed on their ability to do so, as can happen at present.

23. The Government's recent proposal to develop a practice-based Masters degree, which we welcome, provides a further opportunity to embed high quality training for child protection and strengthen social workers' understanding of the lessons that can and should be learnt from recent serious case reviews.

#### QUALITY

24. We welcome GSCC's commitment to examine current arrangements for monitoring quality standards and interrogate whether it is sufficient for regulation to depend on examination of HEIs' own quality systems rather than on examination of delivery itself. We believe that all employers should be able to expect all those trained on an approved social work degree to be ready for employment and capable, with support from the NQSW programme, of operating at a high level of competence.

25. A concern we have seen raised by employers and NQSWs alike is the variability of the current practice knowledge and experience of those delivering initial training. NQSWs who were particularly positive about the level and quality of teaching were most likely to comment that their lecturers had recently practised social work, or were continuing to practise. We think it is also worth noting the large number of candidates who do not successfully complete the degree programme, and the number of those who do complete who do not subsequently move into relevant employment. More could and should be done to ensure that the degree is presented and marketed as a professional training programme as well as a course of academic study.

26. Practice learning is a key element of social work initial training. CWDC's role, in partnership with Skills for Care, includes supporting employers to provide practice learning placements that enable HEIs to meet the Department of Health requirements for social work training, which require every student to spend at least 200 days gaining required experience and learning in practice settings.<sup>2</sup> The introduction of the social work degree, and the increase in the volume of social workers in training, has put significant pressure on employers in relation to practice learning—particularly on local authorities, who are more likely to be able to offer placements offering experience of statutory social work tasks involving legal interventions. Despite the success of the Practice Learning Task Force set up in 2002 in increasing the number of practice learning opportunities in third sector organisations and a range of public sector settings such as schools or health services, a significant challenge remains in ensuring that all practice learning is of a high quality and that all students graduate with experience of practice in a setting where the statutory powers and duties of social work are exercised.

27. CWDC welcomes the GSCC's commitment to considering whether the current reporting system by which HEIs demonstrate that the practice placements offered through their programme are of a high quality are sufficiently robust. The GSCC's recent report on raising standards in social work education in England in 2007–08 notes that HEIs' self-reporting that only 82 of the 11,500 placements provided failed to meet their own quality standards is both remarkably small, and “at odds with emerging reports from students and employers of poor-quality placement experiences, poor levels of practice assessing and ill-prepared qualifying students”. The GSCC also notes that “the quality and provision of practice learning was a common area identified for improvement in re-approving degree courses”.<sup>3</sup> CWDC believes that courses should not be permitted to run if they do not consistently provide high quality practice learning for all students, in a setting relevant to the population group with whom they intend to work.

28. Placements in which students gain experience of the applications of social work law, and the exercise of duties and powers conferred on specific organisations are important in enabling them to become competent and confident practitioners. CWDC is currently working with Skills for Care, GSCC and a range of stakeholders, to propose a strengthened definition of what are commonly referred to as “statutory placements” and begin to assess with employers what the potential impact of applying this definition through the regulatory framework would be. We intend to offer learning from this work to the Social Work Task Force.

29. We should aspire to a culture, as exists in medicine, where it is the norm for more experienced practitioners—as part of their own progress up the career ladder—to take personal responsibility for the development of the next generation of practitioners. Establishing a career framework for social work with children and families would assist greatly in creating an environment in which practice learning could flourish. Such a framework, which needs to be discussed across the profession, should have links to the package of rewards available to individuals.

30. While we do not have specific evidence of whether the switch to degree-level qualification has improved the calibre of recruits and the effectiveness of NQSWs, we note the concerns expressed by employers in relation to NQSWs' readiness to practice during our consultation last year.

#### SUPPLY OF INITIAL TRAINING

31. Decisions about whether to offer qualifying courses in social work are taken by individual HEIs in the context of their wider business planning; they are not informed by a national supply strategy. The GSCC has responsibility for the approval of social work courses under section 63 of the Care Standards Act 2000. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) monitors the provision of higher education against subject

benchmark statements.<sup>4</sup> Funding for delivery of social work qualifying courses is disbursed to HEIs from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). Bursaries are available through the NHS Business Services Authority to any student not funded by their employer. The dispersed nature of these arrangements, and the lack of a national supply strategy, impedes effective market management of initial training. We have heard concerns that social work course leaders within HEIs feel pressure from their institutions to increase student numbers, within existing resources, because of the availability of student bursaries.<sup>5</sup>

#### POST-QUALIFYING TRAINING AND CAREER PATHS

32. We believe two things are needed to increase the fitness for purpose of post-qualifying training and to encourage social workers to build a long-term career in the field:

- review of the arrangements for the funding, quality assurance and inspection of post-qualifying training, and
- a career framework for social work with children and families.

33. Similarly to the situation for qualifying training, responsibility for funding, quality assurance and inspection of current post-qualifying training arrangements is so widely spread as to compromise its effectiveness. We also recognise that the post qualifying (PQ) arrangements are just one way of many for social workers to receive further development. We see continuing professional development as encompassing a myriad of learning opportunities which include coaching, short courses, peer review, co-working, mentoring as well as attendance on a PQ programme.

34. Feedback from employers suggests that partnership arrangements between employers and HEIs for commissioning post-qualifying training are of variable effectiveness. CWDC, GSCC and Skills for Care have recently commissioned further work to increase understanding of the picture of current partnership arrangements. In the current environment a lack of a national framework or set of expectations has led to fragmentation and variable results. There is a need for assurance that the current regional commissioning basis is providing the quality and flexibility that employers need and individual social workers want.

35. Most professions have a recognised career pathway for those who enter them. This not only helps to ensure the retention of staff, but also sets the clear expectation that senior colleagues have a responsibility to support and enable the development of the generation that follows them. CWDC has initiated work to develop a career framework for children and families social work and believes that this is a vital foundation for strengthening the profession and ensuring the needs of vulnerable children and families are met. The further development of post-qualifying training (in its widest form) needs to be situated in this context and address concerns raised by employers regarding the structure and content of the current framework including the adequacy of provision for the development of practice educators, following the loss of the old practice teaching award. The announcement that the NQSW programme will be available to all eligible social workers in a children and families context provides an opportunity for training to be designed around the needs of NQSWs as they all work towards a set of nationally agreed outcomes.

36. The support that employers provide to their social work staff varies. Training and development budgets are always vulnerable when finances are tight. In order to ensure greater consistency across the country, there is a need to establish clearer expectations of employers in relation to the support they provide their social work workforce and to their understanding and use of social workers' professional expertise and authority. We have been struck in our discussions with employers by the appetite for central direction in relation to the recruitment, retention and development of the social work workforce.

37. We support the strengthening of the GSCC's Code of Practice for Employers of Social Care Workers and also recommend that there should be a national agreement with local authorities detailing what is expected of them in respect of qualifying and post-qualifying training of social workers. This would be linked to the career framework we have previously described and would build on the impact of CWDC's current social work programme in increasing the consistency of support offered to social workers. We recognise that there would be some cost involved, but believe that implementation could be partially achieved through changes in current working practices. This expectation should be embedded through performance indicators and inspection frameworks.

38. The availability and quality of robust supervision, particularly for social workers in the early stages of their career, is of paramount importance. A supervisor should be observing the social worker as they make interventions, and reflecting with them on the process. Supervision should be both challenging and offered in the context of learning environment. The Government's recent announcement that CWDC will lead on strengthening training for both supervision and coaching is to be welcomed and will build on work already underway to spread existing effective practice.

39. In recognition of the value of high quality of supervision our NQSW pilot programme offers a comprehensive guide for supervisors, commissioned specifically to support the programme, and training for all those supervising an NQSW participating in the programme. This support and training for supervision will also be available to social workers who participate in CWDC's early professional development pilot programme from September 2009.

## REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> CWDC (2009) *Newly Qualified Social Workers—A report on consultations with newly qualified social workers, employers and those in higher education.*
- <sup>2</sup> Department of Health (2002) *Requirements for Social Work Training.*
- <sup>3</sup> GSCC (2009) *Raising Standards—Social Work Education in England 2007–2008.*
- <sup>4</sup> QAA (2000) *Social Policy and Administration and Social Work.*
- <sup>5</sup> CWDC/Skills for Care (2009) *Research and Mapping of Statutory Placement Learning Opportunities and Needs in London.*

May 2009

### Memorandum submitted by the General Social Care Council (GSCC)

## INTRODUCTION

## ABOUT THE GENERAL SOCIAL CARE COUNCIL (GSCC)

1. The General Social Care Council is the social care workforce regulator for England. The GSCC is a Non Departmental Public Body established in October 2001 under the Care Standards Act 2000. It is sponsored by the Department of Health (DH) but also works closely with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) in delivering the children's and young people's care agenda.

2. The GSCC works to improve the quality of social care services for the benefit of people who use services through regulation of the workforce and through its contribution to social work education. It has three main functions:

- it issues and distributes codes of practice for social care workers and their employers;
- it maintains the register of social care workers; and
- it regulates social work education and training.

## ENTRY ROUTES TO THE PROFESSION

*Are entry routes to social work sufficiently flexible to encourage mature entrants, re-entrants and people considering a career change?*

3. In order to practise as social worker it is a legal requirement to be registered with the GSCC. The GSCC, therefore, operates a gateway to the profession and has been tasked with doing so in order to ensure that quality standards are consistent across the workforce. It sets the minimum level entry requirements for practising social workers, including a requirement to hold a recognised qualification.

4. The vast majority of those registered with the GSCC have a social work qualification which pre-dates the introduction of the Social Work Degree. Any previously qualified social worker who is no longer practising will be required to register with the GSCC before returning to work. However, it is not necessary for previously qualified social workers to re-qualify before registering with the GSCC. The GSCC registers those social workers who have attained any of the predecessor social work qualifications dating back to 1971 when the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW) started to regulate social work training.

5. Given the concerns about the retention of experienced social workers the GSCC welcomes the recent initiatives announced by the Local Government Association and the DCSF to encourage experienced social workers to return to the profession.<sup>20</sup> It will be important for employers to ensure that any returning social worker is familiar with the significant changes in policy and practice in children's and families social work.

6. In terms of encouraging people who wish to change their career to become a social worker, it is possible for those holding an undergraduate degree or equivalent level qualification to enter onto the two year social work masters degree. As with undergraduate students, a bursary is available to assist with the cost of studying. This provides flexibility for graduates from other backgrounds who wish to switch to social work and currently 24% of social work students are enrolled on the masters degree in England.<sup>21</sup> Within this group of students there is a very low withdrawal and failure rate.<sup>22</sup>

7. Mature students are also well represented on the current degree and those over the age of 25 accounted for 61% of the total intake into the social work degree in 2007–08.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Community Care 3 March—2009 *LGA and Ed Balls bid to lure back ex-children's social workers* <http://www.communitycare.co.uk/Articles/2009/03/03/110871/lga-and-ed-balls-bid-to-lure-back-ex-childrens-social-workers.html>

<sup>21</sup> General Social Care Council—*Social Work Education in England 2007–08* p 3.

<sup>22</sup> Department of Health "Evaluation of the New Social Work Degree Qualification in England—Executive Summary p 9" June 2008.

<sup>23</sup> General Social Care Council—*Social Work Education in England 2007–08* p 4.

8. Employers currently provide a number of schemes to support those already working in social care to qualify as social workers. These include providing employment based routes to a social work qualification, where employers support students through the payment of fees and/or fund their study time. In 2006–07 10% of students who registered on the social work degree entered through an employment based route.<sup>24</sup> Funding is provided to local authorities by central government to support these schemes; this allocation is split between adults and children’s social workers although it is not currently ring fenced.

9. There is some evidence that the number of people entering the Social Work Degree through flexible study routes, including those studying part time—which is currently 8% of Social Work students—has declined since the Degree was introduced.<sup>25</sup> This is likely to be because of the recent changes to the funding allocations for social work training to local authorities. The recent DCSF initiative to fund local authorities to provide 200 social work qualifying training places will, however, help to improve access to the degree.

10. The GSCC is working closely with the Children’s Workforce Development Council, which is looking at employment-based routes to achieve the social work degree. It will be particularly important that new routes deliver the same standard of academic and practice preparation as the university-based degree.

## STRUCTURE OF TRAINING

*Is a three year bachelor’s degree/two year master’s degree the right format and level for initial social work training?*

11. Before the introduction of the bachelor degree the previous professional qualification in social work was the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW) which was a two year qualification at sub-degree level. The introduction of a degree level qualification in 2003–04 was accompanied by the introduction of mandatory professional registration with the GSCC in 2005 and has substantially improved the status of the profession. The number of enrolments on the degree has increased substantially (up 38% over the past decade) compared to the DipSW.<sup>26</sup> The degree entry requirements which stipulate numeracy and literacy standards have also meant that the proportion of people training to be social workers who have A-levels has also increased.<sup>27</sup>

## CONTENT OF INITIAL TRAINING

*Is the generic social work degree fit for the purpose of training children and families social workers?*

The structure and content of the Social Work Degree

12. The current Social Work Degree is not underpinned by an agreed curriculum. Instead course providers are asked to demonstrate to the GSCC that their curriculum meets a set of outcomes and standards which are derived from three main sources—the Department of Health’s requirement for the degree; the National Occupational Standards, developed by the Sector Skills Council; and the Quality Assurance Agency Benchmark Statement for Social Work. Taken together these documents establish, amongst other things, the entry requirements for students entering onto the degree, the requirement for all social work students to undertake 200 days of practice learning, as well as the training, learning and assessment requirements for all courses.

13. The content of the social work degree is, therefore, the responsibility of a number of different bodies. The GSCC is responsible for approving social work courses on the basis that they meet these requirements and it provides a further function by assessing HEIs’ (Higher Education Institution) own quality assurance systems.

## Evidence on performance of the social work degree

14. The Social Work Degree is still relatively new and it has only recently been possible to gain an understanding of the impact that it has had on the quality of training received by social work students and whether it can be considered fit for purpose.

15. In seeking to establish the efficacy of the generic degree in terms of training children and families social workers, it is important for the Committee to understand the government’s original intention. From its inception, it was intended that the introduction of a degree level generic qualification for social work would assess students according to the following attributes:<sup>28</sup>

- The practical application of skills, knowledge, research and analytical abilities to deliver services which create opportunities for users.
- The ability to reflect social work values in their practice.

<sup>24</sup> Jess Harris, Jill Manthorpe and Shereen Hussein: *What works in “Grow Your Own” initiatives for social work?* Kings College, London 2008. p 19.

<sup>25</sup> Jess Harris, Jill Manthorpe and Shereen Hussein: *What works in “Grow Your Own” initiatives for social work?* Kings College, London 2008. p 18.

<sup>26</sup> Department of Health “Evaluation of the New Social Work Degree Qualification in England—Executive Summary p 6” June 2008.

<sup>27</sup> Department of Health “Evaluation of the New Social Work Degree Qualification in England—Executive Summary p 9” June 2008.

<sup>28</sup> Department of Health (2003) *Tender Document for the Evaluation of the New Social Work Degree*. London: Department of Health.

- The ability to manage change and deliver required outcomes.
- The ability to communicate with users and carers of all ages and from all sections of the community.
- The practical application of social work theory.
- The ability to function effectively and confidently in multi-disciplinary and multi-agency teams.

16. The Department of Health funded an evaluation of the degree which was undertaken by Kings College, London and this was published in 2008.<sup>29</sup> In broad terms the evaluation reported that the degree is delivering according to the national standards and requirements. Course providers were found to be producing graduates ready to practice at the minimum level of competence with a perception from programme staff of an increase in the academic and practice standards of students compared to those who took the DipSW. The results of the evaluation indicate that the degree has produced more analytical and critical students who have acquired these skills from both the classroom-based and practice learning elements of the course.<sup>30</sup>

17. The DH evaluation also found that employers welcomed the fact that the initial training for social workers was set at degree level. However, the study concluded that that it was too early to assess whether the needs and expectations of employers were being met through initial training as the first cohort of degree qualified social workers had only been in the workforce for a short time.

18. In 2008, the GSCC published its own audit of the degree to establish whether social work education for children's social work was fit for purpose.<sup>31</sup> The study covered six universities and their employer partners and found that the teaching of children's social work was being adequately addressed in the curriculum offered by assessed universities. However, the study also revealed that the depth of understanding attained by Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) was variable and that most respondents thought that additional training through a Post Qualifying award was necessary to provide the social worker with the full skill-set. A key finding of the report was that some of the concerns about the content and quality of children's social work teaching were unfounded.

19. In 2007, Bournemouth University published research which tracked NQSWs over a year.<sup>32</sup> Eight local authorities and 35 NQSWs participated in the study. Three-quarters of the NQSWs and their managers felt the degree had prepared them with the right skills, knowledge and understanding for their current post. For those who did not feel prepared this was mainly in the area of assessment, report writing, record keeping, time and case management. Nearly all the NQSWs questioned felt that their practice placements during their initial training had been the element of their course that had prepared them most for the social work tasks in their first role.

20. The Children's Workforce Development Council has also conducted a consultation with employers and NQSWs to ascertain their views of the degree. Around two-thirds of the 291 NQSW respondents had social work degrees and over a third had two or more practice placements in children's social work while on the degree. The survey showed that those NQSWs with more experience of children's social care practice, either before, during or post qualification, scored themselves as having higher levels of effectiveness. NQSWs with an undergraduate degree rated themselves marginally more confident in practice than postgraduates.

21. In the light of this evidence it is possible to conclude that the Social Work Degree has achieved its initial objectives in terms of the goals established by Government. However, the GSCC recognises that there is increasing concern amongst some employers and NQSWs about whether the degree is equipping students with the right levels of initial training to meet the current demands placed on them in the workplace.

22. Whilst it is wrong to expect that any form of initial training for any profession will equip an individual with the skills to undertake highly complex tasks from day one, the GSCC would support a review of the current requirements of the degree to assess whether they match the current expectations of government and employers. The GSCC also considers that an agreed core curriculum for social work training should be developed to give greater clarity to universities, employers and students about what will be taught. A common curriculum would provide a clearer standard against which to judge the performance of Higher Education Institutions. It would also provide greater assurance to employers about the types of knowledge and skills attained by Newly Qualified Social Workers.

### Specialisation within the Social Work Degree

23. The original intention behind the degree was that it should provide all social workers with a generic understanding of the legal and theoretical approach to social work practice and that it should encompass aspects of working with both children and adults. From the perspective of this inquiry such broad level training is critical for future children's social workers, as a central component of child neglect and abuse is often family breakdown or alcohol or drug abuse amongst parents and family members. Conversely, it is also essential that social workers in adult services should have a basic understanding of social work with children and families if they are to contribute to the outcomes set out in "Every Child Matters".

<sup>29</sup> Department of Health (2008) *Evaluation of the New Social Work Degree Qualification in England*, London.

<sup>30</sup> Saks, M (2009) *The Regulation of Social Work Education*. Internal GSCC report.

<sup>31</sup> Blewitt, J & Tunstall, J. (2008) *Fit for Purpose? The Social Work Degree in 2008*. GSCC: London.

<sup>32</sup> Brown, K. et al (2007) *Tracking the learning and development needs of newly qualified social workers project*, Final report for Skills for Care South West, Bournemouth University.

24. The current degree framework was established in order to provide opportunities for specialisation at post qualifying level. However, whilst it is possible for student social workers to develop a level of specialisation through the settings in which they undertake their practice placements, there is no requirement on HEIs to tailor their course structure to cater for those who wish to work with particular groups of people or in specific settings.

25. While the GSCC supports the continuation of generic training for all social workers, any review of the requirements of the social work degree or the development of a common national curriculum should, therefore, look at providing greater opportunities for specialisation so that both future adults and children's social workers can begin to gain the skills and experience appropriate to their roles earlier in their initial training.

26. These pathways for specialisation should be available for those wishing to work specifically with children and families, as well as those who wish to work in mental health settings or with older or disabled people. The final year assessment of student social workers should be linked to their displayed competencies whilst working with specific groups. This would give the current degree a greater focus on professional and vocational training and would provide employers with a better understanding of the skills, experience and training of NQSWs when they enter the workplace. It is important, however, that any moves towards greater specialisation during the degree programme are not seen as a substitute for providing NQSWs with additional specialist training and supervision during their first years in work.

## QUALITY OF TRAINING

### *How effectively does the GSCC regulate the quality of training?*

27. The GSCC currently employs a delegated model of regulation which gives responsibility for monitoring quality standards to universities. This approach was agreed with government when the Social Work Degree was introduced in 2003. There are two key aspects to our regulatory function in this area:

- initial approval and re-approval of the degree and;
- annual monitoring of the quality assurance function of HEIs.

28. The GSCC initially approves Higher Education Institutions to deliver the Social Work Degree. Before granting programme approval, which relates to individual courses, the GSCC assesses the proposals against the Department of Health requirements for the Degree, the National Occupational Standards and the QAA benchmark statement. Each provider is assessed every five years to determine whether the course should again be approved by the GSCC. These approval assessments may involve visits to the university by GSCC inspectors and by people who use services who are recruited by the GSCC.

29. This re-approval cycle allows GSCC to intervene to identify HEIs which are not delivering the degree to the appropriate standard. In 2007–08 conditions for re-approval were set in 70% of cases, either requiring action to be taken before the courses could be re-approved or asking for evidence of improvements to be provided to the GSCC through annual monitoring. In most cases, action to address issues of quality was taken promptly by universities working with the GSCC and re-approval was granted to all but one HEI. In this particular instance the HEI agreed to suspend its undergraduate intake for 2008–09. The key concern here related to the partnership with the local employers and the inadequacy of practice learning places.

30. Under the annual monitoring programme, the GSCC examines the HEI's own quality assurance systems to establish how they are performing. HEIs are required to report annually to the GSCC to demonstrate that they are continuing to meet the criteria against which they were approved to deliver the Social Work degree. These reports also ask for information on the number of students enrolled on the degree, the sufficiency and quality of practice learning and the evaluation that they have received from students. In making judgments on the annual performance of HEIs the GSCC also takes into account the reports of external examiners and any concerns raised by stakeholders. Inspections are only carried out where serious concerns arise that requirements and standards of education and training are not being met.

31. In 2007–08, 75% of HEIs were judged by the GSCC to be providing evidence of well-run courses, managing resources satisfactorily against the criteria and requirements and providing confidence that the institution's own quality assurance and monitoring processes are working effectively. Of the remainder, 15% (12) of courses were considered satisfactory in most respects but there was concern that at least one area of provision needed attention. A GSCC inspector worked with each of the 12 universities over 2008–09 to ensure that these areas were addressed. In the other 10% (nine) of courses an assessment of the annual monitoring reports led to the conclusion that at least one or more requirement was not being met in some way. In each case the HEI has been required to set out a satisfactory action plan to deliver improvements. This will be monitored and delivered according to agreed timescales.

32. Where concerns are identified the GSCC's approach is to work collaboratively with the HEI to assist them in addressing the identified concerns. While the GSCC retains the right to withdraw approval to provide the degree and we would take that action where necessary, our approach is designed to support improvement to meet the required standards to ensure the impact of quality concerns on existing students is minimized.



33. The GSCC considers that the current regulatory framework for Social Work Education and Training should be reviewed in order to ensure that high quality training is delivered to all social work students. We commenced work on this in March 2008 and provided initial advice to government in November last year about the changes we could make to strengthen the regulation of the degree. Before moving forward on these issues it will be important to learn more about the government's intentions in relation to Social Work Education following the final report of the Social Work Taskforce.

34. There are a number of weaknesses with the current system which we have identified and would like to address. These are:

- The current arrangements for the delegation of the assessment of quality to HEIs means that there is little opportunity to assess fully the extent to which HEIs are preparing social workers for professional practice;
- The fact that little information about the assessed quality of a course is provided to prospective students or to local employers means that there are no “market” based incentives to drive up quality; and
- the fact that the provision of the Social Work Degree is assessed against a set of high level output statements means that the benchmark against which quality is measured is poorly defined.

35. In addition to recommending to government that a common curriculum for social work training is developed we have also considered introducing the following measures:

- introducing targeted and sample visits to courses to meet the programme management board, lecturers, students, people who use services and employers involved in the partnership should take place as agreed. This may include observation of teaching and visits to placements as necessary;
- introducing mechanisms to gain feedback from NQSWs and their employers one year into employment on how their training prepared them for practice; and
- publishing annual monitoring reports from universities to ensure that students are better informed.

*How can the quality, suitability and supply of practice placements be assured?*

36. The DH requirements for the Social Work Degree state that each student must:

- undertake a minimum of 200 days practice learning during their course;
- have experience in at least two practice settings, working with at least two different types of people who use services and carers;
- have experience of statutory social work tasks involving legal interventions; and
- be assessed as competent and safe to practise by a qualified and experienced social worker.<sup>33</sup>

37. Practice placements account for 50% of student time on the degree and are essential in preparing students to be ready to enter the workforce. It is the responsibility of HEIs to ensure that practice learning opportunities are of a good quality and that there are sufficient numbers of appropriate practice educators to support and assess students in their placements. In addition to the GSCC's criteria, rules and requirements, HEIs must comply with the QAA's best practice guidance on the provision and monitoring of work-based learning.

38. The GSCC administers DH funding to HEIs to support practice learning. In 2007–08 this amounted to £20.5 million which was passed on to HEIs. In 2006–07 there were 12,698 practice learning opportunities undertaken by social work students which indicates the scale of the task in ensuring the right supply of suitable, high quality placements. The majority of placements take place in local authorities (48.4%); 24.4% in a voluntary agency; 5% in a private agency; 3.7% in health and 2.8% in education.

39. The GSCC has received anecdotal evidence that the availability of statutory placement settings is reducing and that this is affecting both the quality of placement experience and students' learning. The DCSF and CWDC are concerned about both the supply and quality of placement provision, especially statutory placements, which are seen as an important element in ensuring students are “fit for practice”. Recently concerns have been raised from the sector that since the removal of a Key Performance Indicator (KPI), for local authorities which measured the availability and quality of practice learning it has become increasingly difficult to find good quality statutory placements. However, the GSCC has no evidence to establish a correlation between this KPI being withdrawn and reduced numbers of appropriate placements.

40. In response to these concerns the GSCC in partnership with SfC/CWDC Partnership Board facilitated three national workshops with HEIs and employers on statutory placements in 2008. The key findings from these events were:

- The need for a clearer definition of what constitutes a “statutory placement”;
- The need for the statutory placement to be a prescribed number of days; and
- A decision to be taken as to whether the statutory placement should be the final placement.

<sup>33</sup> Department of Health (2002) Requirements for social work training.

41. The DH commissioned evaluation of the SWD presents evidence that 78% of students in the survey rated their placement as excellent, very good or good. This independent research is consistent with the GSCC's findings over several years of annual monitoring of HEIs. However the research also reported the following negative findings:

- That not all agencies could offer a useful range of work experience;
- That the quality of assessment was variable; and
- That some students felt they received inadequate support and supervision during their placement.

42. The GSCC's annual monitoring of HEIs in 2006–07 revealed that a large majority of programmes were judged by universities to be adequate in meeting practice learning quality standards. However, these judgments of quality are primarily based on HEIs' own monitoring of their placement provision, taking into account the views of students. Only 82 placements were reported by HEIs as not meeting their own quality standards, a remarkably small number out of the 11,500 placements provided that year.

43. This evidence reveals a need to introduce consistency in terms of how the quality of placements is assessed. The GSCC has been involved in developing a national benchmark tool the Quality Assurance of Practice Learning (QAPL), which can be used to audit the quality of all placements against a set of common standards. An electronic audit and evaluation tool has been piloted and distributed to all HEIs. Depending on how useful this tool is seen to be, the GSCC will consider requiring HEIs to use this as a measure when they report on the quality of practice placements.

44. The availability of practice placements can also be managed better through the greater use of IT data management systems. Skills for Care is currently developing a web-based system (LeaRNS) which will allow HEIs and employers to plan better the availability of practice placements. It is intended that this system should be rolled out in September 2009.

45. The most important factor in developing high quality practice placements is the relationship between HEIs and employers. The GSCC would, therefore, like to see a formal requirement introduced for local partnerships to be established between HEIs and employers to ensure that appropriate and high quality placements are available for all students.

*How can the quality, suitability and take-up of post-qualifying training be assured?*

#### Post-Qualifying Framework

46. The GSCC is responsible for regulating the structure of Post Qualifying Courses for Social Workers. This is known as the "Post-Qualification (PQ) framework". The PQ framework is the structure through which the GSCC sets the standards and requirements for post qualification training for social workers, sets criteria for such courses, endorses those that meet the GSCC's requirements and regulates HEIs' delivery of these courses. Inter-Professional Education is a key principle within the framework and joint courses are likely to take place between professional groups. This framework consists of three academic levels:

- the post-qualifying award in specialist social work (Hons degree or Graduate Diploma—H level);
- the post-qualifying award in higher specialist social work (Post Graduate Diploma—M level); and
- the post-qualifying award in advanced social work (Minimum Level M—Masters).

47. Courses can be in five different areas of practice. These are:

- Children and young people, their families and carers;
- Leadership and management;
- Practice education;
- Social work in mental health services; and
- Social work with adults.

48. The process through which the GSCC quality assures courses under the PQ framework broadly replicates that for the social work degree, although there are some differences.

49. PQ programmes are required to appoint at least one external examiner who has a GSCC recognised social work qualification. Annual monitoring of programmes includes scrutiny of reports by these external examiners, which universities must provide to the GSCC together with copies of university responses and, where appropriate, information on subsequent actions. The GSCC will publish these reports in summary form.

50. On an annual basis, universities responsible for approved courses are required to supply copies of any internal evaluations of course quality. They are also required to monitor stakeholder views about programme quality and to make the results of these stakeholder monitoring exercises available to the GSCC if asked for.

51. All PQ programmes are to be reviewed on a five-year cycle and reviews will formally confirm re-approval of programmes. These reviews will involve visits by officers of the GSCC and/or independent visitors appointed by the GSCC for this purpose. Reviews will always involve opportunities for stakeholders to provide their views on the quality and fitness for purpose of PQ programmes.

52. Courses may be inspected at any time if there is evidence that indicates that an inspection process should be triggered. The specific triggers for inspection are those laid down in the regulations governing the degree in social work. Inspection visits are to be carried out by a panel consisting of officers of the GSCC and independent visitors

53. Two hundred and forty-two PQ courses have been approved at 53 universities under the new framework since 2007. By far the most popular provision of courses is in the children and young people specialism, with courses in this specialism representing 36.8% of the total available. Our most up to date figures show that 4,747 students have enrolled on the new PQ courses, with 2,296 (48%) enrolling on the Children, Young People, their Families and their Carers award. The intake balance correlates well with the provision of available courses, demonstrating that universities are reacting well to employer demand in this area.

54. In terms of ensuring that children and families social workers have access to PQ training the issue of resources is key. Available evidence indicates that funds notionally allocated to local authorities to support training for social workers is often not spent on the intended purpose but is utilised to meet other spending pressures.<sup>34</sup> The GSCC would support any initiative to protect this funding through ring-fencing training allocations to local authorities.

55. The Government has endorsed the recommendation made by Lord Laming that a practice-based programme Masters programme for social workers should be developed for experienced children's social workers. Given that there is already a work-based route to both a post-graduate certificate and a master's level qualification in specialist children and families social work provided by the new PQ framework, the GSCC considers that the PQ framework should be the basis for developing this route to master's level qualifications for all children's social workers.

56. The current PQ award for children covers a broad range of children's issues. If there is a perceived need for a further specialist PQ award in safeguarding in its own right then this could be developed within the PQ framework as it stands. We will also consider if it is necessary to strengthen this syllabus to include two new awards on safeguarding either children or both children and vulnerable adults and on forensic social work.

#### Post Registration Training and Learning Requirements (PRTL)

57. A further way in which the take up of Post Qualifying Training can be assured is through making this a condition of an individual social worker's registration with the GSCC. Currently, each registered social worker must undertake a set amount of Post Registration Training and Learning activities (PRTL). The requirement is to undertake either 90 hours or 15 days of study, training, courses, seminars, reading, teaching or other activities which could reasonably be expected to advance the social worker's professional development, or contribute to the development of the profession as a whole.

58. Although the GSCC has issued guidance on this requirement, the GSCC has thus far avoided being prescriptive with respect to the content of the training and learning activities. Instead, we have placed the onus on registrants and their employers to identify relevant and beneficial training and learning.

59. In 2008, the GSCC conducted a review of these requirements and found that PRTL was generally regarded as "fit for purpose" by stakeholders, although it was recommended that the GSCC should work with government to consider introducing a number of possible changes. Amongst the most significant of these proposals was that there should be a requirement that a minimum of 45 of the 90 hours should consist of formal and independently assessed learning and that registrants should be asked to indicate how the learning activity they have undertaken has contributed to their ability to understand and meet the needs of people who use services. Another proposal for consideration was that every registrant should be required to complete particular sets of training activities or areas of study during each three year registration period; and that Post-Qualifying courses should be compulsory at certain points in a social worker's career.

60. It is the GSCC's view that no social worker should be allowed to undertake complex child protection cases until they have obtained the specialist PQ for social work with children and families. We are considering whether to introduce a change to the way we register social workers to make it mandatory for newly qualified social workers to achieve a specialist-level post qualifying award in their first years of practice. In the light of the findings of the Social Work Taskforce we will consider whether we should consult on potential amendments to the registration requirements for social workers to achieve this aim.

61. A number of key issues need to be considered before any changes to the registration requirements for social workers can be implemented. If more prescriptive training requirements are introduced it will be necessary for these to be fully costed in terms of their impact on government, employers and registrants. Employer support here is crucial as the ability of registrants to meet any more stringent PRTL requirements will be heavily dependent on being granted time off to complete training modules.

<sup>34</sup> *Local government social care workforce development expenditure: a survey of trends and funding* (Learn to Care, 2008).

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CODES OF PRACTICE FOR EMPLOYERS OF SOCIAL WORKERS

62. One way in which the responsibilities of employers can be made clearer is through making the GSCC Code of Practice for Employers mandatory and enforceable. This Code requires employers, amongst other things, to “provide training and development opportunities to enable social care workers to strengthen and develop their skills and knowledge”. However, the GSCC has no means of enforcing adherence to this code. Thus, whilst the GSCC has helped to develop and regulates the provision of high-quality post-qualification training through the PQ framework, it cannot compel employers to support social workers to undertake this training.

63. The GSCC, therefore, strongly welcomes the commitment by the Government to “legislate at the earliest opportunity to” place the Codes on a statutory footing. GSCC considers that the number of social workers who undertake some form of Post Qualifying training award would substantially increase if the formal responsibility of employers to support training was made clearer, together with the ring fencing of training funds to local authorities.

*How well are social workers trained to deliver front-line supervision?*

64. One mechanism for providing training to social workers to deliver improved front-line supervision is through the PQ framework. Within this the GSCC sets out generic criteria that all approved courses must meet at each of the three academic levels—specialist, higher specialist and advanced—no matter the area of practice the course covers. In addition to a range of other criteria, in order to satisfy approval requirements at higher specialist level programmes need to show how they will enable qualified social workers to:

“Support, mentor, supervise or manage others, exercising practice, research, management or educational leadership to enable them to identify and explore issues and improve their own practice”.

65. As the creation of this framework is a recent innovation (2006), it has not yet been possible to undertake any assessment of whether these awards are providing a sufficient level of training in front-line supervision.

66. The Government’s commitment to the development of a national Newly Qualified Social Work programme is a welcome development that will help to ensure that social workers receive the support they require in the initial period of their career after graduation, and which will include guaranteed supervision. However, it is important that the NQSW programme is not regarded as an alternative to undertaking courses delivered through the PQ framework. It is essential that social workers receive both extra support in the earlier part of their career and ongoing access to high quality post-graduate training.

May 2009

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*Witnesses:* **Keith Brumfitt**, Director of Strategy, Children’s Workforce Development Council, **Jane Haywood**, Chief Executive, Children’s Workforce Development Council, **Rosie Varley**, Chair, General Social Care Council, and **Mike Wardle**, Chief Executive, General Social Care Council, gave evidence.

**Q96 Chairman:** I welcome Mike Wardle, Rosie Varley, Jane Haywood and Keith Brumfitt to our deliberations. I think that you have all seen that we are under pressure today to squeeze as much information out of you as we possibly can in the time that we have. We have barely an hour to conduct this next session, so forgive us if we rattle away at it. I will go across, as I did with the other panellists. Mike, you heard the comments of the last group of witnesses and some of the questions that we will ask you will run on similar themes. We are carrying out an inquiry. How have you reacted to the evidence that we took just now?

**Mike Wardle:** Rosie and I have worked on preparing an opening statement, which Rosie will deliver in a minute, if that is okay.

**Chairman:** As long as it is not too long, I am very happy for Rosie to do that. So, Rosie, you will get us started.

**Rosie Varley:** I will, but given what has been said I will précis my opening statement. First, I want to introduce myself and Mike. I am Chairman of the General Social Care Council, but I have only been the chairman for a short time. I come from a

background in health, most recently in regulation in health. I was Chair of the Council for Healthcare Regulatory Excellence, which oversees all health professional regulation, so I bring some expertise from outside and some comparisons. Mike is the expert in social care regulation, so that is the partnership. The GSCC is the professional regulator in social care; we are not the organisational regulator. To put it simply, we are the General Teaching Council, the General Medical Council or the Nursing and Midwifery Council for social care. The other important thing to say is that we are a relatively new regulator. We were established in 2001. We began registering social workers in 2003 and we introduced the degree in 2005. So, to a certain extent we are in our infancy. We have achieved a lot, but there is no doubt that there is a lot more for us to do. I would like to say something generally about regulation. I feel very passionately that regulation is about the positive promotion of the highest quality standards. We are not a police force. We work through maintaining a register and making sure that you can only enter our register and remain on it if you are competent and have the behavioural

features that you would expect of a professional. We also work very strongly through our role in education and in approving educational institutions, not only in undergraduate training—initial training—but in career-long development. Our conduct powers only come into play in relation to a very small proportion of social workers who do not live up to the standards that we would expect. I have a number of core messages, if you like. I am sorry if I disagree with Hilary over this, but the first one is that we believe that there is an urgent need for a common curriculum across the universities. That is not to say that the content of the curriculum cannot be delivered in different ways, but we do think that a common curriculum is essential. We also think that it is extremely important that there is a national model of work force supply and demand; in other words, it is essential that demand for the degree is linked to professional recruitment shortages across the country. At the moment there is an absence of such a model. We also think that it is important that there is a national agreed career structure in social work. In our view, social work education needs to be dynamic, responsive and ongoing. It is entirely unrealistic to expect that a new social work graduate should be qualified to carry out all the duties of a social worker, so we need good undergraduate training. We need a foundation year during which the knowledge that an undergraduate has acquired is transferred into fully competent practice through supervised training in the early years. We then need agreed routes into specialist training, which are supported through accredited specialist education and are ultimately, I would argue, linked to the register, so that people are not only registered as social workers but are registered to practise within particular specialist areas of social work and can demonstrate that they have both the competencies and the experience to carry out that specialist work. I am not going to say anything more now; I have probably said enough.

**Chairman:** Does Mike want to say something about that?

**Mike Wardle:** Thank you, Chair—

**Rosie Varley:** I have told him that I am new and that he can correct me whenever he wants.

**Q97 Chairman:** Have you got rid of any institutions in terms of the training of social workers in the time that you have existed? Have you barred many people from practising as social workers?

**Rosie Varley:** I will take the first question. We have not got rid of, as you put it, any universities providing social work courses, but I was told earlier today that the General Medical Council in its entire history, which is more than 100 years, has never closed down a medical school. What we have done is to work very closely with the education providers, and on many occasions we have said to them, “We have concerns that you are not meeting our expectations in this or that area. We want you to put in place remedial measures and we will come back and have a look at you again next year”. So we have worked with educational institutions to make sure that they satisfy our requirements. What we have

done is to refuse to approve some new courses with new providers that have come with us, saying, “At the moment you do not meet our requirements”. In terms of removing people from the register, indeed we have. I think that it is 70 to date. Is it Mike?

**Mike Wardle:** Round about, and we have also refused—

**Q98 Chairman:** How many?

**Mike Wardle:** If I may, we will give the Committee a note on the precise up-to-date numbers.<sup>12</sup> They change every day. We have also refused entry to the register to more than 400 people who have applied to become registered social workers because either their qualifications or something about their background and character have not persuaded us that they are the right people to work in the field.

**Q99 Chairman:** Do you get worried when leading institutions go out of social work training? We were reminded that the London School of Economics no longer does social work and I believe that Reading has gone out of it. Why is that happening? Have you gently nudged them out?

**Mike Wardle:** I do not think that we have been a direct cause of any of those decisions by universities. Universities will decide for their own strategic purposes to come in or out of particular areas of training or teaching. What we are concerned about is that there should be sufficient available training spread in the right geographical areas to enable students to participate in courses. Because social work is very much a mature profession—60% of those coming in to the profession train as mature students—the students are less geographically mobile than some. We are not so concerned about the actual institutions but we are concerned to ensure that there is an adequate supply of social work places across the whole of the country. Whether they are provided by this institution or that institution is of less concern to us, provided the training is high quality and is there on the ground.

**Rosie Varley:** What Mike says is very important. I would add that as an independent regulator—it is important that as a regulator we maintain our independence—it would be quite wrong of us to bend to any pressure for the dilution of educational standards in order to increase the number of social workers. That I believe would be quite wrong and is not something that we would do.

**Jane Haywood:** I am Chief Executive of the Children’s Workforce Development Council. We are an employer-led organisation, and we are responsible for leading reform across the whole children and young people’s work force. A particular priority at the moment is our social work programme. Our view is that we need some systematic change in the way that we train and support our work force. We are clear that, across the system, there are good things happening and good pieces of work happening, but we have not got it working as a proper and effective system. There are

<sup>12</sup> See Ev 64.

some long-term solutions, but there are some short-term things that we have under way to underpin it. In the short term, we talked to the Committee last year about the newly qualified social worker programme, which was just about to start. It has kicked off and is being welcomed by our employers and our work force. We are now developing proposals for early professional development and advanced practitioner work, so we are starting to see a framework. It starts with someone coming in to the degree course, with early work in terms of their induction to the profession and further development in the early stages,<sup>13</sup> and then develops further either into the advanced practitioner stage or into management and leadership. There is a debate to be had about where the learning takes place for all those stages, and I think that the newly qualified social worker programme will help us to understand that. We are clear and our employers are clear that there needs to be some specialism in the degree, but it also needs to start as a generic degree because, as we clearly heard from the HEIs, children and young people live in families. Many of their problems come from the fact that the family is dysfunctional, so it is very difficult to pick out what the adult social worker and the children's social worker should do. When the newly qualified social worker joins them, our employers need to know that they understand what it is like to operate as a children's social worker in the children's services context, understanding the wider integrated working that is under way. They need to be able to do the reports and they need to be able to start to do some of the analysis and some of the casework, because if they cannot do that they will not learn and will not become the experienced social workers that we need. The practice placements are a very important part of the degree, but it is clear that we have not yet got it right. The relationship between the HEIs and the employers is not working as it should. Some of that will be about funding, and some of it will be about strength of personal relationships, but it should not really rely on that. It comes back to needing a systematic framework for making it happen, and a clear expectation of who is doing what in order to ensure that we have high-quality practice placements. However, for the children's social worker, those practice placements have to be in front-line children's practice rather than more general placements.

**Keith Brumfitt:** I also work at the Children's Workforce Development Council, and my role is to lead a large range of our initiatives in social work, all of which have kicked off in the last year. Essentially, our work picks up social workers after they have completed their initial training, so we work mainly with local authority employers but also with some voluntary and private sector employers, supporting them to develop further those social workers who work in the children and families context. There is a large range of initiatives, and we can talk about them in detail if you wish.

**Chairman:** Thank you for that warm-up session. Derek, I shall call you first on the entry routes to the profession.

**Q100 Derek Twigg:** How can the balance between diversifying entry routes and maintaining high expectations be managed?

**Jane Haywood:** Shall I go first?

**Chairman:** It is like being back at primary school.

**Jane Haywood:** You have to put up your hand. I am not sure that I can answer in detail, but as our HEI colleagues were telling us, it is not only to do with academic ability; it is about a set of personal skills. That recruitment process has to ensure that the people coming in know that they are joining a profession and training for a profession. Underneath that there will be an academic course of study and an academic underpinning. I think that passion and commitment to the profession have to be at the start of the recruitment process. Through the course, we should make the assessment processes work, so that we only get people coming out at the end who can meet the academic standards. But if they do not have passion or commitment to the profession, they will not work for us.

**Mike Wardle:** As we have heard from some of the witnesses on the first panel, the question about partnership between employers and the universities is crucial. If the partnership is really good, there does not seem to be a difference in expectations between the employer and the universities, but in partnerships that are weak, there is. We must think of ways to spread the good practice in partnership throughout the system—things such as ensuring employers are involved in the processes by which students are selected, in deciding which students come to them for practice placements and in the assessment of students at the end of those placements. They must be integrated into the way in which the professional skills are taught and the assessment of the students' capabilities, both during practice placements and at the end of the degree. The partnership approach is the one that will make it work.

**Q101 Derek Twigg:** What guidance is given to universities? What connection do they have with employers in determining suitability, which is what Keith has been talking about? What guidance is out there? Clearly, there is a mix. You get an x number of good social workers, who still get through the system, but are not really fit for purpose for that particular job.

**Mike Wardle:** There is not a lot of national guidance. There is the material that has been referred to and the Secretary of State's requirements for social work, which give various general statements about the types of quality you are looking for in someone to be selected for social work, and say that you must have a process to make that selection. But there is no nationally prescribed guidance as to exactly what you are looking for and what you should be doing when selecting students.

<sup>13</sup> *Note by Witness:* The newly qualified social worker programme starts after someone completes their degree course, with further development in the early years of employment.

**Q102 Derek Twigg:** Do you think that between the entry and the completion, the guidance is somewhat lacking? There is a different issue about when you are starting to recruit someone to a course and the completion of it in terms of the suitability. Is there something more that should be done? As you said, there is no great guidance out there at the moment.

**Mike Wardle:** There is more that can be done. As I said, there is some very good practice out there, in both the universities and employment about how to work together to get the right people in to support them through the degree and get them into practice. We need to bring that together in a way that is accessible to the people concerned to say that that is what works and get that replicated across the system. We certainly want to work with both employers and universities to get that done. We have started the debate with them about how we can bridge the gap in expectations and start to bring that together. The idea of an understood and agreed curriculum, which will also deal with the question of what is generic and what could be specialist in the degree, and how we get good practice in the selection and assessment of students, is something that we can work on with those partners.

**Q103 Derek Twigg:** Is that, again, the argument for more central planning and much more involvement from employers? A question was asked in the previous session about the disagreements on that.

**Mike Wardle:** I would personally welcome a bit more central planning in the system. Rosie mentioned the idea of a supply model in social work. We do not actually have one. We know that local authorities report almost 10% vacancy rates for front-line social workers and children and family services, but there is no national model that tells us, for a given time and population, how many social workers we want in a society to give an optimal service. So we do not actually know potentially how many social workers we need. We need some kind of model for that, which is understood and accepted. We need to understand what the role of each major employer is in providing practice opportunities and doing their bit in supporting the development of the profession. Without being over the top about it, a bit more national discussion at least, if not planning, would be helpful.

**Rosie Varley:** I entirely endorse that. Coming in from another sector, it seems to me that we need a much clearer national understanding about what a social worker ought to be doing and the competencies that they ought to acquire at every level of their career. I think very strongly, as I said earlier, that we need to move towards a common curriculum. We need a common understanding of what social workers ought to acquire in terms of competence and experience in their early years. We ought to have a nationally accredited rooted specialist service.

**Q104 Chairman:** Should employers be involved in that?

**Rosie Varley:** One of the complexities in social work is that it is unlike health. Health has a national service, and national agreements that have to be developed locally. There is quite a strong, central hold on it. But in social work, social workers are largely employed by local authorities and independent providers. It is much more difficult to gain that national understanding about what ought to be done when, and what the competencies ought to be at every stage because we have such a plethora of employers.

**Q105 Chairman:** Do you not regularly meet up with the employers and say, "Come on. There are some real problems here. One of the problems is lack of placements. What are you going to do about it?" What do they say? You must have these meetings. What is the answer?

**Rosie Varley:** We have an employers code. We have an individual code for social workers, which is statutory. Any professional social worker has to abide by our code. We also have a code for employers that would require them, for instance, to employ only registered social workers to provide development training and supervision. That as yet is not obligatory, but one of Lord Laming's recommendations, which we wholeheartedly endorse, is that it should become obligatory. We think that will make a real difference, so employers will have to abide by our code.

**Jane Haywood:** Our employers have said that they want to improve the quality of practice placements and the relationship with HEIs, but they are struggling to do it. The pressures on children's services are so significant that it is very difficult to get a hold of all the issues. Where the importance of practice placements and the importance of the HEI is understood at a senior level in the authority, that can make the relationship with a higher education institution work. Where it is not, and there will be good reasons for that because of the pressures of work, it is much more difficult to make it work.

**Q106 Mr Timpson:** Can I take you back to your opening remarks and the common thread that was running through it, which was that—correct me if I am wrong—you all seem to agree that there has been up until now the absence of an effective national work force model for the supply and demand of social workers? One thing that I did not hear, apart from you all agreeing that that is something that we need, is why we have not had it, and why in 2009 we are still talking about it. What are the reasons that we have not been able to not only see that vision but implement it?

**Keith Brumfitt:** Decisions are made by a very large number of organisations that can often make decisions autonomously, so decisions made through a regulatory process and through individual universities may not take account of other pressures in the system, and there can be quite significant regional differences. In some parts of the country there can be an over-supply of people coming out of training courses, and in a different part of the country there will be an under-supply. Those two

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situations in themselves cause significant pressures for employers in terms of placements. I think it is a collection of individual organisations making separate decisions.

**Mike Wardle:** Another difficulty is that it is a very complex question. There is not a strong research base to understand the factors that play into the question. In teaching we can set a pupil-teacher ratio and you can say that with a given number of pupils we know how many teachers we are going to need. To an extent you can determine how many teachers you need in secondary specialisms. In social work you first of all have to decide for any given population how many social workers are the optimum number to be engaging with the different types of social need and how the social needs are likely to change given the economic situation or other factors that we know have an effect. At the moment there is not the research base that will enable us easily to come up and crunch the numbers and say, "That is a good model for the supply of social workers." So at the moment we are relying very much on individual local authorities, as the major employer of social workers, to take their own decisions about what they can afford and what they think will work to deliver the services that they deliver to their local populations. What there has not been is a coming together of that experience and evidence from all over the country to say there may well be an optimum position here that we could be working towards. I do not know exactly why that has not happened but I know that the complexity is one of the reasons and the lack of a research base is another.

**Chairman:** May I suspend the session for a couple of minutes. We are waiting for a member of the Committee to arrive, as a member has to go out to do an interview about the European elections. We are not quorate, so relax for a moment. And now we are quorate. Fiona has just come in. Jane, carry on.

**Jane Haywood:** The 2020 children's work force strategy said that it had a number of different strands in the children's work force and that, for a number of reasons, it chose to take a different approach with each part of the work force. It was usually for historical reasons so if you look across the piece, different parts of the work force were funded, supported and planned for in different ways. We have chosen in this country for some parts of the work force—for example, teaching and medicine—to take very much a national planning approach. We have chosen not to do that in social work. We have seen that as the responsibility of individual employers. We might be coming to the point when we have to think about whether that is sustainable for the long term. If we do not do something nationally, we need a requirement for regional work force plans, because some of it centres more around regional labour markets than national labour markets. That might be a way through some of this and help us to get the work force plan that we need.

**Q107 Mr Timpson:** So who would be responsible for providing that central direction and looking at the supply and demand of social workers throughout

the whole country? How would it work in practice? One of the criticisms by social workers to the Social Work Task Force of both your organisations is that there has been a vacuum of leadership and that there is some duplicity in the roles that you are both performing. They are not my criticisms. They are those of the social workers. It seems that there is some confusion about exactly what your roles are. What roles do you see both your organisations having individually and when working together to provide the national leadership and central direction for social work supply and demand?

**Rosie Varley:** Before the question is answered directly, may I say that, coming into the sector, the impression that I got was that there were a lot of national organisations in social care and that there is not necessarily a clear understanding of their different roles. I believe that there has been some overlap. In my view, we need a strong regulator that focuses on regulation. We need a strong professional body, which to date has been lacking in social work. I really welcome the initiative that there is now to have a college of social work that could become a royal college of social work. We need to have a strong work force development agency. The time has come to develop a very clear model with distinct boundaries between those three organisations and some discipline on their behalf only to operate in the area that is their own responsibility.

**Jane Haywood:** It is not for me to sit here and bid for work.

**Q108 Chairman:** But do.

**Jane Haywood:** But I am going to anyway. We are asked to count the number of social workers and to give a view of work force supply. So, if you like, we are part way along the path. We do not have the powers or the levers to then really take a hold of that and make a whole work force plan work. We could be asked to do that. Equally, there are other partners around the table who could also be asked to do that, and it is probably for the Government to decide who is best placed to do it for the system, ask someone to do it, and take a hold of it.

**Q109 Mr Timpson:** Are the Government best placed to do that? Are not social workers and those working in the profession better judges of that?

**Jane Haywood:** I think that the Government are responsible for the 2020 work force strategy and for taking an overarching look at what we need in the children and young people's work force, and to work closely with directors of children's services and the Association of Directors of Children's Services to think about such issues. It sits with the Government to ask the question, but not to do that on their own, but with their partners.

**Q110 Mr Timpson:** So the ball is halfway in their court, but you still want to try to drive it forward yourselves.

**Jane Haywood:** Yes. I think that we could take that on and move it forward, probably not this year but, because of the work that we have started, we could start to do it. But, of course, we only cover the



children, young people and families' work force. There is the adult work force, and the work force needs to be planned as a whole.

**Q111 Chairman:** Give us a bit of history then. Why is it like it is? You have clearly shown that if you come from health, it is a very different system. If you come from education, it is a very different system—much more nationalised, centralised and focused. Why has it developed in this way? Why have the good people in this sector not done something about it before now? Rosie, do you know? You are coming from health.

**Rosie Varley:** My observation as an incomer has been as I have shared with you. I do not have the long-term vision to understand how it has got there. I am asking the same question as you—could you answer it better, Mike?

**Mike Wardle:** I am not sure that I could either. I am not as recent a newcomer to the sector, but my knowledge of the history of the sector does not go back far enough to answer your question.

**Q112 Chairman:** Someone usually knows—has an historic memory—why we are where we are now, rather than somewhere else.

**Jane Haywood:** We are all new, so we cannot speak for the history, but I think that the social work profession has not spoken loudly and confidently about what it needs and wants. Sometimes when it has spoken about what it needs and wants, the system has not been ready to hear it. Now the system is ready to hear those messages.

**Q113 Chairman:** Which Minister should have done what he or she should have done to change this before? Which Minister has been lacking in leadership?

**Jane Haywood:** It is not appropriate for me—I do not think that it is a Minister actually, but a system thing. We live in a political world. How do you get resources? It is when a crisis comes—it opens doors.

**Q114 Chairman:** But this Committee is used to shadowing a Department. When something goes wrong, our job is to say to the Government, through a Minister, "Why didn't you do this? Why didn't you sort this out before?" This world is such an interesting, murky, inchoate sort of mess, is it not?

**Jane Haywood:** I think it has gone on a long time. That is why it is difficult to say, "This is you" or "This is you". This has been a long time in the making. People have been interested in teachers and schools, and not always interested in social work—I think that that is fair to say.

**Q115 Fiona Mactaggart:** I am sorry that I did not hear the beginning of your presentation. My sense—in fact, one of my colleagues said this in the House recently—is that, when I was at university, social work as a profession, and going into social work, was perceived as a high-status profession. It was seen as something that was on the list of options. Somehow it seems to have been slithering down in terms of the status of professions. I am much less

likely to know a young social worker now than I am to know a young nurse or doctor in my broad social circle. I do not know why that is. That is completely anecdotal, but I think that there is a long-term shift in the social recognition of the social work role. I would be interested to know why you think that has occurred and what you think needs to be done to remedy that.

**Mr Pelling:** It is seen as worse than being an MP.

**Fiona Mactaggart:** We are all just crooks.

**Rosie Varley:** It is interesting. Ten years ago teaching was in exactly the same situation. There have been various initiatives taken in teaching that have been explicitly geared towards reinforcing the professional image, such as creating a proper career structure and introducing remuneration packages reflecting experience and teachers' level of responsibility for supervising other teachers. That is, as far as I understand it, although I was not around in education at the time, a specific initiative that was taken by the Government and that has been delivered. It was in response to the very poor reputation that teaching had at the time. I think that we now have an opportunity to do precisely that in social work. My anecdotal evidence, as I was telling my colleagues last week, is that there are some very bright young people around now who, as a result of the spotlight that has been put on social work, are now saying, "That is a profession that I would like to go into, because I would like to be part of changing it."

**Q116 Chairman:** All the witnesses that we have had so far have been terribly relaxed when we talk about pay. We asked one group and they did not seem to know how much social workers earned. Is that one of the problems, that people are not paying enough?

**Mike Wardle:** There is some evidence that the amount of money that you are likely to earn over a lifetime influences the popularity of student choice of profession. Social work comes at the bottom of the league table in terms of career earnings. Also the reason why the A-level scores are probably less for people coming into social work than doctors is actually that medical schools can—

**Q117 Fiona Mactaggart:** What proportion of social workers are women?

**Mike Wardle:** Eighty-four per cent, which is another issue, as it has been traditionally. Nursing is paid better than social work, and it has that similar gender profile.

**Q118 Chairman:** This is a really difficult profession. It is very demanding and stressful and you need an amazing range of competences to do it, and yet it pays pretty awfully.

**Mike Wardle:** It does not pay awfully, but it pays less than comparable professions.

**Chairman:** It does not sound that good to me.

**Keith Brumfitt:** It also pays differently in different areas. There is no national pay scale; it is all locally determined. There is some significant variation. The evidence that we have from newly qualified social workers is about what they anticipate earning when

they are three, four or five years into the profession. It is at that point that it begins to bite, less so than when they are first appointed.

**Q119 Chairman:** One of the problems is that social workers have to get into the administrative and managerial line to get the increase in pay, which means that you lose them as good front-line social workers, whereas the evidence from the teaching inquiry is that you can remain a professional in teaching, go up the scale and get a reasonable income but remain doing what you like doing.

**Jane Haywood:** The starting salaries for social workers and teachers are broadly the same, but they very quickly go in different directions, so pay is an issue. One of the points that we have been trying to make is that, given the work that we are doing to develop the advanced social work professional, there has to be extra money. Otherwise, why would you take on what are likely to be the more difficult and demanding cases and the support for colleagues who are dealing with it? There has got to be some reward and remuneration linked to it.

**Rosie Varley:** I am very pleased that we are talking about reward and remuneration, because when we introduce the career structure linked to the specialist qualifications that we are talking about, it will be most important that those who acquire the specialist qualifications and experience are remunerated adequately, and that they remain on the ground as specialist practitioners rather than in management. We have had that development in nursing. We have specialist nurse practitioners who are able to prescribe and do a range of things that were previously restricted to doctors. Of course, a consultant medical practitioner will be the most highly qualified person and will remain treating patients and supervising colleagues. As you say, that is the model now in teaching, and we need it in social work.

**Mike Wardle:** Some authorities already have models of consultant or senior practitioner social workers, so it would not have to be invented from scratch. There are good models in many authorities where senior practitioners partly mentor on difficult casework and partly take on the most difficult cases, and they are there as on-the-ground professionals supporting less experienced colleagues. That model has worked very well.

**Chairman:** We have been holding John back from his questions.

**Q120 Mr Heppell:** The Chairman touched earlier on placements. John Barraclough of London Metropolitan University told us that “as long as there is no compulsion on statutory social work agencies to provide practice placements, universities will be in the invidious position of continually having to persuade, cajole and occasionally beg agencies to provide student placements . . . This makes it impossible to plan placements well”. A number of our previous witnesses have said there is a real problem with placements. Do people have to have an obligation to provide placements before it

will work? What can the GSCC or the CWDC do to make it better and provide those extra places? Is there anything you can do?

**Jane Haywood:** I am always reluctant to use compulsion to bring about change, because once you take your foot off the pedal, you have lost the change. There might need to be some element of signing up to a code of practice or things like that, but this is about a culture change. It is about building the relationship between the HEIs and the employers so that the employers are confident in their role in helping to train future professionals. They have the skills and the support from the HEIs to do that. It has got to go both ways. If you think that by having the power to say, “You have to do this”, you will get a quality placement, well, you will not. A quality placement comes from people investing time in it and from the leadership investing time in it. It is about planning where the placement will be and about the feedback to the student afterwards. That has to come from people who want to do it and see that it is important, not from people who are forced to do it.

**Rosie Varley:** I think that we could get more sophisticated in the way we fund placements. At the moment, the GSCC has responsibility for passing the funding on to universities, but it has to do so according to a formula that is numerically based, so it is related to the number of students. We do not have any power to relate the funding to quality improvement, so we cannot use funding as a lever. I think that would be a very important development for us. We simply have a mechanistic formula.

**Keith Brumfitt:** The issue that John raises applies to universities on a range of degree courses. Sometimes we forget that on dozens and dozens of degrees, universities are seeking placements with local employers. I think sometimes social work degree colleagues in higher education beat themselves up unnecessarily because of the difficulties they have. People running other degree programmes have similar difficulties. Having said that, it is important that we get it right, and I agree with Jane that compulsion is probably not the best way of doing it. When I talk to employers about this, they are keen to be involved, but they want to be involved in more than just the placement. They want to be involved in other aspects of the training as well, so that they feel that they are working on and committing themselves to a professional training programme, rather than just being the recipient of a student on a placement. The employers I have spoken to are looking for more.

**Q121 Chairman:** But initial teacher training placements are not compulsory, and they seem to be doing a lot better job than you.

**Keith Brumfitt:** My background is education, so I am an insider and I did rather a lot of time in initial teacher training at universities. When I was running placements in a university for teacher training, placing 400 people a year, we had the same difficulties. It was about relationships and embedding the universities and the employers or schools in the same room, spending a lot of time

making it work and ironing out difficulties. That is not to say the people on social work degrees are not doing that, but it is a common challenge for universities—finding high-quality placements.

**Q122 Chairman:** Keith, I put it to you that we are doing a parallel inquiry into the training of teachers and we are not getting this constant complaint of a lack of placements from the training-of-teachers side. We are getting it from this side, so something is going awry here.

**Keith Brumfitt:** Indeed.

**Q123 Chairman:** To push that further, we are at a critical point in the development of social work. If among the 150 local authorities in England, there is another situation comparable to the tragic case of baby Peter, you know what will happen to that local authority in terms of jobs and all the rest. So this is of the moment; it is extremely important that we have a highly qualified social work work force. With that being of the moment and the fact that we are at last perhaps going to see Ofsted being more rigorous and hands-on in its inspection, is this not the opportunity for all of you in this sector to make the changes and quite dramatically improve placements?

**Keith Brumfitt:** I agree that stronger work on improving the quality of placements is very important, but with regard to the comparison to the initial training of teachers, 10 or 15 years ago they were in a very similar position, with real difficulties about placements and the quality of placements. It has taken a lot of work consistently, predictably, around working at those relationships and structures. It is tough.

**Q124 Chairman:** You are giving me the impression that, compared to the education world, social work is all a bit sloppy.

**Keith Brumfitt:** No—

**Q125 Chairman:** You have not got around to it; you have not built the relationships—it has been a second-order priority. But it is in an area where children die if we do not get it right. It is not like education, where children might get a pretty awful education. This is a sector where children die if we get it wrong or end up spending years in a miserable situation.

**Keith Brumfitt:** I do not think that the sector is sloppy at all. I think that there is a lot of work that the HEIs are doing to build these relationships, which are difficult relationships. The HEIs are working with a lot of employers who have significant vacancy levels. Some of those employers find it difficult to provide the supervision and support for a student on placement, because of the vacancy situation.

**Jane Haywood:** Of course the degree is still quite new, so we are still, if you like, building the relationships. This is the first year that the first set of candidates are coming out,<sup>14</sup> or it may have been last

year, so we are still building up and learning how to deal with this different kind of degree and a different kind of student.

**Rosie Varley:** Also, professional regulation in social work is still very new. I think that we have to remember that it is still in its infancy. The profession is still building itself and learning what it means to be accountable and responsible, and to work to standards. I think that a lot has been achieved in the last few years, but there is certainly a long way to go.

**Mike Wardle:** I want to give one bit of history, if I may. Under the former diploma in social work, the requirement was over two years to complete 130 days of practice education. With the introduction of the degree in 2003, that was lifted to 200 days. So the sector has had to expand the number of practice placement days that it can provide by an enormous amount. First, there is simply that increase from 130 to 200 days of practice education in each qualification. Secondly, there has been a 30% increase in the number of students coming through the qualification. In fact, I think the sector has done an enormously good job in expanding offers very quickly. We know that there are problems of getting good-quality placements. I think that universities, when pressed, would say, “Well, we can get placements, but we just want a bit more quality”. What we have done, in partnership with CWDC and Skills for Care, which runs the adult side of workplace development in social work, is to produce a new tool that we are piloting with both employers and universities. That new tool is all about the quality of practice learning, so that we can get a better handle on those things that are going well and those things that are not. We intend to make that a compulsory part of the quality assurance regime for practice placements once we have done that piloting.

**Chairman:** People are going to get Sue and Hilary’s back up about how long is required. I can see them nodding or shaking their head at some of these points.

**Q126 Mr Heppell:** There is a problem that rolls on from that. People have been put in placements where there were no qualified social workers there, so, effectively, it is other professions that are looking at them. I am no expert in this area but my understanding is that the practice teaching award, which was brought in with the diploma for social work in 1992, has now been superseded by the introduction of the post-qualifying framework. John Barraclough from London Metropolitan university said to us, “That’s who you are downgrading”, whereas before you were bringing people on. It was doing what the medical profession would do; qualified people would train people below them. The assumption would be that people would be qualified, but when they were qualified they would be expected to do some of the training of other people, to make them qualified. He was saying that he thought that that had been lost. Why has the enrolment on practice education awards been so poor?

<sup>14</sup> *Note by Witness:* This has been the second year that the first set of candidates are coming out.

**Mike Wardle:** It is directly our responsibility. We inherited the previous system of post-qualification awards in social work from a predecessor organisation. The reason why we took the decision to shift the practice teaching element of the post-qualifying award away from a specialist qualification in practice teaching was that our evidence showed that most people who had taken that qualification only ever managed to supervise one student in their career after they got the qualification. It was a very good qualification for learning management and for learning how to supervise staff. It was fantastic for that and people used it as a stepping stone towards management positions, but it was not delivering what it was intended to deliver, which was a cadre of people in the profession who specialised in being practice teachers and taking on students. Therefore, the direction that we have taken is that every single specialist post-qualifying award in our new framework includes a module that is about supervising and mentoring others, whether they are students or staff, to try to achieve exactly that goal and so that the whole profession takes responsibility for supervising and mentoring, and the development of the future profession of social work. That is the intention. We are still in the early stages for that new award and we do not yet have enough evidence to say whether it has been a successful development. However, we think that it is a step in the right direction, given what we inherited, which was an award that was not delivering what it was intended to deliver.

**Q127 Mr Heppell:** Is there not a problem because any qualification is likely to lead people to be promoted out of where you want them to be? Must there not be a mechanism to require qualified people to spend some of their time ensuring that others are trained as well?

**Keith Brumfitt:** As colleagues said earlier, one of the projects we are developing this year is a pilot working with 45 local authorities on the idea of the advanced social work professional. Such people would take on a more senior role in a front-line job in social work within a local authority. As Jane mentioned, we will be looking for a pay premium. As part of that, we will specify explicitly what they are required to do in the new role. That will of course include support for student and trainee social workers as well as other less experienced social workers in the team. That is in addition to the post-qualification arrangements that Mike described. It will make explicit that more experienced and senior staff in local authorities have a responsibility to work with less experienced staff. We can build on what is already going on in 40 or 50-plus local authorities. There are therefore other things on top of the qualification.

**Q128 Fiona Mactaggart:** It is striking that the evidence about the post-qualification courses and routes suggests that there is no consensus between different organisations on the best way of doing it. Everyone says that it is not good enough at present,

but the suggestions we have received in evidence and proposals do not all point in the same direction. There seems to be a lot of diversity. I feel that it would help the Committee hugely if we got a clear steer about the post-qualification framework. There are obviously complicated things that need to be done to it. It has been proposed that people should be enabled to supervise appropriately and that it should be standard to have people in training. Lots of courses have been approved and there seems to be little coherence about where they are geographically and so on. I am wondering what core principles we should look for in a post-qualification framework. When should someone be registered to what comes next? I do not think that I can see clarity in those basic issues.

**Chairman:** I have time for two quick answers from two of you. Keith?

**Keith Brumfitt:** It is an issue that we have wrestled with in developing our newly qualified social work programme and our programme of early professional development in the second and third year of employment. Talking to lots of employers about how those programmes match or align with the post-qualifying framework has taken a lot of time. Where we came down to philosophically was to set, with employers, a series of outcomes that individuals would be expected to demonstrate at the end of the first year of employment and then later at the third year of employment. So, set the outcomes and expectations and then say to employers, "Please find the most appropriate way to enable your individuals to meet those outcomes." Some employers have chosen the post-qualifying framework as the ideal vehicle for achieving those outcomes, but other local authority employers have chosen internal training divisions, other arrangements with universities or other bespoke arrangements. In terms of consistency, we have tried to work with employers to set clear outcomes at the end of a period of employment rather than prescribing how people achieve them. That reflected the range of approaches that local authorities and employers wanted to take to support their own staff.

**Q129 Fiona Mactaggart:** It sounds like a recipe for not getting a coherent profession.

**Keith Brumfitt:** But the outcomes—<sup>15</sup>

**Fiona Mactaggart:** I understand why it has happened.

**Mike Wardle:** We take the view that getting a post-qualifying award is an important part of demonstrating your competence in a specialist practice, whichever area of social work specialism that is. We have not yet got to the stage of working that into our requirements of being a registered social worker, but we have started a process of consultation about the requirements we make of social workers as part of their registration. We already require them to undertake a certain amount of continuing education in each three-year period of registration, to check that and to renew their registration. There is a serious debate, however,

<sup>15</sup> *Note by Witness:* The outcomes provide the consistency around expectations.

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1 June 2009 Keith Brumfitt, Jane Haywood, Rosie Varley and Mike Wardle

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about whether the first registration period should incorporate a requirement to meet the newly qualified social worker standards at the end of year one and whether it should go on to say that someone should have achieved a post-qualifying award in their specialist area of practice. It would be quite a big shift for the profession; we have never had that level of specificity about the level of qualification needed to practice, except in the area of specialist mental health work, where there has been that requirement. However, the profession needs to have that debate and say, "Can you demonstrate your qualification and competence to undertake complex work in your specialism?" We think that the PQ framework provides a way in which to do that, so long as it is valued by employers. You asked about a point of principle, Chairman. You said that the PQ framework has to have the support of employers and be valued by them as something that really adds to

the quality of practice. We know, so far, that employers would say that it does. I was talking recently with the head of safeguarding at Suffolk. He said that in teams where his people have post-qualification awards, the quality of practice is different—it is better. We have not yet spread that message across the country, but that is where we need to go.

**Chairman:** Mike, Rosie, Jane and Keith, thank you very much for that. We apologise again. We want to get this report out fast in order to make a difference and to influence policy, so we are pushing ourselves into these double sessions, although they do not always suit such talented people, as the eight of you are. We wish that we could have had longer with you. However, if, after you have left, you think, "Why didn't I tell them that?", please add to our store of information. Only when we pick up the resonance can we write something good, which we intend to do. Thank you.

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### Supplementary memorandum submitted by the General Social Care Council (GSCC)

#### CONDUCT OF SOCIAL WORKERS

##### *Key statistics:*

Between June 2006, when the first conduct hearing was held and June 2009, 74 conduct hearings have been completed, as a result:

- 36 social workers have been removed from the register\*
- 9 social workers have being suspended from the register
- 24 admonishments (caution recorded on the register) have been given.
- In three cases, allegations of misconduct were not proven
- Two cases have been adjourned
- The GSCC receives an average of 42 complaints about social workers a month.
- The majority of conduct referrals are closed at the early stages without the need for further investigation
- In two cases the sanction of removal from the register was overturned by the Care Standards Tribunal and a lesser sanction imposed.

#### SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

##### *Key statistics:*

The Social Work Degree has an average withdrawal rate of about 15/16%. The table below shows the overall percentage of students who have withdrawn to date. Please note that the latest figures are not complete. Some people refer or defer their work and then drop out 2/3 years later so until all data is complete the latest figures will not be accurate.

<i>Result</i>	<i>2003–04</i>	<i>2004–05</i>	<i>2005–06</i>	<i>2006–07</i>	<i>2007–08</i>	<i>2008–09</i>	<i>Grand Total</i>
Deferred	37	112	250	74	42	24	539
Failed	84	128	117	30	7		366
No Result Yet	40	78	741	4,280	5,305	5,532	15,976
Withdrawn	464	760	641	156	88	58	2,167
Passed	1,909	3,513	3,975	1,154	4		10,555
Referred	48	159	357	54	2	3	623
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>2,582</b>	<b>4,750</b>	<b>6,081</b>	<b>5,748</b>	<b>5,448</b>	<b>5,617</b>	<b>30,226</b>
Withdrawal%	18%	16%	11%	3%	2%	1%	7%

June 2009

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**Wednesday 10 June 2009**

Members present:

Mr Barry Sheerman (Chairman)

Annette Brooke  
Mr David Chaytor  
Paul Holmes  
Fiona Mactaggart

Mr Graham Stuart  
Mr Edward Timpson  
Derek Twigg

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**Memorandum submitted by Liz Davies, Senior Lecturer in Children and Families Social Work,  
London Metropolitan University**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 Since 1992, I have been involved in designing and delivering child protection training and teaching in the context of both single and multi agency courses. At London Metropolitan University, I teach social workers on the undergraduate and postgraduate courses and specialise in child protection. I also teach child protection at post qualifying level. I have written two online courses for basic awareness and basic skills in protecting children which have been published by the training company Akamas ([www.akamas.co.uk](http://www.akamas.co.uk)) and have recently written four books on child protection training.

1.2 This submission addresses my concern that the child protection aspect of social work teaching and learning, particularly in relation to joint training with police, has become marginalised. Following the demise of child protection systems, as reflected in policy and practice guidance, training in child protection skills has become inaccessible to social workers at both introductory and advanced levels. Child abuse inquiries demonstrate that tragedies are taking place because of lack of knowledge of the “Working Together” protocols and as a result of a professional lack of confidence in the use of statutory processes and intervention to protect children.

**2. THE DEMISE OF CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEMS AND TRAINING**

2.1 It is of great concern that child protection training at all levels has been seriously marginalised since the refocusing of children’s services, the introduction of assessment protocols and the Every Child Matters prevention agenda. These policy developments have resulted in a lack of awareness of child protection procedures, a decreased understanding of statutory roles in the investigation of child abuse and a general sense of reduced confidence and knowledge about how to intervene to protect a child from significant harm.

2.2 As the expert witness for Lisa Arthurworrey, social worker for Victoria Climbié, Nevres Kemal (Haringey whistleblower) and one of the social workers in the Baby P case, I have gained further understanding about the lack of social work training in child protection and the difficulties in implementation of the Working Together guidance (DfES, 2006).

2.3 Since Lord Laming recommended that police should focus exclusively on crime (Laming, 2003 p 382), the police have changed their threshold of involvement in child protection cases and are now reluctant to become involved at the level of investigation of significant harm. This change in the police threshold has left social workers without the support of police colleagues in the investigation of child abuse. The police have also reduced attendance at child protection conferences and often it is civilian police staff who do attend. Section 47 strategy discussions are mainly by telephone from a social worker to a referral police sergeant who will ask for information relating only to crime. The close working that there used to be between police child protection officers and social work specialists in protecting children has been undermined.

2.4 At a recent BASW London meeting there was agreement that strategy discussions were commonly by phone and that a strategy meeting of police, social workers and other relevant professionals now rarely took place. A system of monitoring a child’s safety through child protection conferences at 6 monthly intervals, with core groups that do not include police, will not protect children from harm. The strategy meeting is an essential multi agency forum for analysis and collation of facts and decision- making about the investigative process and protective action. The effectiveness of a conference depends on the quality of the section 47 investigation informing it.

2.5 The abolition of the child protection register has been a severe blow to social workers and the most important protocol for the protection of children has been taken away from them. Working Together (2006: 5.60) states that a section 47 is a core assessment, thus shifting the protective process away from joint investigation with police to assessment of the child and family needs. This has diverted social workers away from the task of intervening to protect children and away from joint work to assess risk posed by perpetrators.

2.6 It is very difficult to train social workers in the protection of children when the systems of protection have been so destroyed.

### 3. INITIAL TRAINING

3.1 The three year degree and two year masters degree are the right format and level for initial social work training and the courses must remain generic. Although recent inquiries highlight the lack of specialist child protection knowledge, they also illustrate the importance of social workers having an understanding of social work with adults such as adult survivors of abuse, asylum seekers, disabled parents, parents with mental health/ substance misuse problems, domestic violence, adult child sex abusers, and adults with a criminal or violent history.

3.2 Courses should include modules specifically on child protection and communication with children and young people to ensure a grounding in these subject areas. However, specialisation should not take place until post qualifying level. The importance of a basic grounding in all forms of social work cannot be over emphasised. If specialism was to take place at the initial training stage then adult social workers would lack the knowledge required in working with children and protecting them from harm. This would have serious consequences for the safety and wellbeing of children. It is my practice to include survivors of child abuse in the teaching programmes and to construct assignments around the survivor's accounts.

3.3 Initial social work training should have to include modules specifically on child protection and communication with children and young people and there should be one adult and one children's placement for all students. This is currently the practice at London Metropolitan University. Recent child abuse tragedies have illustrated the risks involved when a social worker begins work in a children's department having only had the experience of student placements in adult services.

3.4 Placements in children's social work are varied in quality. The placement of students in schools where they work in isolation from a social work team is problematic and provides a very limited learning opportunity. Similarly placement in profit-making organisations is not always satisfactory as there is the risk of the student becoming exploited and being used to replace qualified workers.

### 4. POST QUALIFYING TRAINING

4.1 The post qualifying level child protection training which was not available to either Lisa Arthurworrey (social worker for Victoria Climbié) or Maria Ward (social worker for baby P) was a two week course held jointly with police covering the investigation of child abuse and the investigative interviewing of children and young people.

4.2 At a Care Standards Tribunal hearing Judge Pearl clarified that Lisa Arthurworrey had not been trained in joint investigation with police and Section 47 (CA 1989) enquiries (Pearl, 2005). In London there used to be a police child protection trainer for every Borough. There were 32 police trainers and 32 social work trainers working together through the Area Child Protection Committee training subgroups. They would deliver an average of three two week courses a year, within each authority, in the joint investigation of child abuse and investigative interviewing of child witnesses. Following the Climbié Inquiry (Laming, 2003) the Metropolitan Police established a central command and a central training unit. There were very few police trainers for the whole of London and now there is one course a month delivered by the Metropolitan Police for a total of six police and six social workers. I delivered these courses when I was child protection manager in the London Borough of Harrow between 1992 and 2002.

4.3 When I began work at the university I continued to deliver these courses jointly with the police, about five times a year, until 2005 because I was aware of the difficulty for practitioners in accessing these courses. The social workers from SSAFFA also attended. Since 2005, when the police trainer I had been working with, Debbie Townsend, retired, the Metropolitan Police have not been able to provide me with a police trainer. I am inundated with requests from social workers for these courses but cannot provide them. It is for this reason that Debbie Townsend and I wrote the two training manuals, listed below, to try and preserve and make available the knowledge and experience that we had gained through teaching these courses for so many years.

4.4 When these advanced level child protection courses were Borough based, all police who worked with children would attend eg from Sapphire teams, CID, CSU and schools involvement officers. We also trained police from central units such as the Paedophile Unit and Clubs and Vice Unit. Since centralization the training has only been made available to police serving on the Child Abuse Investigation teams. This has reduced the numbers of police available for training. At the same time children's social work has become focused on children in need and there are no longer specialist child protection social work teams. There is therefore now a situation where there are fewer police but many more social workers needing the training and this presents an obstacle to the delivery of these courses.

4.5 I recommend that the Local Safeguarding Children Boards have a responsibility at local level to train all police and social workers who conduct child protection investigations, or who interview child victims and witnesses, in advanced level child protection training. This training must be jointly with police and social workers. In both the Climbié and Baby P case there was a lack of knowledge and experience in joint investigation processes. It is of concern that Lord Laming's recent report does not mention this important and essential training at all or for that matter anything concerning joint investigation processes (Laming, 2009).

4.6 All practitioners working with children—not necessarily conducting investigations—need introductory training in basic child protection skills. This was commonly a two day multi agency course delivered locally through the ACPC's training sub group with the involvement of the named child protection specialists from all agencies. This course, in my experience, is now rarely delivered, although I continue to present this course in the London Borough of Barnet. It is this course which formed the basis of *Protecting children—basic skills* as an online resource published by Akamas. I was eager to make sure that practitioners obtained the specialist knowledge at this level which had largely become unavailable within their workplaces.

## 5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Child protection training and teaching is essential for all social workers. At post qualifying level this training must include multi-agency child protection training. For social workers conducting investigations advanced level joint training with police is required. However, with the demise of investigation systems and the shift away from joint working with police, it is difficult to deliver training courses which promote a well proven knowledge base about the protection of children from harm but do not easily replicate current policy and practice—policy and practice which has become dangerous not just for social workers and other professionals but for vulnerable children.

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- 29 April 2009

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### Memorandum submitted by Dr Eileen Munro

#### 1. SUMMARY

- (a) Risk assessment is a key task in social work with children and families. The most important decisions about removing children from their birth family involve an assessment of the relative risks and benefits of removal compared with leaving them in the home.
- (b) Research shows that people's intuitive risk assessments tend to be biased. Training in the conceptual process involved can not only reduce these biases but also improve transparency, helping social workers articulate the reasoning behind the final judgment to families, their supervisors, and the judiciary.
- (c) In responding to a child protection referral, assessments need to be made of the child's current safety or harm, the family's needs and strengths, and the risk of future harm. The current single form designed as an assessment of need contributes to workers failing to make a clear assessment of current harm and future risk.
- (d) Defensive practice combined with weak risk assessment skills leads to risk assessments that focus more on protecting the worker or agency than children.
- (e) A number of actuarial risk assessment tools have been developed but either have poor accuracy or have not been empirically validated.

2. I have been asked to submit evidence on the issue of risk assessment in the training of children and families social workers.

3. My research focus includes the study of risk assessment and decision making in child protection. I have expertise in the use of formal risk assessment and decision making frameworks as well as in the psychology of risk and decision making. For several years, I taught a Masters' course at the LSE in "Child Protection: Risk Assessment and Decision Making" to a multi-disciplinary group of experienced workers.

4. The poor quality of social work assessments has frequently been noted in SSI and Ofsted inspections and in SCR reports.



5. Assessments need to be made of the child's current safety, the future risk of harm, and the family's functioning, noting both needs and strengths. There is some evidence that the use of a single assessment framework to cover all these dimensions contributes to an inadequate focus on current safety and risk of harm. Assessing current harm and risk requires a different mindset from assessing needs and strengths, with a heightened sense of suspicion and a willingness to be more challenging, even at the risk of upsetting the parent(s). It should be noted that in many of the most high-profile cases, such as Baby Peter and Victoria Climbié, the main failing was in the assessment of the maltreatment the child was already suffering, not in the assessment of future harm.

6. Risk assessment is crucial in deciding whether it is better to remove the child from the birth family or whether the family can be strengthened sufficiently to provide adequate care. Such decisions involve a very complex balancing of the risks and benefits of each option; only rarely is there a clear choice between a highly dangerous family and a safe alternative.

7. The language used in discussing risks is ambiguous, contributing to misunderstandings between professionals in child protection. More attention needs to be given to ensuring there is shared usage of key terms. For example, "high risk" can mean a risk of a highly adverse outcome or a highly probable risk of an outcome. Recently, ambiguity has increased due to the "Every Child Matters" policy broadening the concept of an "at risk" child to those at risk of failing to fulfil their potential. Consistency of use will be increased by people understanding the conceptual processes to which the words refer.

8. A number of actuarial risk assessment tools have been developed in the USA and Canada but either have poor accuracy or have not been empirically validated. They are being used in many jurisdictions but research has found that they are, in practice, used in inappropriate ways by many practitioners. The empirical evidence on their accuracy is limited but indicates low accuracy. This is perhaps not surprising because the conditions that lead to maltreatment are a complex and poorly understood interaction of a range of psychological and social factors relating to parents and children. In a blame culture, such tools have the attraction of transferring responsibility for a judgement that turns out to be inaccurate from individuals to the tool. The risk to the family of receiving an inaccurate risk assessment merits more attention. The main lesson to draw from the research on these tools is that our ability to predict future family behaviour is weak, whether by actuarial or professional calculation and therefore professionals need to hold their judgements with caution and be willing to review and revise them as new evidence emerges.

9. Conducting high quality risk assessments requires a high level of the basic social work skills of interviewing, observing, thinking critically, collecting information and analysing it.

10. Improving the training of social workers in risk assessment needs to be linked to ensuring that their subsequent work environment creates the conditions in which good risk assessments can be made. This involves recognising the time needed to reflect and formulate an assessment plus the crucial role of critical, reflective supervision.

11. Risk assessments require knowledge of numerous substantive issues eg the probability of a successful outcome from a mother's attendance at a drug addiction programme. The internet offers immense potential as a source of such knowledge and its use needs to be encouraged.

May 2009

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**Memorandum submitted jointly by Professor Michael Preston-Shoot (Dean, Faculty of Health and Social Sciences, University of Bedfordshire) and Roger Kline (on behalf of Aspect, the Association of Professionals in Education and Children's Trusts)**

**SUMMARY**

- At both qualifying and post-qualifying levels in academic curricula, students are taught the standards of decision-making required by administrative law, powers and duties in legislation and amplified in government guidance, and human rights.
- Research evidence in social work (as in the health service) indicates that practice assessors and managers often attach greater importance to agency policies and procedures, rather than legal and moral duties.
- Pressure on resources leads managers and staff to constantly seek to adjust service provision to inadequate funding, often at the expense of the requirements for public involvement and accountability built into government policy. In so doing, they undermine legislation and guidance, service user needs, and compliance with the GSCC Code of Practice.
- Practical steps to ensure a change of culture linked to robust supervision arrangements are required since the current processes, including whistleblowing, are ineffective, notably for newly qualified social workers.

## INTRODUCTION

We welcome this opportunity to present evidence about social work education and practice to the Committee. It is derived from our experience as a social work practitioner, educator and researcher (MPS) and as a trade union official representing professional staff (RK). It should be read in conjunction with submissions from the Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee and the Association of Professors of Social Work. One of us (MPS) is a member of both organisations and Immediate Past Chair of the former. Our focus here is that, when considering the outcomes of social work education and practice, a key aspect of the practice context is often overlooked, which provides half of the qualifying degree. In seeking to improve outcomes for vulnerable adults and for children in need or at risk, searching questions should be prompted by judicial review evidence, Ombudsman and other inquiries and narratives from service users and carers.

## MESSAGES FROM THE NHS

1. Professor Ian Kennedy has described the culture that drove the sole Bristol Royal Infirmary whistleblower to emigrate to Australia:

“If the culture of openness between the NHS and the public has to change, so too does the internal culture within the NHS, so as to allow for greater openness with and between staff. Currently, there continues to be a sense among the workforce that they cannot discuss openly matters of concern relating to the care of patients and the conduct of fellow workers. There is a real fear among junior staff (particularly amongst junior doctors and nurses) that to comment on colleagues, particularly consultants, is to endanger their future work prospects. The junior needs a reference and a recommendation; nurses want to keep their jobs. This is a powerful motive for keeping quiet.”<sup>(1)</sup>

2. The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 sought to give statutory protection to whistleblowers. Each NHS employer is required to have an internal Freedom of Speech procedure to enable staff to whistleblow. The Healthcare Commission was established as a new powerful inspectorate. Research evidence questions the Act’s effectiveness.<sup>(2)</sup>

3. The professional regulatory bodies, notably the GMC and NMC, explicitly require registrants to draw attention to concerns about the environment of care in terms that are similar to those of the General Social Care Council Code of Practice.

4. Yet, despite this framework, patients died at Maidstone Hospital NHS Trust and at Stafford General Hospital. The Healthcare Commission report on Stafford General reported deficiencies at “virtually every stage” of emergency care as managers pursued targets to the detriment of patient care. At Maidstone Hospital, the Commission said a “litany” of errors in infection control had caused the “avoidable tragedy”, with nurses too rushed to wash hands and leaving patients to lie in their own excrement.

5. There have been no reports of whistleblowers triggering either the Maidstone or Stafford investigations. The NMC has been unable to tell Aspect if any nurses or managers have faced fitness to practise charges as a result,<sup>(3)</sup> but did not hesitate to remove from the NMC register Susan Hayward, one of the few nurses in recent years who have publicly raised concerns as they are required to.

6. Whistleblowers were also absent when in 2007 the Healthcare Commission audit of services for people with learning difficulties found that:

“... most services for people with learning difficulties provide poor standards of care and there are unacceptable variations in the quality of services throughout the country.

“The Commission said that while services are driven by committed staff working in difficult environments, significant institutional failings are depriving people with learning difficulties of human rights and dignity in many instances. It said services operated off the radar of the healthcare system, with poor leadership, poor training and no framework to measure the performance of services.”<sup>(4)</sup>

7. Social work faces similar problems, despite a framework whose purpose is supposedly to ensure staff can raise concerns about unsafe or inappropriate practice.

## THE LOCAL AUTHORITY EXPERIENCE

8. Local Authority social services are required to have in place:

“appropriate whistle-blowing procedures, and a culture that enables issues about safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children to be addressed”<sup>(5)</sup>

9. The CQC (formerly Commission for Social Care Inspection Guidance) states:

“Care service providers know how internal whistleblowing arrangements can help safeguard the interests of people using their services.

“Staff in regulated care services know they can make whistleblowing disclosures to CSCI if they need to and CSCI responds appropriately when they do.

“The law requires care service providers to have in place measures to safeguard people using their services from harm or abuse and to promote their rights and welfare. National minimum standards expand on this requirement and call upon care service providers to have whistleblowing arrangements.”<sup>(6)</sup>

10. When an Ofsted whistle-blower hotline was finally established on 1 April 2009, no one used it in its first month (April 2009).

11. The GSCC Staff Code of Practice requires all social care staff to comply with the Code by:

“Bringing to the attention of your employer or the appropriate authority resource or operational difficulties that might get in the way of the delivery of safe care.” (Para 3.4)

12. Despite the GSCC Code of Practice requirements, workplace whistleblowing procedures, and the Public Interest Disclosure Act, CSCI’s Chief Inspector explained their role as follows, in 2005:

“The Commission for Social Care Inspection’s (then) chief inspector David Behan sees whistleblowing as a key weapon in improving standards in social care services, and wants more employees to tell the commission of their concerns.

“A lot of people will be reluctant to go to their employer so they can come straight to us,” a CSCI spokesperson said.<sup>(7)</sup>

13. In response, the view of Public Concern at Work was that:

“the sector (social care) was a long way behind even the health service. The important thing is to try to develop a culture of accountability where people are more likely to speak out.”

#### THE HUMAN COST TO STAFF

14. Despite the Public Interest Disclosure Act, a large number of whistleblowers have lost their jobs or suffered detriment. The very first whistleblower (Bryan Bladon) to go to court to use its provisions worked in a private nursing home. He won his case but lost his job.

15. Twenty years ago, social worker Alison Taylor raised concerns about apparent abuses in a North Wales children’s home. A decade later the Government set up a public inquiry. By then she had been sacked. Though she won damages for unfair dismissal, she suffered stress and ill health, and never worked again as a senior residential social worker.

16. Susan Machin was a social worker at Ashworth special hospital on Merseyside, the subject of a 1992 inquiry into alleged abuses of patients. She was the only social worker to give evidence. A year later she was suspended and subsequently sacked for helping patients keep records of alleged ill treatment. In 1995, an industrial tribunal awarded her compensation for wrongful dismissal. She suffered a nervous breakdown, ill-health, and her marriage broke up. She has not worked in social services since.

17. More recently, Community Care reported:

“Haringey Council has launched a counter-offensive against a senior social worker who won an employment tribunal against by default last week. Nevres Kemal had claimed that seven children had been put at risk by being left with an alleged abuser, that the council did not act on her concerns when she raised the alarm, and she was then treated unfavourably. Haringey is appealing against the tribunal’s decision claiming it was not served papers in time. It described Nevres’ allegations as ‘spurious and incorrect’. Haringey hits back at child protection whistleblower”. (22 February 2007)

However, 14 months later the same journal reported:

“Haringey council this week agreed to pay a senior social worker who had claimed children were being left at risk an undisclosed sum”. (18 April 2008)

Nevres Kemal has been unable to get work as a social worker since.

#### WHY IS THIS?

18. Firstly, professionals experience the employment relation as much more powerful than that of external professional accountability. Despite what they are taught at qualifying and post-qualifying levels in academic curricula, which includes standards of decision-making required by administrative law, powers and duties in legislation and amplified in government guidance, and human rights, research evidence indicates that practice assessors and managers often foreground for students and staff agency policies and procedures rather than legal and moral duties.<sup>(8)</sup> The requirements within the Code of Practice for registered social workers need a far higher profile within employment contracts. In particular, social workers must interrogate agency policies for accuracy in interpretation of the legal rules. They must also challenge, in ways that the Ombudsman and judicial reviews have exposed, where decision-making is not evidence-based, research-informed or defensible in terms of values and professional knowledge. Education for professional practice and the management of that practice must embed the skills to introduce legal, ethical and other forms of knowledge for child care and child protection practice into decision-making.

19. Secondly, without more public involvement in the development and scrutiny of services, other pressures are often more pressing and immediate. In Stafford, the Regional Health Authority, the Healthcare Commission, the GMC and the NMC all professed to know nothing of what was happening, yet a high profile local patients campaign was repeatedly raising concerns without any contact from these bodies.

20. There are requirements for public involvement and accountability built into government policy, legislation and guidance, and at the heart of the public sector equality duties and within staff codes of conduct, yet none had the desired effect. Indeed, complaints to the Ombudsman routinely feature grievances regarding the management of complaints procedures. Recent case law has shown how disability and race equality duties are not always considered by local authorities.

21. Thirdly, the inexorable pressure on resources, linked to a large degree of discretion in the provision of services, means that managers and staff are constantly seeking to adjust service provision to inadequate funding, often at the expense of service user needs. The influence of this context should not be underestimated when reading judicial review decisions and Ombudsman investigations.

22. Fourthly, workloads and vacancy rates are often too high. One result, apart from high stress levels, is that, Lord Laming pointed out in his 2009 Report:

“in some authorities visited in the preparation of this report over half of social workers are newly qualified with less than a year’s experience. Inevitably such staff may be asked to do work that should be done by ‘experienced’ social workers.”<sup>(9)</sup>

23. Fifthly, when concerns are raised, it can be very hard to do so effectively and without consequential detriment for those doing so. The General Social Care Council has had some decisions regarding removal of social workers from the professional register overturned by the Care Standards Tribunal because of inadequate supervision and management structures, performance and support.<sup>(10)</sup>

#### A CRUCIAL STEP

24. Local Authority social services should be “learning organisations”. Some are. Many social workers and their managers work effectively, a point noted in several High Court judgements. Employers should have in place regular, frequent, formal supervision. Staff should be able, and be expected, to raise concerns in the first instance as an explicit and integral part of social worker supervision. It should not be necessary for staff to take out grievances or trigger a whistleblowing procedure to raise concerns about the range, nature or quality of care being provided (or not provided). Whilst whistleblowing may be a part—and sometimes an essential part—of such a culture, the raising of concerns should be seen as a normal, constructive and essential part of an early warning system that will allow social care organisations to learn from mistakes and to take preventative action to reduce risks to service users and staff. It should be seen as part of a practitioner’s and manager’s legal and ethical literacy.

25. It is quite unreasonable to expect social care staff to risk their careers without a robust, enforceable, co-ordinated framework in place which enables the GSCC, Ofsted and CQC to ensure that staff who ought to, do raise concerns, and can do so in the knowledge that any attempt to prevent them doing so or to cause them detriment will be dealt with in a robust and timely manner.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

26. We therefore recommend the following as a means of helping ensure that social workers are better able to comply with their Code of practice and their duty of care as taught in the social work syllabus:

- (a) The Code of Practice (GSCC, 2002) to become an express term of the contract of employment for social workers and all social care staff, including agency staff.
- (b) The Code of Practice for Employers of Social Care Workers to have mandatory force, as requested by the GSCC, endorsed by Lord Laming in his 2009 Report and agreed by the Secretary of State.
- (c) Social worker supervision must be the cornerstone of the raising of concerns. Ofsted, CSCI and the GSCC should ensure employers have in place protocols and resources which ensure that regular, frequent formal supervision takes place as the cornerstone of making the authority a “learning organisation”. Staff should be able, and be expected to raise concerns in supervision. They should not have to resort to using the employer’s, let alone an external, whistleblowing procedure.
- (d) The extent to which staff can raise concerns should become a part of the inspection process of both CQC and Ofsted. To that end all providers of social care are expected to maintain records of all such concerns that have been raised and make them available to inspectors in the same way that complaints from the public are already monitored and made available for inspection. Ofsted inspections require those being inspected to “make sure you have available the record you keep of complaints about the care you provide”.<sup>(11)</sup>
- (e) Directors should have specific protection to ensure they are able to carry out their statutory duties, including making protected disclosures, without detriment. They are required to ensure that “there are sufficient financial, human and other resources available to discharge the authority’s statutory functions and maintain service standards in the future.” PIDA regards as a protected disclosure

one stating “that a person has failed, is failing or is likely to fail to comply with any legal obligation to which he is subject”. The Secretary of State should issue specific guidance to Local Authorities, to make clear that if Directors believe that sufficient resources are not available to meet those statutory duties then any disclosure is specifically protected.

- (f) Specific advice and protection should be provided to agency and temporary staff to ensure they have the same access to supervision and the opportunity to raise concerns without fear of detriment.

27. The experience of those who have tried to raise concerns in social services has not encouraged others to do so. It is extremely unusual that a whistleblower of any kind is promoted rather than suffer a detriment. As one small step that would resonate across the sector, Haringey council could reinstate Nevres Kemal thereby showing that whistleblowing is appreciated as one part of the protection of the public.

## REFERENCES

- (1) *Learning from Bristol*: the report of the public inquiry into children’s heart surgery at the Bristol Royal Infirmary 1984–1995 Ch 22.28. Command Paper: CM 5207.
- (2) Hunt, G. (1998). *Whistleblowing in the Social Services*. Public Accountability and Professional Practice. London: Arnold.
- (3) When Aspect asked the Nursing and Midwifery Council whether anyone from Maidstone or Stafford General Hospital had faced fitness to practice proceedings arising from these events they were unable to say since “the NMC records case files by a registrant’s name, *not* by outcome or by health site location. Although the information you seek may or may not be retained in individual case file, it is not easily available.” (Letter 5 May).
- (4) Healthcare Commission press statement. 3 December 2007.
- (5) DfES. (2006). *Working Together to Safeguard Children*. A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children Para 2.8. See also DoH. (2000). *No Secrets*: guidance on developing and implementing multi-agency policies and procedures to protect vulnerable adults from abuse. Para 7.5.
- (6) CSCI. (2006). *Whistleblowing arrangements in regulated care services*. Para 3.
- (7) *Community Care*. (3 February 2005).
- (8) Braye, Preston-Shoot and Thorpe (2007). *Beyond the classroom: learning social work in practice*; and Preston-Shoot (2000). *Using the law to uphold practice values and standards*. Practice Volume 12. No 4.
- (9) Lord Laming. (2009). *The Protection of Children in England: A Progress Report*. Para 5.2.
- (10) See for example *LA v General Social Care Council* [2007] 985.SW and *Tricia Forbes v General Social Care Council* [2008] 1267.SW.
- (11) Ofsted (2007). “*Are you ready for your inspection*” p 12.

May 2009

*Witnesses: Liz Davies*, London Metropolitan University, *Dr Eileen Munro*, London School of Economics, and *Professor Michael Preston-Shoot*, University of Bedfordshire, gave evidence.

**Q130 Chairman:** I welcome Dr Eileen Munro, Liz Davies and Professor Michael Preston-Shoot to our proceedings. We are very grateful that you have taken the time to be with us. This is a very important inquiry for us. We apologise for the room and its acoustics. We also apologise for the fact that, because we are trying to get on with this inquiry in parallel with a major inquiry into the training of teachers, we have double-banked the evidence. Normally, we would not want to do that, but we have to do it just to get through the material. Our apologies if you find us rattling through the questions. I must also declare an interest because Dr Munro is an old friend of mine, and she is a governor of the London School of Economics, as am I. Any other declarations of interest? No. We usually give you the chance briefly to say something to get us started. You can say where you think we are on the training of social workers or you can opt to go straight into questions. Eileen?

**Dr Munro:** May I just make a statement about my area of competence? It is specifically around child welfare, rather than social work in general. On the whole, most of my experience is in how organisations do risk assessment and the understanding of organisational factors that make for good or bad reasoning.

**Chairman:** Could I ask our team to move the microphones slightly towards the table?

**Liz Davies:** I teach and train social workers at London Metropolitan University. I also specialise in child protection training post-qualification. Until fairly recently, I was teaching police and social workers about the investigation of child protection issues and the investigative interviewing of children. I am very grateful for the opportunity to present to the Committee, and one thing that I am really keen for it to address is the lack of post-qualifying training now for joint investigation between the police and social workers. The courses rarely run,

and this training is absolutely essential to effective child protection practice, so that is a big concern to me.

**Q131 Chairman:** Your written evidence on that was very compelling, Liz. Thank you for that. Michael, we will go onto first-name terms rather than titles. Is that all right?

**Professor Preston-Shoot:** Yes, please do. My surname is rather long, so it is much easier to be on first-name terms. I have been a social work academic for the past 20 years. I was one of the members of the Joint University Council's Social Work Education Committee, which was involved with the Department of Health in the development of the social work degree, in its planning and early implementation stages. You have had evidence from JUC SWEC in written form and orally. I qualified as a social worker in the mid-1970s, and I mainly teach and research the interface between law and professional practice, which is why the submission that I co-wrote with Roger Kline has a particular slant to it, which is the legal and ethical literacy of organisations and individual practitioners within them.

**Chairman:** Thank you for that. Derek, as we did not allocate you a question would you like to open up the questioning? Do you have a general question?

**Derek Twigg:** I have no questions.

**Chairman:** Are you sure? Right, let us go straight into questioning with Fiona.

**Q132 Fiona Mactaggart:** Let us start at the beginning, with the content of the social work degree course. There is no national common curriculum for social work degree courses, and in our evidence so far we have heard a number of comments that the social work degree course in the UK is not appropriately preparing social workers to deal with issues of child protection, which are so critical. I wondered whether you felt that our higher education institutions had a shared understanding of what should happen on a first degree course, and whether there ought to be a common curriculum, as opposed to the outcomes that are supposed to be achieved.

**Professor Preston-Shoot:** I hesitate to begin giving evidence by contradicting a Member, but we do have prescriptions for social work education.

**Q133 Fiona Mactaggart:** But prescribed outcomes, not prescribed input.

**Professor Preston-Shoot:** No, prescribed content, in the sense that we have the Quality Assurance Agency's benchmark for social work, which was revised in 2008 and which very clearly states what social work degree programmes should contain in relation to values, knowledge bases and skills. The focus is as much on content as on outcome. There are also the national occupational standards, which the sector skills councils produced in 2002, alongside the five prescribed areas that are in the Department of Health's own requirements for the degree, so universities in general do have a very clear idea about what the content of the degree should be. Every approval and reapproval process conducted

within universities, and overseen directly by the General Social Care Council, should contain a mapping of how the curriculum as it is proposed to be delivered by a university with its agency partners maps against the core requirements in the three documents that I have outlined.

**Q134 Fiona Mactaggart:** Why do you think we have had such robust criticism of the outcomes of the preparation that the degree—not post-qualification studies—is giving to social workers in relation to child welfare and protection? The Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service says that students are not properly able to put “their learning from universities into practice” because they lack “confidence in engaging with service users” and “understanding of risk assessment and child protection issues”, have “a limited understanding of child development in relation to abuse” and neglect, and lack skill in writing legal and court reports. The latter may be an appropriate point to develop later. The Institute of Education says in written evidence that “social work training is thin on analytic skills” and “on helping develop reflective practice” and that there is insufficient “attention given to understanding the potential of effective interventions”. The London borough of Hackney says that “training courses put a strong emphasis on values”—I notice the first thing that you note—“but teach little about evidence-based methodology, and that there needs to be more emphasis on changing what goes on in families and not just assessment.” That is the critical issue, is it not? The evidence seems to show that social work education is, in a way, slightly abstract, and is not professional preparation. Unless it is professional preparation, newly qualified social workers will simply be unable to do what is required of them when they begin their professional life. I see that Eileen is desperate to intervene.

**Dr Munro:** There is a horrible tendency at my age to think back to the good old days, but in my training I had excellent placements in social work units that were staffed by highly competent people. One problem is that the university can only do part of the job; there must also be placements in statutory agencies where people are able to teach to a high standard. You need a work force that is allowed to work to a high standard. At the moment, we have a work force that is very constrained by a very clumsy performance management system, which does not put the welfare of the child at the heart of the service.

**Q135 Fiona Mactaggart:** In that case, why did the Director of Social Services from Hackney, for example, say to us that he did not employ UK-educated social workers and that he only employs them from overseas, because they can do that?

**Chairman:** I think he was the assistant director.

**Fiona Mactaggart:** Sorry, forgive me.

**Dr Munro:** I think that it is partly because the education overseas is at a higher academic standard, but the assistant director in Hackney has the courage to speak the truth when others have perhaps been cautious. It is a reality that the nature of a lot of the

practice these days is not good enough. It is not just that we are failing to pick up cases of abuse, but I think that a lot of the work, as experienced by families, is damaging, so that we not only fail to protect children, but harm the family with clumsy social work.

**Q136 Fiona Mactaggart:** What would you do differently in the undergraduate degree to remedy that?

**Dr Munro:** I think that you need a remedial solution, which may become permanent, but you have to accept that the skill is not in the work force. We need to create social work student units, have joint appointments, and create settings with people who have the time and the skill to do that practice experience with people and not expect those who have huge case loads and are demoralised and inexperienced themselves to provide that training.

**Chairman:** Michael, you were nodding.

**Professor Preston-Shoot:** I agree with Eileen that universities can only do so much. Some 50% of the degree is delivered in practice agencies. Good practice teaching and good practice assessment, which is legally literate and skilled and literate in all the knowledge bases around human growth and development, including child care and safeguarding, is absolutely fundamental. Certainly, a lot of the research that I have done, for example, on legal knowledge and the skills in implementing that knowledge among practice teachers, experienced social workers and their managers, identified deficits in those areas. I agree with Eileen, but I would extend her analysis and say that we need to focus on the quality of the organisations in which students are placed and in which newly qualified social workers enter at the end of their degrees. In other words, we need to focus not only on the quality of the knowledge and the skills of practice teachers, but on the quality of the organisation as a whole. There is a wonderful quote by a judge in relation to an Isle of Anglesey child care judicial review. He referred obiter dicta to viruses having entered an organisation and infected all of its decision making. If this inquiry is in part about identifying viruses, we need to look at organisations as a whole. Although we have the documents to which I referred earlier, universities, which deal with the academic part of the curriculum, have to make choices within the time available. There will therefore be different emphases across the university sector about what is foregrounded within the academic part of the curriculum. I am very clear in my university that what should be foregrounded are the knowledge and skills relating to safeguarding right across service user groups, because that is absolutely fundamental, but other universities may make different choices about what is foregrounded.

**Liz Davies:** I think the General Social Care Council requirements have to change, because at the moment they state that there are 200 day placements, which is an enormous part of the social work experience, and the placements must be contrasting. That is not good enough, because it means that students can do two adult placements—providing they are

different—in mental health, older people and so on. I am in quite a lot of contact with Maria Ward, who was Baby Peter's social worker. She did two adult placements on her course, but her first job was in Haringey and she had no post-qualifying training in child protection, so she was set up to fail. It is a very important factor to say that there should be one children's placement and one adult placement, which is what we insist upon at London Metropolitan university. The other requirement relates to the statutory placement. It does not say that you have to do such a placement, only an aspect of it. For instance, a student could do the first placement in the voluntary sector and the second placement in a children's department and not do statutory work, but the component could be fulfilled by them shadowing a social worker on an assessment or something like that, which is totally inadequate. I supervise about 20 students on placements. My other big problem is that a lot of them are supervised by practice assessors who are not qualified social workers and do not understand the language that I am using. They do not even have to complete practice teacher training. We strongly encourage them to do so, but they do not have to do it. For the second placement, we insist that, if they are not actually social work qualified, they have a long arm who is a qualified social worker, but such qualified social workers are not on site every day for the detail of the complexities of practice. I think that the whole placements issue has to be re-examined.

**Q137 Fiona Mactaggart:** Liz, when you watch your students on placement—presumably you go to observe them—do you see them sitting on the floor with children, or do you see them sitting on chairs talking to adults?

**Liz Davies:** Or putting data into computers perhaps?

**Fiona Mactaggart:** Or putting data into computers, indeed. I am trying to get the texture of the placements.

**Liz Davies:** We don't actually do that much monitoring. We do an initial three-way visit with the practice assessor and ensure that it is a suitable placement and so on. We then do a mid-way visit where the student does a presentation of a case. That is where I mostly pick up poor practice, particularly around child protection. I have some recent examples that are really worrying, where the student gives a wonderful presentation of a case, but they have not protected a child because there is a lack of knowledge in the placement from the practice assessor and the whole framework that they work within. We can teach the students rigorously at the university about child protection systems, but when they go on placement, those systems are not there for them.

**Q138 Fiona Mactaggart:** But do you teach them about communicating with children?

**Liz Davies:** Oh yes, definitely. We run a whole module on communication with children.

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10 June 2009 Liz Davies, Dr Eileen Munro and Professor Michael Preston-Shoot

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**Q139 Fiona Mactaggart:** Where does it start?

**Liz Davies:** Sorry?

**Fiona Mactaggart:** I am serious about this—where does it start? I really mean it about sitting on the floor. I am shocked by the fact that I don't see social workers doing that.

**Liz Davies:** We certainly teach that. It is a skills-based module. We talk about the detail of communication in terms of working with interpreters and with disabled children. We take them through the whole process of a formal investigative interview and then through therapeutic work and storytelling—it is a very comprehensive course. We work with service users throughout the course: they are involved in designing, assessing and delivering the course, and they monitor student performance. Every single session is worked through simulations and role plays, and service users feed back to the students on those role plays.

**Q140 Chairman:** You referred specifically to the Victoria Climbié case and the Baby Peter case, so you are saying that that lack of sufficient training is at the very heart of some of the inadequacies in those cases.

**Liz Davies:** Absolutely, yes. Even in the case of Lisa Arthurworrey, who I am still in touch with and who is still trying to become a social worker again, material from her university course was presented as evidence at her Care Standards Tribunal, to show the lack of child protection focus in some of the work, as it was very much following a family support model of work and overlooked the risk involved in families. Her dissertation was also presented as evidence. She had none of this post-qualifying training with police at all, and neither did Gillie Christou, the manager in the Baby Peter case. The problem is endemic. The post-qualifying training, where I think the core specialist training should happen, is not at all easily accessible now. We introduce it in our modules but we can only introduce students to its concepts; the actual detail of training jointly with police and other agencies, for instance, has to be post-qualifying.

**Professor Preston-Shoot:** I would like to underscore that and add to it. One of my major regrets when we were planning the social work degree with the Department of Health was that a recommendation we made at that point to Ministers through the relevant civil servants to have a newly qualified social worker system and to see the first degree as the beginning of a journey—a very important beginning, but a beginning none the less—which then required further periods of registration, protected case loads, guaranteed supervision and post-registration teaching and learning, was rejected at that stage. The newly qualified social worker system that is now coming in is a major opportunity, but we proposed that when working on the degree and putting it together.

**Q141 Fiona Mactaggart:** Am I not hearing from you that it is a major opportunity that is unlikely to work, because of the standards of the existing work force, or have I got that wrong?

**Professor Preston-Shoot:** It is a major opportunity that can work, as long as we focus not only on qualifying education but on continuing professional development and post-qualifying education and particularly, from my area of research and teaching expertise, on the legal rules, so that when a student or qualified practitioner says to a manager, “You cannot be serious. The legal rules require us to do this,” they are listened to and respected, rather than ignored or turned away because of other imperatives.

**Dr Munro:** You will not see social workers sitting down on the floor with children because that is not included in the Government's performance management system. If you have a heavy case load and are being nagged by your manager to meet the performance indicators, the aspects of your practice that are about children have to be dumped because the priority is sitting in front of the computer and filling in the various forms. That is the reality of what people face. When social workers talk about the work they are proud of, they talk about how they defied the managerial system in order to put the child first. We need to redesign the system so that putting the child first is the priority, instead of a piece of personal preference by dedicated social workers.

**Q142 Chairman:** I think we will move on. When the Deputy Director of Children and Young People's Services in Hackney was here, he rather chided me, I thought, although I think it was amusing, by pointing out that the London School of Economics no longer has a degree course in social work.

**Dr Munro:** I was hoping you wouldn't mention that. No, we don't have a degree course. Again, that is because of the Government's performance indicators, which have created a system of inspecting and judging universities that makes it very unattractive for research-intensive universities to provide social work training.

**Q143 Chairman:** Right. He did mention that it was an institution that, because of Titmuss, had a certain reputation in social work.

**Dr Munro:** It has a great history in social work, and I am very sad that it went. I would love to see—

**Chairman:** Right, thank you for that. We have to move on. Fiona, is that all right? We are going to look at the question of generic or specialist training. Annette will lead and Graham will follow.

**Q144 Annette Brooke:** As we have Eileen and Liz here this morning I particularly wanted to talk about risk-taking, which I believe you mentioned on “Panorama”, Eileen. To what extent is current social work training missing out on the whole concept of making evidence-based decisions and being able to analyse risk?

**Dr Munro:** To me, the level of practice is worryingly low. It seems that people do not have a good enough understanding of what a risk assessment is, so they end up making defensive decisions that are basically aimed at protecting themselves and the agency, rather than the child. A lot of field workers have told me that one of the problems is that the



Government's core assessment form, which is the crucial document in a section 47, quite accidentally does not focus on risk. You can push it into the form, but the form is not designed to remind social workers to think through clearly an entire risk assessment. If you do not do it as a formal and explicit exercise, you will do an intuitive kind of risk assessment, which will be pushed around by your emotions and by the latest information you have, and it will be very distorted. In the Baby Peter case, the emotional dynamics with the mother seemed to have obscured social workers' judgment to the point of not seriously looking at the harm the child was experiencing and recognising that that was very worrying. They somehow got distracted from it by the relationship with the mother. If they had started to write that out clearly for their seniors to look at, they would have said, "This child is having far too many injuries for them just to be accidents."

**Liz Davies:** There is huge confusion between investigation and assessment. All the current performance protocols that Eileen is talking about are based on the assessment triangle, which offers a framework of assessment for children and their families and was introduced in 2000. They are not based on the *Working Together* protocols relating to section 47 and the investigation of likely harm to a child—those are totally different processes. A section 47 investigation, of course, might well include an assessment of the child's needs and the family's needs, but it is not the same process. That is where there needs to be a revision in *Working Together* which was published in 2006. It stated that a section 47 is a core assessment, and that is completely wrong. It means that social workers are now, when they get a child protection referral, following the assessment route. It is the wrong process. It will not get you to protecting a child.

**Q145 Chairman:** Do you agree with that, Eileen?

**Dr Munro:** Yes. It is a different mindset when you are suspicious, challenging, critical, looking further and testing the evidence, as opposed to trying to work in harmony and partnership with the family and to engage with it. Those are different mindsets, and you need both.

**Professor Preston-Shoot:** You also need to know that the organisation employing you is supporting you, holding you and enabling you to manage the dynamics, the pressures and the instances of violence you will encounter. It must enable you to have the time to reflect on what you have seen and heard and to have the courage to say what you need to say. You have to have courage to have very difficult conversations to drive down to the fundamental assessment judgments you need to make. You need to know that your organisation is supporting you to do that. My fear is that a lot of social workers cannot count on that support.

**Q146 Annette Brooke:** Just to pursue that point, is the core of the problem the system in which the newly trained social workers are operating, or the training?

**Dr Munro:** They both matter, and they are so intertwined that you cannot really say that one is the first cause and the other a consequence. They feed into each other in a way that, in the last few years, has been going downhill.

**Liz Davies:** Just to give an example, when a child protection referral comes in, say, at school level, they will pursue the common assessment framework. That means doing a referral, a 12-page form. That is a delay; they should be ringing it straight through under child protection procedures so that there is action—immediately if necessary. When the referral arrives at the social work office there will be an initial assessment, which is a seven-day process. Child deaths have occurred in those seven days. For babies, for instance, seven days is a very long time if they are being harmed. Instead of triggering immediately a section 47 investigation, they are following assessment protocols that are highly mechanistic, rigid, and affected by time scales that are all performance targeted. That does not allow the creative thinking and multi-agency working that is needed in a child protection investigation, where there should be immediate liaison with police to get background on the adults, and so on. A lot of that is reflected in the Baby Peter case where they were following the assessment of the child and family, providing family support services, providing new furniture, and not investigating child abuse or looking at the perpetrators in the family. In a child abuse investigation with the police, perpetrators will be looked at. There are unexplained injuries—who could possibly have caused them? Where are the adults in this child's life? What do we know about them? That process was not happening. The social workers were off and away doing their assessments of need and the police were off and away investigating crime—police have done that since Laming's recommendation in the Climbié inquiry, in which he said that the police should focus on crime. There are two separate directions and no joint investigation of child abuse of significant harm; that is where Baby Peter fell through the net.

**Q147 Chairman:** Could you tell the Committee more about the police concentrating on crime since Laming? I read that in your evidence and it seems disturbing. Could you give us more detail? I am sorry to cut across Annette's question, but it is important to get on record that you are saying that something quite dramatic changed in terms of how the police pursued the possibility of a child being at risk.

**Liz Davies:** Absolutely. At the point of referral, we rarely know if a crime has been committed or not, or even if one is likely to be committed, because child protection is a complex subject. Often we only get clues or a statement from a child. In the past, we would have worked together with the police to look at the referral and, perhaps, screen it out as child protection or screen it in. Lord Laming's recommendation 99 in the Victoria Climbié inquiry stated that the police should focus exclusively on the

investigation of crime. He even said the police should conduct the investigative interviews of children. That goes against the Achieving Best Evidence guidance of the Home Office, which says it should be a joint process with social workers. Since that point, if a social worker rings the police and says, "A child in a school has made an allegation of sexual abuse," the police will say, "Well, is there a crime?" The social worker says, "I don't know." The police say, "You go and interview the child and the family. If you find evidence of crime, come back to us." That is totally different from a joint investigation of significant harm, when there would have been a strategy meeting with the police. You would have sat down with the police and other agencies and said, "We have had this allegation statement from a child. What else do we know about this family and the children in the family?" You would have then done an analysis together and the process would be ongoing—it would not stop until the end of the child protection investigation was reached.

**Chairman:** These are worrying comments. Eileen, do you agree with them?

**Dr Munro:** Yes. There seems to be a policy confusion between the fact that, on the whole, we want to support families and work with them, but at times, our agenda has to be challenging and coercive and we do things that families do not like. It is as if people hope that by working with families, child abuse will fall into place—and it will not. It is a different type of problem from a disabled child needing support.

**Professor Preston-Shoot:** I agree. What comes to my mind is the uncertainty that is probably in the minds of many social workers and police officers about whether what they are dealing with can be encapsulated within a welfare or a justice approach. We seem to swing between one or the other—actually we need both. We need both professions there, asking the difficult questions and supporting each other in their assessments.

**Chairman:** I just wanted to get that on record. Annette, back to you.

**Q148 Annette Brooke:** Could we expand the joint training and joint working towards health and education? What improvements could we have in the basic training to enhance joint working?

**Liz Davies:** At London Metropolitan University, we involve paediatricians in the training of social workers and we bring in the police child abuse investigation team, so there are ways of bringing other professionals in to contribute to the content of the courses; that is really important.

**Professor Preston-Shoot:** We need to make sure that we have confidence that social work students know what they need to know and are skilled in what they need to be skilled in, so part of the initial qualifying degree needs to focus on social work students and their knowledges and skills. We need to have confidence in that. Equally, social workers need to know how to work with paediatricians, police

officers, solicitors and barristers providing local authorities with legal advice. They need to know when they should be taking control of interactions when, in a sense, they are the lead professional; they need to know when they are the supportive professional. They need to have confidence in those interactions and, equally, teachers, health visitors and lawyers also need those understandings and confidences. You can only achieve that by, to a degree, training people together. There is a judgment to be made about when you move away from focusing on uni-professional training to make sure that the police officer, the social worker and the teacher know what they need to know to perform their professional roles and tasks. There is a judgment to be made about when you move from that to training people together, so that they can do these complex tasks confidently.

**Q149 Annette Brooke:** We clearly have some conflict between the family support model and the extreme cases and risk analysis. May I ask, finally, is there a reconciliation between these two terribly important parts of the job in terms of training? Has Every Child Matters been taking us forwards or backwards in both respects—family support and child protection?

**Chairman:** Does Eileen want to take that and take the pressure off Liz for a moment?

**Dr Munro:** It is a very interesting question. I have had a lot of contact around the world in the Anglo-Saxon circle, where we have very similar child-protection problems, and there is this difficulty of reconciling the two dimensions of the practice, but I think the heart of any solution is that they have to be reconciled within the one worker. You cannot separate them into two different streams of services. In one of the Australian states, they tried; they had two different ministries and it has been disastrous—they are now merging them again. It brings out the heart of it: the nature of the work is that you work with parents, knowing that most parents care far more about their children's welfare than you do, but that some of them are either unintentionally harmful or maliciously harmful—that is the reality of what you are working with. You need an agency that helps you keep both mindsets in order. If you are working with the nicest of families in a Sure Start centre, you still have to have your eyes and ears open for concerns.

**Professor Preston-Shoot:** For a number of years as a qualified social worker, I worked in an organisation called Family Service Units, first in west London and then in Leeds. We worked along a continuum. We worked with families, where the family support model was appropriate; we were using family aides, social work support and all sorts of methods of intervention. At the other end, we were taking children into care. Social workers need to be able to move along that continuum, they need to know why they are at a particular point on the continuum at a particular time and they need to be continually reassessing that.

**Dr Munro:** Because families move along that continuum as well.

**Professor Preston-Shoot:** Indeed. And they need to be very sure in their own minds, as do organisations and wider society, about what we regard as good enough and what we do not. If we reach a point where something is not good enough and more interventionist forms of involvement are necessary, we need to make absolutely sure that what the state is providing is better, rather than worse, than what the family itself is struggling to do.

**Q150 Mr Stuart:** Eileen, you have just said that family support and child protection have to be reconciled in the one worker. Michael, do you agree with that?

**Professor Preston-Shoot:** Yes.

**Q151 Mr Stuart:** You could find a system in which you do not separate into separate ministries, which one could easily imagine being disastrous, but actually try to have teams working together in which there are separate strands so that the family support person might be providing evidence that triggers the hard-nosed child protection people to come in as part of an integrated team. Is that possible, or would you reject that out of hand?

**Dr Munro:** What I mean when I say that it has to be in the individual head is that when you are working in a supportive way with a family you have to be alert for warning signs that the situation is deteriorating or that you have misjudged it in the first place. But if you are working in the more investigatory mode, you also have to ask, whether they are abusive or not, "Does this family need our help?" Although your prime job might be in one dimension or the other, you have to be aware of the other dimension and the other way of thinking when looking at the family.

**Q152 Mr Stuart:** But that would not necessarily preclude specialisms within teams?

**Dr Munro:** Oh, no.

**Mr Stuart:** It would not preclude some people being more suited to family support and others better suited to the diagnostic effort of child protection.

**Dr Munro:** We have a history of looking at either risk or need, but we have to look at both.

**Liz Davies:** Because we are so preoccupied with prevention, we have lost protection, and that is the most worrying thing. Because social workers are going straight into assessments of need, they are missing the child protection aspects. When you do an assessment with a family you actually need their consent to look at any other records, liaise with any other agencies or interview other children, and you are alerting the family. If you were seeing it as a child protection investigation you should not be doing that at all, because you might be completely destroying any possibility of a prosecution, for instance, by going in that direction. But they are routinely going in that direction. What we have to do is get child protection back on the map. Obviously,

we have suffered the loss of the child protection register last year, which is absolutely devastating.

**Q153 Chairman:** When did that happen?

**Liz Davies:** April 2008. Even the public have an understanding of what the register meant. To lose it has been just awful—we have lost the alarm bell system that it gave us with the emergency services, which are no longer alerted when a child is at high risk of harm. The message that getting rid of that register sent out was colossal, because it undermined the status of the meeting. I know that Baby Peter was on the register, but at that time the status of the meeting had already declined greatly and meetings were very poorly attended and not informed by investigations.

**Q154 Mr Stuart:** I notice that you are nodding, Michael. Liz, you made that case very strongly. We have picked up that that view is not necessarily universal across professionals in the system. They do not all feel as strongly as you do that the loss of the register has been a blow to child protection. Eileen, do you agree with Liz's point?

**Dr Munro:** I don't have enough experience of what the implications have been in practice to comment.

**Mr Stuart:** Michael is nodding.

**Professor Preston-Shoot:** Yes, I would agree with Liz that the loss of the register is regrettable. Going back to your question, I agree with my colleagues that what you are looking for in a team is a continuum of experience and people with knowledge and skills to move along that continuum, even if it is the social worker who takes the child into care, alerted by the family aide, as was often the case in FSU when I was working there, that actually the welfare and support interventions were no longer good enough. One of the other viruses that I think has entered the system and that deters people from looking at section 47 investigations and care proceedings, especially in financially very hard-pressed local authorities, is that local authorities now have to bear the cost of care proceedings, and those costs are substantial. I know from first-hand experience of qualified social workers and their managers who have been deterred by their employing organisations from intervening at that level, because of the cost.

**Q155 Mr Stuart:** I had better get us back to training, although this is a fascinating digression. I didn't really get a straight answer as to whether or not you both agreed with Eileen that the strands had to be reconciled in the one worker.

**Professor Preston-Shoot:** Not in the one worker—in the one team. But each worker has to be able, in their own mind, to move along that continuum.

**Q156 Mr Stuart:** Understood. But they don't have to be all-purpose; it is possible within a team. That is your opinion. I want to ask about the substance of the generic social work role, as opposed to the role of a children and family social worker. Going back

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to the training issue, we seem to be turning out generic social workers who then may or may not turn their hand to specialising in working with children. Can you tell us about the substance of that generic role?

**Dr Munro:** It is very easy to design specialist training for child welfare. We did it rather well in 1948 and it worked for decades. I do not think that we should necessarily have an either/or situation. Particularly if people are coming into the profession at the age of 18, they need broad training; they are too young to know where they want to specialise. It could be attractive to consider having specialist entry for mature entrants in their 20s and 30s, who have a degree and some relevant life experience. They might do specialised child welfare training.

**Q157 Mr Stuart:** That would only be available to mature students?

**Dr Munro:** Yes.

**Q158 Mr Stuart:** Going back to the courses, from the evidence that we have received it seems that there is basically a dispute between those who support generic social work courses and those who suggest that, at least in the third year, there should be specialist training in children's services, particularly so that there is an understanding—to go back to Liz's earlier point—of the interaction between all the complex agencies within this new children's services world where everyone is supposed to be joined up. If you emerge from three years of training as a children's social worker and you have precious little understanding of this new supposedly "joined-up government", you are not very well equipped. Can you give us your thoughts on that?

**Professor Preston-Shoot:** I don't think that my university—

**Chairman:** We are running out of time, so I would like shorter answers, and shorter questions from my team.

**Professor Preston-Shoot:** My university allows students to specialise, to a degree, in the third year, whether in children's services, adult services or mental health, on the basis of at least two years of solid, generic training. My experience as a social worker, both as a child protection specialist and a mental health specialist, is that people do not come in neatly compartmentalised boxes. A person with severe mental distress may also be a parent and vice versa. I am absolutely clear that you need a generic foundation. People may then specialise, with particular service user groups and within particular service user groups, in particular methods of intervention or in particular aspects of that service user group, but it has to be on the basis of a generic foundation.

**Chairman:** Does anyone else want to comment? This is a pretty crucial question.

**Liz Davies:** I really support generic training at degree level and at masters level, because social workers working with children and families must have an in-depth understanding of the world of adults. Look at the Baby Peter case and the role that adults played in it. The social worker was not homing in on those

issues about violence, mental health, learning disability and so on. That broad-based training is absolutely crucial if we are going to be able to protect children effectively.

**Q159 Chairman:** Why can't you have a broad-based approach in the first two years and be more specific in the third year?

**Liz Davies:** We do something similar. We have some options in the third year—

**Q160 Chairman:** You used to train social workers within two years, didn't you?

**Liz Davies:** Yes.

**Q161 Chairman:** You have three years now and you still say that you can't have more focus and more specialisation in the third year.

**Liz Davies:** We have some options for students in the final year.

**Q162 Mr Stuart:** The Association of Directors of Children's Services, who are the consumers of your product, don't seem to share your rosy view that you are giving the specialised skills that people need. If they are the consumers of your product and they don't think that, surely you need to think again, don't you?

**Liz Davies:** Within the degree, there are modules that are specialised. We do mapping across the whole programme, so we make sure that different modules focus more on adults or children, and that there is a balance.

**Q163 Mr Stuart:** Why is the consumer—as I am calling the ADCS—so unhappy?

**Dr Munro:** I think that the families and service users are the consumers, not the directors of children's services.

**Chairman:** Graham, do you have one last question?

**Q164 Mr Stuart:** Are the people delivering social work degree courses sufficiently up to date on the current situation? We have been going on about joint agency work and over the past few years there has been tremendous change in children's services and inter-agency working. Are the people who are teaching those courses, where specialised courses are taught, capable and up to date enough to do that?

**Chairman:** Can you all give quick answers to that.

**Professor Preston-Shoot:** That is a major challenge, and not just for the social work profession. I am the dean of a faculty that also includes health, and I have health care managers, practitioners and educators asking me the same question. Many universities are required to major in research, and it would be very helpful if it were also possible for university academics to achieve the same kind of standing by making contributions to practice and to the management of practice in the way that I do by being an independent chair of two safeguarding boards. If the same value were put on that as is put on the research assessment exercise, it would be easier for universities to meet the professional imperative that you were describing. The converse is that the

organisations that you are calling the consumers of our product are in fact deliverers of 50% of the product, so they are not just consumers. The converse of what I have just said in relation to universities is if we can have a system where children's departments and adult social care departments also see education and training as a core part of their business. Whether they make that contribution through joint appointments directly into higher education institutions or in other ways, they are none the less learning communities in that sense.

**Chairman:** That was a long answer, but a very good one.

**Professor Preston-Shoot:** I am sorry that it was long.

**Chairman:** Eileen, do you want to go on that?

**Dr Munro:** Sorry, I've got lost.

**Chairman:** Eileen has lost the will to live.

**Q165 Mr Stuart:** Is the current teaching work force up to date with current practice and therefore able to teach people and prepare them for front-line practice?

**Dr Munro:** I think they are as up to date as you can be when it is such an evolving scene. Keeping up to date is difficult even for people in the field.

**Q166 Mr Stuart:** Is that a yes or a no?

**Dr Munro:** It is as they are as good as they can be.

**Chairman:** Liz.

**Liz Davies:** We have a partners forum; we have 10 partners in London local authorities and we meet regularly so there is a constant to and fro in terms of sharing experience and knowledge.

**Chairman:** We have one more section on these questions, but I am going to get Derek in.

**Q167 Derek Twigg:** A number of profound statements have been made, two of which struck me. One was that there is too much emphasis on engaging with families and not enough on being suspicious and challenging, and the other was that we should look much more at prevention than at protection, so following on from Graham's point about people getting up-to-date training and methods, how could that be? If there is too much focus on engagement and not enough on being suspicious and challenging, how could there be too much focus on prevention and not enough on protection? I don't understand that.

**Dr Munro:** Well, the policy of Every Child Matters clearly says that. Margaret Hodge made the statement that they want to shift the focus towards prevention, but she did not finish the sentence with "and away from protection", which is the logical consequence. You have ended up with an assessment framework in which because the old protection model did not look widely enough at the family's needs, they have unintentionally gone too far the other way—looking at the family's needs without looking at it as a child abuse case about the level of harm.

**Q168 Derek Twigg:** Who has gone too far?

**Dr Munro:** The Government frameworks have gone too far.

**Q169 Derek Twigg:** So, something specifically in the Government framework says that you should now concentrate more on prevention than protection?

**Dr Munro:** It has got a single mindset in it, and I have been saying that you need to switch from one mindset to the other.

**Derek Twigg:** I am sorry, I am not quite understanding you. Where is the wording that says "Concentrate more on"—

**Dr Munro:** It is called the "assessment of need framework", so it is in the title.

**Derek Twigg:** That says that you should concentrate more on prevention than protection?

**Dr Munro:** Yes.

**Derek Twigg:** It actually says that in those words?

**Dr Munro:** Yes, that is the whole tenor of it.

**Q170 Derek Twigg:** A final thing is that, surely, as a social worker, it would be trained into you that, while, of course, you want to engage with families, you must be suspicious and challenging. How is that not the case today?

**Dr Munro:** You have to remember the power of the performance indicators. If you are rushing to get your initial assessment done in seven days and your core assessment in 35 days, your little worries that would take a long time to explore become something that you leave aside, because your manager is nagging you to do something else.

**Q171 Derek Twigg:** It is a bit like asking a police officer not to be suspicious, isn't it?

**Dr Munro:** They have the same problem, haven't they?

**Q172 Derek Twigg:** They are not suspicious then?

**Dr Munro:** They are spending too long on paperwork instead of being suspicious and following things. That is why they are trying to abandon targets in the police force.

**Q173 Derek Twigg:** You are basically saying that the training does not instil into new social workers, at university or elsewhere, the belief that they should be suspicious?

**Dr Munro:** The training does it, but the work culture discourages it. It does not reward it, does not reinforce it, does not encourage you to go to your manager, saying, "We have been looking at the family this way; I think we have got it completely wrong."

**Q174 Derek Twigg:** The training is a waste of time then?

**Dr Munro:** No, you need the training, but then you need to have the employers reinforcing it. If you did not have the training in the first place, you would not have a hope of reinforcing it.

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**Q175 Derek Twigg:** So it is all down to targets?

**Dr Munro:** It is one of the aspects at the moment that all social workers find very destructive. It is one aspect.

**Q176 Mr Chaytor:** In all the information we have received for this inquiry, I do not recall seeing the statistics on completions in social work degrees, or on failure rates. Could you give us an indication of what those figures are?

**Professor Preston-Shoot:** I cannot give you an indication off the top of my head. I think I am right in saying that the annual reports produced by the General Social Care Council will give completion rates, failure rates and general attrition rates. Certainly universities, when they report, through HESA and HESES, to the Quality Assurance Agency and to HEFCE, will be reporting on completions and non-completions. So the evidence is out there, even if I cannot reel it off the top of my head immediately. In my own university, the completion rate for the three-year degree would be somewhere around 90% of candidates. We fail people for all sorts of reasons—academic, practice, unprofessional conduct and so on.

**Q177 Mr Chaytor:** Do you think there is any exceptional pressure on social work degree providers not to fail students, for whatever reason, compared with providers of other degrees or other forms of professional training?

**Professor Preston-Shoot:** No, and I would be very adamant about that. I think all social work educators are profoundly aware that the ultimate accountability is to the person who is using the service—the service user, the child, the parent, the mentally unwell person—and we are very clear that we have to send people out who are ready to begin practice. I certainly take very seriously the termination of training procedures, and so forth, in relation to students whose conduct might be of concern.

**Q178 Chairman:** Do you share that view, Eileen, from your perspective?

**Dr Munro:** I'm not involved in undergraduate teaching any longer, so I don't know.

**Chairman:** You don't have a view on it?

**Dr Munro:** No. It would only be anecdotal.

**Q179 Chairman:** We have heard evidence that there is a real concern. We had an initial seminar where we had people from university saying, "Some university courses are not very good and we are very worried about the quality of students in some institutions" and that not all are up to the standard. That is a myth, is it?

**Liz Davies:** There are obviously professional issues which come up. Maybe a student could succeed academically and get through all the university regulations, but there may be issues that come up on the placement; maybe the practical assessor says, "This person is not suitable to be a social worker." However, we then have the GSCC code of conduct, which we have incorporated with the student

misconduct regulations, so that, specifically for the social work courses, we can address the professional issues within the academic requirements.

**Q180 Mr Chaytor:** May I pursue the position once the student qualifies and starts work. Michael, in your written submission, you draw attention to the pressures of the working environment and the priority given to policies and procedures, rather than legal and moral duties. How is that different in social work from any other professional field? Does not the same apply whether you work in an engineering factory, in McDonald's, or as a teacher? What is distinctive about social work in terms of its conflict between professional training responsibilities and the immediate pressures of the organisation?

**Professor Preston-Shoot:** What is distinctive about social work is that councils with social services responsibilities are given, by Parliament through primary and secondary legislation, powers and duties, and they are delegated to social workers. What happens in organisations is that the powers and duties that are contained in primary and secondary legislation, and amplified in central government policy and practice guidance, are translated into organisational procedures. What my research, judicial review and ombudsman investigations sometimes find is that the process of translation—or the subsequent process of implementation—leads an organisation, and therefore its individual practitioners, away from the intentions that are contained in primary and secondary legislation or central government guidance. So, one of my messages to students and qualified practitioners is that they must audit agencies' procedures against the legal rules. That is what is distinctive. What is troubling—I related this to Liz and Eileen before the Committee met today—is that often students and qualified practitioners say to me, "You have taught me what my powers and duties should be. I try to implement those powers and duties." They are told, "This is the way the organisation does it here." They then say to me, "What do I do? Do I whistleblow? Is there another mechanism I can use to uphold the code of practice—which you have trained me on—to meet my professional obligations and to stay in my employment?" My written submission with Roger, points out that in this complex picture, that is one of the areas that must be addressed. Then people can raise concerns about the standard of practice short of whistleblowing unless that is necessary.

**Q181 Mr Chaytor:** Finally, can social work training learn from recent developments in teacher training; for example, in the use of fast-track forms of training or the use of teaching departments in local authorities?

**Chairman:** Fast-track or Teach First?

**Mr Chaytor:** It could be fast-track or it could be Teach First.

**Professor Preston-Shoot:** You asked for quick answers because of time pressure—no. The reasons would be the distinctiveness of social work which, in part, I tried to encapsulate in what I said about powers and duties; the complexity of social work with

which you are struggling as much as we are; and the fact that getting people to the point at which they are ready to begin their journey of practice cannot, and should not, be rushed. My concern with fast-track—and some of the evidence coming from Scotland, where they tried it—is that we may be hurrying too quickly.

**Q182 Chairman:** We get the impression, from some of the evidence we have had, that you are not hurrying at all, that it all looks a bit of a mess and no one is doing much about it. Eileen, is that a wrong interpretation?

**Dr Munro:** I hope that we might see a complete change in dynamic on social work because it has been going downhill for the past few years and, to me, we have reached a crisis point. I would like to see a total transformation.

**Q183 Chairman:** Liz, what do you think?

**Liz Davies:** My students get quite frightened when they see what happens to social workers when things go wrong, but we work in a profession where things go wrong, and there will be mistakes. Maria Ward, Gillie Christou and even Lisa Arthurworrey are still living almost under house arrest—they are not able to leave their homes and they could face numerous legal hearings. That is a very frightening picture. I would really like a change in that whole approach of blaming social workers when things go wrong. Instead, we should look at our policies and systems which, as we have already been saying, are so flawed in relation to this subject.

**Chairman:** Paul, you can put one question to one witness.

**Q184 Paul Holmes:** Just on the fast-track issue, we have been in New York recently and one of the things we looked at was social workers. Social workers in New York told us that they had gone from being the worst provider of child protection and social work in the USA to one of the best in a fairly short space of time because they had a tragic child death. One thing they did was start to fast-track students into being social workers in what to us seemed an incredibly short space of time. They said it worked brilliantly, so why not here?

**Chairman:** Briefly, otherwise we will not have any time for the next witnesses.

**Professor Preston-Shoot:** For the reasons I have already given: the complexity of the families with whom you are working; the complexity of the organisation that you are working in; and the complexity of the knowledge and the skills, including the emotional resilience to ask the difficult questions that you have been trained to ask. All that cannot and should not be rushed.

**Fiona Mactaggart:** Do you agree, Eileen?

**Dr Munro:** Can I say the opposite? If you have mature entrants rather than 18-year-olds, there is the possibility of fast-tracking, especially if you then ensure that they have good critical supervision when they are in practice. The idea that quick training will enable them to go off on their own into the sunset is nonsense.

**Chairman:** Good. That was excellent. It is frustrating because we wanted to ask you twice as many questions and we have overrun a bit. I know one of our next witnesses has got to leave early so can we have a quick change. Thank you very much. That was an excellent session.

### Memorandum submitted by the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass)

#### SUMMARY

Cafcass is a non-Departmental Public Body, created in 2001 and sponsored by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). Its functions involve safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in England who are the subject of a range of family court proceedings. Each year, Cafcass staff are involved with approximately 80,000 children and their families. Cafcass is the largest employer of social workers in England, employing more than 1,200 employed qualified and experienced social workers, all of whom have at least three years post-qualification experience before being employed by Cafcass. Though not employing newly qualified social workers, we are a major provider of social work placements (about 100 per year).

Cafcass also plays a full role in working with the General Social Care Council and the Children's Workforce Development Council; in particular assisting with the latter's current *Early Professional Development* and *Advanced Practitioner* projects. Thus, Cafcass is well placed to provide informed comment on the majority of the issues raised by the Children, Schools and Families Select Committee, in its call for evidence. Brief answers to most of the questions raised by the Committee are set out below.

#### ENTRY ROUTES TO THE PROFESSION

*Are entry routes to social work sufficiently flexible to encourage mature entrants, re-entrants and people considering a career change?*

1. Whilst these entry routes now attract a growing number of younger candidates it does not appear to have dissuaded more mature students from embarking on qualifying courses. What has changed is that there are fewer students sponsored by employers through a "grow your own" route. This route has the merits of benefiting from the practical skills, organisational understanding and commitment from the student if they are able to take up this type of sponsorship opportunity, rather than expecting mature entrants to take significant financial risks in entering a new profession.

## STRUCTURE OF TRAINING

*Is a three-year bachelor's degree/two-year master's degree the right format and level for initial social work training?*

2. The three-year BA and two-year MA degrees would be sufficient if supported by the Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQS) structure, on the basis that this would be a requirement for all employers of new social workers. However, given that younger candidates come into the profession with relatively less experience of social care and of life in general then the provision of additional support and learning opportunities is essential. In addition, the following steps are needed:

- 2.1 Effective selection which assesses aptitude, emotional intelligence and empathy with children and young people including the direct involvement of young people in the selection process (now extensively used within Cafcass);
- 2.2 Longer and more varied placements;
- 2.3 Greater involvement of experienced social workers in delivering some of the degree inputs to give a realistic picture of current social work, and
- 2.4 The NQS scheme, as already mentioned.

*Following initial training, how should newly qualified social workers be equipped with the further skills and experience they need?*

3. This requires a coherent structure of effective ongoing training, supervision and ongoing assessment of competence. The NQS scheme provides the basis of this if it becomes a requirement. In addition we share the concern expressed by Mike Leadbetter, the former GSCC chair, regarding:

“the lack of a rigorous post-qualifying framework that supports a career structure and the lack of opportunities to follow a recognised academic route towards becoming a master/doctor in social work.”

## CONTENT OF INITIAL TRAINING

*Is the generic social work degree fit for the purpose of training children and families' social workers? Is there sufficient scope for specialisation?*

4. When students come to Cafcass, usually on their final placement, they themselves often report that they feel ill equipped to undertake the social work task. Practice Teachers are concerned that, in many instances, students lack of ability to put their learning from universities into practice. The issues highlighted are:

- 4.1 Lack of confidence engaging with service users;
- 4.2 Lack of understanding of risk assessment and child protection issues;
- 4.3 Limited understanding of child development in relation to abuse situations such as neglect/ domestic violence, and
- 4.4 Writing legal/court reports or even on occasions appointment letters with service users.

5. Specialisation may be of value, but there are also merits in all social work students, regardless of their future career paths, acquiring an integrated understanding of the needs of both children and adults, in learning that safeguarding is everyone's business and of the importance of “thinking family” rather than focusing on adults or children in isolation from wider family and environmental factors.

*Does the content of training reflect the tasks social workers will be asked to undertake when in employment? Is the balance of knowledge, skills, values and experience correct?*

6. In general, the documents ‘A statement of Social work Roles and tasks for the 21st century’ (March 2008) and ‘The National Occupational Standards for Social Work’ (May 2002) adequately describe the standards, values, knowledge and skills which should be expected within social work.

7. However these documents lack sufficiently explicit references to child protection/safeguarding and risk assessment, which are significant omissions, which need to be more directly addressed in the training of social workers.

## QUALITY

*How effectively does the General Social Care Council regulate the quality of training?*

8. Cafcass does not have extensive direct knowledge of the GSCC role in regulating the quality of initial training. In other areas, such as the training and development required to renew registration we have experienced regulation as being insufficiently robust and we would welcome a stronger regulatory body, which works closely with other key agencies such as the DCSF, Skills for Care and CWDC.



*How can the quality, suitability and supply of practice placements be assured?*

9. In general, this area is overly dependent on the initiative and commitment of individual employers who may struggle to prioritise and fund this area with other competing demands. This is in contrast to professions such as medicine and teaching, where it is a more central part of the culture and structure to be actively involved in the training of new entrants and to have a major say in assessing their fitness to practice.

10. The cost of providing placements to an employer is extensive. The placement fee does not meet the cost of providing supervision, training and support for the student and that needed by the Practice teacher/educator to ensure quality of service. To ensure stability, quality and supply of these placements, designated Practice teachers/educators need to be trained and supported and the Practice Teaching Award should be placed within the PQ or equivalent secure framework.

11. The Quality Assurance of Practice Learning (QAPL) document has started to look more closely at the quality of placements. However, some students come to statutory placements on their final placement having to “run to catch up” as their previous placement provided little exposure to statutory demands and responsibilities.

12. The “Advanced” or enhanced Practitioner role has been used within Cafcass to take a lead on supervising and educating students on placement.

*Has the switch to degree-level qualification improved the calibre of recruits and the effectiveness of newly-qualified social workers?*

13. The Cafcass Practice Learning Co-ordinator, who has been a Practice Teacher for more than 10 years in Local Authority and in Cafcass, reports little change.

## SUPPLY OF INITIAL TRAINING

*What factors influence whether higher education institutions offer social work qualifying courses? How effectively do the DCSF, DIUS, and the Children’s Workforce Development Council ensure adequate training capacity and workforce planning?*

14. This is not an area in which Cafcass is directly involved.

## POST-QUALIFYING TRAINING AND CAREER PATHS

*How can the quality, suitability and take-up of post-qualifying training be assured?*

15. Such a framework needs to be built into an overall career and development structure for social workers, which is not dependent on individual employers and which currently lacks ring fenced funding. Key improvements would be:

- 15.1 Provision of adequate funding;
- 15.2 Compulsory expectation of obtaining a PQ linked to pay progression;
- 15.3 Adequate workload relief;
- 15.4 Links with an organisation’s performance framework, and
- 15.5 More closely linked with practice and work based assessors being more integral to the programme.

*What factors influence the continuing development of newly qualified social workers and their future career decisions?*

16. Reflective supervision, which combines an accurate assessment of competence with an effective supervisory relationship, is the key factor.

*How well do employers support the development of social workers?*

17. As previously discussed, this appears to be excessively variable and inconsistent.

*How well are social workers trained to deliver front-line supervision?*

18. Within Cafcass all new managers and practice supervisors are trained in reflective supervision based on the work of Tony Morrison who now also provides supervision material for the CWDC.<sup>1</sup> We are not well placed to comment, other than anecdotally, on supervision training by other employers of social workers.

May 2009

<sup>1</sup> Morrison, T(2005) *Staff Supervision in Social care*, Brighton Pavilion Press.

## Memorandum submitted by the Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd (ADCS)

### INTRODUCTION

ADCS is pleased to offer written evidence to the Children Schools and Families Select Committee inquiry into training of social workers. Our comments are intended to represent the views of the key employer group for the children's workforce; a single workforce with a single, coherent set of needs.

Well-trained and supported social workers are clearly essential to protecting children from harm and in supporting them and their families to achieve their potential in terms of all five of the Every Child Matters outcomes. The discussion about whether training and support are sufficient to enable individual social workers to perform these tasks must not be focused solely on the "hard end" of child protection but on all the tasks that social workers are called upon to do.

This includes local authority children's and adults' services; NHS primary and hospital care; joint teams and multi-disciplinary services; specialist agencies like CAF/CASS; independent practices; voluntary and not-for-profit bodies including user-led organisations; private sector companies, and private practice. Within local authority; NHS and inter-agency services; social work is often structured in specialist teams focused on child protection; children in care; family support; disabled children; leaving care; children's centres; fostering; adoption and permanence; child and adolescent mental health; youth offending; care management; disability; learning difficulty; substance abuse; mental health, and older people.

As is recognised in the 2020 Workforce Strategy, the social work profession represents a sector of the workforce that has previously been neglected in terms of provision for training and support. While raising the initial social work qualification to degree level has started to have an impact on the quality of recruits into the workforce, there is still much improvement to be made to the content of these courses to ensure that they adequately prepare students for working in a statutory service. Any discussion about modifying the structure or content of social work courses must recognise that such changes do not offer a panacea to the skills and knowledge deficit within social work, nor will the impact be immediate. We are only now starting to see the effect of the raising of the initial qualification to degree level as the first cohort gain sufficient first-hand experience in the workplace to support the content of the courses.

It is important to restate our commitment to a core set of skills for every professional working with children and that all professionals receive training in key areas of practice, allowing for the development of professional specialisms over and above these skills. Given the overarching framework of Every Child Matters, the complex legislative and regulatory context relevant to working with children and families and the multi-agency approach to delivering services, we believe that there is a strong case for the initial social work degree to provide for specialisation on working with children.

Provision of such experience in a supervised and supported way is essential both on placements during training and after graduation. We fully support the introduction of Newly Qualified Social Worker status as recognition of the need for graduates to continue to develop in their first year of practice. Similarly, provision for continued professional development for those currently working in the profession is vital to keep skills and knowledge up to date. This paper seeks to outline the challenges involved in ensuring provision of suitable opportunities for all three groups—students, newly-qualified and experienced social workers.

### 1. INITIAL SOCIAL WORK QUALIFICATIONS

#### 1.1 *Entry Routes*

1.1.1 The requirements for entering social work degree courses have been criticised as being too low, and as much below those required of candidates for teaching or nursing courses. In fact there is great variation in the A-Level grades required, with the most popular courses requiring much higher grades than the C and D grades quoted in the media. In addition, of course, Masters Level courses already exist for which the entry requirement is a 2:1 undergraduate degree.

#### 1.1.2 An easy option?

1.1.2.1 The perception that low entry requirements in terms of A-Level attract students who have no intention of becoming social workers on graduation but merely want a degree is not upheld by the General Social Care Council who report that nearly 80% of social work graduates since 2006 were registered as social workers with GSCC by February 2009.<sup>2</sup> This suggests that those who graduate from social work degree courses intend to work as social workers; whether they are prepared to do this work or whether there is sufficient demand for newly qualified social workers is discussed elsewhere in this paper.

1.1.2.2 It is important to remember that the entry requirements for a course are only the starting point for those wishing to be social workers and should not, of itself, affect the quality of graduates entering the profession. If the supervision of students, their examination and the demands made on them throughout the course is of sufficient quality, these measures will

<sup>2</sup> General Social Care Council *Raising Standards—Social work education in England 2007–08*.

prevent those incapable of completing the course from qualifying as social workers. While this may not yet be the case (see comments below regarding structure and content of courses) raising the entry requirements will not compensate for these shortcomings.

### 1.1.3 Personal Characteristics

1.1.3.1 To be a successful social worker requires more than purely academic abilities and any alterations to the entry requirements for qualifications should reflect the need for a social worker to have the required maturity and resilience for the role that they hope to undertake. Children and young people have a clear expectation of the character and behaviour of a “good” social worker. These are characterised by fairness, willingness to trust and believe in the child or young person, asking and listening, helpfulness in creating understanding among their peers, not prejudging their needs or characteristics, keeping promises, and ease of contact.<sup>3</sup> These characteristics are not measured by academic qualifications.

1.1.3.2 We would be concerned if the unintended consequence of increasing entry requirements was to reduce the number of mature students or those changing careers later in life applying for courses or those who will bring a more nuanced understanding to the profession. This includes disabled candidates or care-leavers, many of whom choose to enter the profession, but also men, who made up less than 13% of the 2007–08 cohort. However, whilst supporting wider access particularly from people from disadvantaged and vulnerable groups is valuable, this should not undermine the need for a professional identity and exclusivity.

### 1.1.4 Experience and maturity

The reduction of the age to train as a social worker has not encouraged younger more able students to take up social work and the role requires a level of maturity and life experience. There are financial barriers to those more mature candidates who have personal or family commitments. Part-time degree courses go some way to mitigating the impact of these constraints but there is still scope for further flexibility.

## 1.2 *Course Structure and Content*

1.2.1 Raising the initial social work qualification to degree level has started to have an impact on the quality of recruits into the workforce. However, there is still much improvement to be made to the content of these courses to ensure that they adequately prepare students for working in a statutory service. While it is hoped that it will have a significant impact, this will take time. In our experience, undergraduate courses do not adequately prepare students for work as a social worker and as such, we would be supportive of a mandatory post-qualifying period of work-based training before a licence to practice is issued.

### 1.2.2 Course content

1.2.2.1 The range of complex skills required by social workers should not be underestimated. These are very similar to those required to manage large organisations or in complex environments. As testimony to this there is evidence of this in the increasing number of people with a social work background in senior positions in local government and a range of other organisations.

1.2.2.2 The body of knowledge needed to practice as a children’s social worker is not well enough defined in its own right and as such it is not surprising that degree courses do not produce graduates who are immediately ready to enter the workforce as fully-qualified professionals. However it is also possible to identify omissions from courses of important aspects of child development and particularly in multi-agency working. The need for these skills is discussed further under Specialisation in para 1.2.3.

1.2.2.3 Degree courses do not appear to provide graduates with the opportunities to develop the personal characteristics required of a social worker. In particular graduates demonstrate a lack of resilience or the ability to use effective interpersonal skills. This may be due to the shortage of high-quality statutory placements which enable students to put these skills into practice. The supply of placements is discussed in Para 1.2.4.

1.2.2.4 There are skills outside of the traditional definition of the role of a social worker that are currently required in order to fulfil duties expected of professionals in the workplace. The undergraduate degree/Masters programme needs to reflect these daily tasks as well as the knowledge and theory relating to the work. Graduates are not equipped to work within the statutory sector without extensive training programmes. These include IT and computing skills and the ability to write clear and detailed reports. The importance of written and IT skills is increasing with the introduction of IT systems to support recording of case notes and details. Employers report that these skills are not sufficiently developed in new graduates.

<sup>3</sup> DCSF 2020 Workforce strategy—Evidence Base.

- 1.2.2.5 We are concerned that the rapid changes in practice and policy in children's social work and across the children's sector may have affected the quality of the content of degree courses, as those teaching and delivering courses do not have direct experience of the new framework in which children's social workers operate. Closer collaboration between employers and course providers would mitigate this impact.

### 1.2.3 Specialisation

- 1.2.3.1 We strongly believe that there is a very good argument for specialisation with the initial social work qualification in the last year of an undergraduate degree.
- 1.2.3.2 We agree with the reasoning behind Lord Laming's recommendation for mandatory placements in statutory agencies working with children for anyone qualifying as a children's social worker. However, we believe that specialisation in the second year of the undergraduate degree would risk losing the coherence of social work as a profession—across adults and children—and much of the understanding of the family context in which children live would be lost. It is important to establish a balance between ensuring that social workers all share a core set of skills whatever age group they go on to work with, and the need for children's social workers to fully appreciate the different framework in which children's services operate.
- 1.2.3.3 Social work with children is part of a wider set of interventions and support provided by a wide range of professionals. This multi-agency context is different from, though with some similarities to, the context for adult social work. This is in part due to the Every Child Matters framework which, rightly, encourages all professionals working with children to have concern for every ECM outcome. All professionals should be aware of their impact on all these outcomes, how to refer a child for specific support in achieving any one of them and how they interrelate to affect the lives and prospects of all children. In line with the Berrow review into provision for children with speech, language and communication needs and countless serious case reviews, the ability to work in a multi-agency context is vital to successfully protecting children. As such, training in the core skills needed by the entire children's workforce, for example in child development, and in collaborative working must be included within a "specialised" part of the initial qualification.
- 1.2.3.4 The Children's Workforce Strategy for 2020 recognised the need for a core set of skills for the children's workforce, that were applicable across the different professions working with children. The Children's Workforce Development Council is currently developing the Integrated Qualifications Framework (IQF), which will be ready in 2010, and which will support the drive for a better qualified, more flexible workforce by bringing coherence, portability and common standards to the different qualifications and qualification routes currently available to people in different occupations within the workforce. Any recommendations concerning changes to the training and development of social workers should take these developments into account and included in any "specialisation" within the initial degree course.
- 1.2.3.5 The differences between adult and children's social work, and in particular child protection, are most apparent on placements and it is important that those who wish to work with children in the statutory sector are provided with the opportunity to experience such work while still students. Specialisation between children's and adults social work during the qualification period would go some way to ensuring that these opportunities can be offered.

### 1.2.4 The quality and quantity of statutory placements

- 1.2.4.1 The current provision of high-quality placements with statutory agencies is not sufficient to meet the needs of the current cohort of social work students, and particularly if students wish to specialise in working with children. This is, in part, due to a lack of commitment from employers. Supporting high-quality placements requires substantial amounts of time from experienced social workers and managers but local authorities do not receive any recompense for supplying such placements. When payment for teaching placements was introduced the quality of placements and the commitment of supervisors increased dramatically—a similar solution for social work may well have a similar effect.
- 1.2.4.2 A centrally funded post of "placement manager" in every local authority, charged with organising and allocating placements, would prevent the provision of placements being affected by budget cuts. These posts do exist in many authorities but are vulnerable due to not fulfilling a statutory function.
- 1.2.4.3 Alternatively local authorities could be contracted to provide a pro-rata number of placements based on their workforce, taking account of vacancy rates. This would need to be supported by dedicated training grant funding, which should include funding to increase the number of practice teachers and to backfill posts taken up by training.

### 1.3 *Supply and regulation of courses*

1.3.1 There is insufficient communication between the higher education institutions, the General Social Care Council and employers in the statutory sector to ensure that the number, quality and consistency of social work graduates meet requirements. In particular there is insufficient co-ordination between local institutions and employers to ensure that the courses meet local needs. There is no effective way for employers to influence the commissioning and provision of HEI training, unlike the relationships between the NHS and the Royal Colleges with HEIs.

1.3.2 Supply of courses and places is currently open to pressures of supply and demand from potential students, but not from employers, due to the financial incentives to boost student numbers.

1.3.3 There have been many comparisons with the provision of training for teachers and social workers in recent months and we strongly believe that the regulation and supply of social work degree courses would benefit from a similar structure to that of teaching. The current position does not compare with the role that Ofsted play with teacher training. Courses are commissioned by GSCC and funded by HEFC. In teaching places are commissioned and funded by TDA and inspected by Ofsted. Our position is that commissioning and funding should move to CWDC so that it parallels TDA.

1.3.4 The work of CWDC is highly valued by employers for their work in developing the workforce. They are not alone, however, in the field of social worker training and workforce planning—the General Social Care Council and Skills for Care and Development also have a role to play. We would argue that this duplication does not provide value for money or allow a comprehensive approach to developing the children's workforce. These changes, alongside other changes proposed by ADCS to DIUS in their review of the sector skills councils, would bring together all the major groups involved in supporting children, young people and families outside the school setting into a single body. It would enable strategic planning to take place across professional boundaries so that a common workforce with a common language, common understanding and common expectations can be developed. There would be a single, non-school body with which employers, employees and Government could engage. There would be economies of scale and efficiencies in planning. The resulting body would not be so large as to make management remote and unwieldy.

## 2. NEWLY QUALIFIED SOCIAL WORKER STATUS

2.1 We fully support Lord Laming's recommendation that newly qualified social work graduates should be entitled to, indeed required to, undertake at least a year of practice-based work experience, with limited caseloads and a high level of supervision to ensure that they are adequately skilled to perform the role. As previously highlighted, we do not believe that the current course content sufficiently prepares graduates to practice alone. Creating a Newly Qualified status would provide a short-term solution to this inadequacy as well as setting the standard for the granting of a licence to practice at a higher level than currently. We also support consideration of a more formal structure to a newly qualifying period, culminating in the issuing of a licence to practice after the post-qualifying year. This could include the collection of continuing professional development credits through demonstrating a commitment to taking responsibility for one's own learning and improvement. This would be analogous to the system used in the legal profession. We would also advocate a guaranteed number of training days for NQSWs.

### 2.2 *Supervision and caseloads*

2.2.1 Two thirds of newly qualified social workers responded to a survey stating that they did not feel that their degree adequately prepared them for working as a social worker. Supporting social work graduates through the provision of high levels of supervision and limited caseloads is vital to preparing graduates for the realities of the role. Cases allocated to newly-qualified social workers should be limited by complexity of individual cases as well as a limit on the number of cases.

2.2.2 Sufficient supervision should allow for a gradual progression towards a full caseload by the end of the "newly-qualified" period. This will allow graduates to gradually embed the theory learnt during their course into their standard practice. Supervision should include the opportunity to discuss individual cases in detail. It is important to recognise that line managers may not be best placed to hold these kind of supervisions and there may be scope for experienced but non-managerial social workers to take on a mentoring role, alongside managerial supervision. Such a role would also contribute to the continuing professional development of social workers on the front-line. (see Para 3.2)

2.2.3 Newly qualified social workers starting work in a statutory agency benefit greatly from an in-depth induction process. As previously noted, social workers can be asked to perform their role in a number of settings and alongside other agencies. It is important that induction covers all services provided to children by the authority and within the area, as social workers are increasingly "lead professionals", holding budgets and arranging specialist services for children and young people outside of the social care service.

### 2.3 Resources

2.3.1 The recommendations above regarding provision for newly-qualified social workers are not currently adequately resourced, though most local authorities have found it necessary to make such provision due to the unpreparedness of graduates for working in a statutory agency. The reduction of caseloads and the time required to provide suitable supervision both have a knock-on effect on the capacity to deliver statutory services. Limited caseloads result in higher caseloads for more experienced workers, while managerial resources are taken up by supervision.

2.3.2 The £58 million investment in the workforce is welcome, but mechanisms for distributing it must ensure that it reaches local authorities who are bearing the costs and is sufficient to meet the demands of providing sufficient supervision and caseloads for all newly-qualified social workers. Those authorities who took part in the pilots should be asked to provide estimates of the resources required if they have not already been asked to do so.

### 2.4 Impact on future career paths

2.4.1 The capacity of first line managers' to support and supervise their practice development, a failure by employers to incorporate this as part of their workforce planning and the perception of relative stress and risk in different areas can have a massive impact on newly-qualified social workers. As a result newly qualified staff are likely to be involved in short term and highly risky activity with more experienced staff gravitating to more planned work. The lack of a "consultant" route for social workers or relative pay measures means many more experienced staff chose either management or roles in areas such as adoption services which may promote similar career plans by less experienced staff.

2.4.2 If crisis management and child protection is to be improved we must stop it being staffed by predominately inexperienced social workers who do not have the skills to deal with very delicate cases. This requires protection for newly qualified social workers as described above, but also action on the career paths available to more experienced professionals to attract them to stay at the frontline and develop their skills in this area.

## 3. CAREER PATHS AND CONTINUED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

3.1 As previously mentioned, the body of knowledge required to practice children's social work is not well-defined, nor is it static. The changes to legislation, regulations and practice in the past five years alone demonstrate the necessity of providing opportunities for practicing social workers to update their skills.

3.2 There are LAs who have made considerable progress in developing and deploying their workforce. The essential ingredients are well known and include some or all of the following:

- organisational stability and coherence which gives staff a sense of security and confidence in their organisation;
- effective leadership and management which is visible, committed and demonstrably engaged with work at the front line;
- systems which develop staff and enable them to see clear career progression;
- a culture which promotes learning and which is able to manage performance, mistakes and problems without resorting to cultures of blame;
- strong leadership on an inter-agency basis through the Local Safeguarding Children Board and Children's Trust arrangements, which has visibility to practitioner staff. They see their senior managers and leaders working together;
- realistic self-assessment within which problems are addressed, accountability is clear and it is possible for staff to have the difficult conversations on a 360° basis, and
- effective leadership from the Political leaders of the organisations.

3.3 Clearly some of the above conditions are out of the scope of the senior leadership of Children's Services within a given authority, or indeed the scope of the Social Work Task Force or the Select Committee. However, there are some practical steps that could be taken to ensure that practicing social workers are given suitable opportunities to continue to develop their knowledge and skills post-qualification.

### 3.4 Resources

3.4.1 The resource implications of the demands for suitable support and development for both newly qualified and experienced social workers make achieving these goals difficult. A high number of NQSWs can put pressure on more experienced staff to take on higher caseloads, which in turn can lead to a lack of supervision. The Berrow review into speech, language and communication support services found that there were restrictions on the ability to release social workers for training due to capacity, suggesting that staffing levels and resources affect employers' ability to promote continued professional development among their staff.

3.4.2 Where resources are already stretched and vacancy rates and the use of agency staff are high, an authority's capacity to provide CPD can be severely restricted. It will be difficult to incorporate increased CPD opportunities without increases in baseline funding or dedicated grants to support this work. It was unclear from the funding announcements made by the Secretary of State in response to Lord Laming, how much of the funding would be allocated to this issue.

3.4.3 Alterations to career structures and presumably therefore salaries must also be properly resourced. The low pay is one of the key factors affecting the status and morale of social workers but to address this without the proper resources will put further pressure on the tight budgets of local authority Children's Services departments and disrupt organisational stability.

### 3.5 Career progression

3.5.1 We would welcome a package of support, professional development, career progression and succession planning, as well as leadership development, similar to the programmes that have been provided for school staff through NCSL and the TDA. The announcement of the Advanced Social Work Professional Status is welcome and its potential for improving the quality of supervision for NQSWs and less experienced social workers should be fully explored.

3.5.2 Training in front-line supervision and line management is not the norm when promoting front-line workers into more senior posts and as such the quality of supervision is variable. This is in part a result of the lack of a clear career path that allows social workers to remain practicing and interacting with children and families, rather than taking on wholly managerial tasks. The removal of managers from front-line practice affects their knowledge of and responses to changes to the legal framework and in definitions of good practice, and thus the quality of supervision that they can provide.

3.5.3 The opportunity to study for a practice-based Masters degree in Social Work will be welcomed by many experienced social workers who wish to enhance and record their careers and associated skills.

May 2009

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### Memorandum submitted by the London Borough of Hackney

1. The London Borough of Hackney has embarked on an ambitious programme of remodelling of its children's social care workforce, known locally as "Reclaiming Social Work". Our vision here in Hackney is to enable, wherever possible, children to remain with their families. The model specifies the methodological approach we expect our social care staff to take with children and families, based on what works best for the families in Hackney. This programme has been highlighted as a good practice case study in Lord Laming's 2009 report *The Protection of Children in England: A Progress Report* (Case Study, attached).<sup>4</sup> The Deputy Director of Children & Young People's Services has also given evidence to the Children, Schools and Family Committee on Looked After Children in October 2008.

2. The following comments are intended to highlight some key issues around the recruitment and professional development of Hackney's children's social care workforce that we have sought to address in what is a comprehensive programme of change. We would be very happy to provide more detail if required.

#### INTEGRATING TRAINING AND PRACTICE—METHODOLOGY

3. In Hackney we believe that children's social care is so complex that it requires a standard of ability of the student and of the course similar to medicine. Hence, practitioners need high intellectual ability, good people skills and a tool box of interventions if they are going to practise it well. In this country, we are a long way off that. The situation has probably got worse rather than better over the past couple of decades. Training courses are not fit for purpose. There is a strong emphasis in training courses on values but they teach little about methodology.

4. As a result those entering social work training are often lacking the basic ability to do such a complex job well. Recognising that, the Department for Children, Schools and Families and its predecessors, and local authorities, have introduced more and more layers of bureaucracy around children's social care in an attempt to compensate. In our view the system has become risk averse and it can act to restrict good social work practice.

5. Thus we believe a five year course which contains two years high quality supervised practice is necessary leading to an award of MA in children's social care. It could be that the first year of the course is shared with other social work and it may be for some social work a BA course is all that is necessary (albeit with improvements from current level). Students intending to undertake the MA need high "A" level grades—as you would expect for a medical degree.

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<sup>4</sup> Not printed.

6. We should introduce the concept of teaching departments similar to the practice in health, so that at the MA level only those departments accredited and appointed would offer the two-year supervised practice. Similarly close links need to be established by academic providers and departments along the lines of medicine.

#### LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE IN OTHER COUNTRIES

7. We have looked abroad to the degree course structure offered in America, South Africa, Canada and New Zealand. Our view is that these training courses teach social workers methodological approaches, which are severely lacking in courses in this country in the main.

8. In addition to the issues around social work training, there is insufficient engagement at practice level with the evidence-based research being undertaken by some leading institutions. Certainly when we had a debate about what methodologies we should use in Hackney, we went to academics and talked to them about what the evidence base told us. One thing they said was that a lot of the evidence base comes from research in other countries, particularly the USA, so there is a key issue about more academic research. This is reflected in the relatively low level of investment made by the Department for Children, Schools and Families on academic research in children's social care—especially when this is compared with the investment in education, for example.

9. The complexity of children's social care needs to be recognised. We need to help councils manage that complex task by helping social care to focus on edge of care, child protection and looked-after children, and not to become involved in other situations. We need to learn from what is going on in other countries, including Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa. Key differences in the approach of these countries include:

- a separation of the social work training required for adults and for children;
- a focus on teaching methodological approaches; and
- an emphasis on changing what goes on in families and not just on assessment, although assessment is important.

10. In Hackney, we are completely changing the way in which we do social work. We are emphasising systemic approaches and social learning theory interventions, which have a sound evidence base. We have created consultant social work units instead of teams, and we are attracting high-quality consultant social workers, most of whom have been trained abroad. Through provision of dedicated administrative support we are relieving them from bureaucratic burdens.

#### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

11. We have commissioned a programme of professional development for our practitioners, which includes the following courses:

<i>Course</i>	<i>Course Provider</i>
Social Learning Theory—one-year programme	De Montfort University
Social Learning Theory—six-day programme	De Montfort University
Foundation Year in Systemic Family Therapy—one-year programme	Institute of Family Therapy
Systemic Leadership & Management Programme—one-year programme	Tavistock & Portman NHS

#### IMPROVED OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN

12. The result of our improved practice is that far fewer children in care. We have reduced our number of children in care from 470 to 340 in the past two years. That means we have about 63 children in care per 1,000 now as opposed to our statistical neighbour's 94. We also have an improved service for our looked-after children. We believe that "Reclaiming Social Work" signposts the way in which children's social care needs to be practised in this country. However reclaiming social work is also showing benefits for our looked after children population this can be evidenced by a range of outcome measures including improved education outcomes. This reflects the overall position in Hackney of rapidly improving education results for our children generally.

13. Reclaiming social work is a long term change programme that is being implemented to radically improve children's social care services. There is some evidence that the programme is already delivering benefits. An independent Case File Audit was commissioned in May 2008, which concluded that the practice in Social work Units (SWU) was generally of a very high standard with roles/responsibilities of SWU members clearly defined in respect of work with children and their families and a strong ethos of working together as a team around the child. There was a noticeable difference in the work of the SWU's and that of the traditional social work teams.



14. The London School of Economics and Political Science, in partnership with Human Reliability, is leading the evaluation of Reclaiming Social work model, which will provide robust and detailed evidence of benefit. Benefits are also measured through national and local performance indicators and a new local children's social care Quality Framework.

April 2009

*Witnesses:* **Bruce Clark**, Director of Policy, Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS), **Eleni Ioannides**, Association of Directors of Children's Services and Director of Children's Services, Bury Metropolitan Borough Council, and **Councillor Rita Krishna**, London Borough of Hackney, representing the Local Government Association, gave evidence.

**Q185 Chairman:** Can I welcome the witnesses to this slightly delayed second session. Welcome, Eleni Ioannides, Bruce Clark and Councillor Rita Krishna, to our proceedings. You have cheated a bit because you have been sitting there being warmed up to the style of questions. It wasn't really cheating—it's good experience. We value the people who come before our Committee and give evidence, and we have learnt a lot—we learnt a lot from that first session and we hope to learn as much from this second session. I know that you have to leave early to go back to Bury at half-past, Eleni, so we will probably ask you more questions than others in that period. You know what the inquiry is about, you have heard some of our concerns and the evidence. What is your take? Some of the last witnesses said there is a real crisis and we have to do something about it urgently. What is your view?

**Eleni Ioannides:** We are in danger of heading towards a crisis, which is a systemic problem. The problem is not just in the training institutions or in the organisations. We have entered into a vicious cycle where we have got a melting pot of pressures within the work that people are doing that does not allow them to create the greatest environment within which to train and nurture students. That in itself does not allow more people to come through, and it means that people are not staying in the profession. We are getting a lot of people coming as newly qualified social workers but they are not staying, so experienced workers come at a real premium and are difficult to keep hold of. They are the people we need to nurture and support the next generation.

**Chairman:** Bruce, what is your take on this?

**Bruce Clark:** That is a big question. Thinking back 20 years to the triple experience of the Carlile, Henry and Beckford deaths, it is clear that social work was similarly problematic at that time. Although things are definitely challenging currently, the low point was probably around 2002–03, in the period between the commissioning of the Climbié inquiry and its report. At that stage, the number of people applying for what in those days was a diploma in social work did not even match the number of available spaces, so the threshold at which people might enter courses was really very low. With the introduction of the degree course, and with more people applying to enter courses than there are places, there is a single, small green shoot of recovery. The organisational context has become more troubling and difficult. With the Baby Peter case coming in the wake of Laming's first inquiry, it is a brave decision for a young person to enter social work, in contrast to 20 or 30 years ago, when most of the social workers who have appeared

before you as witnesses entered social work. The work that you are doing, and the work that the Government have initiated with the Social Work Task Force, gives us the prospect of the transformation that we all agree is needed. Your work can help inspire that.

**Chairman:** Thank you, Bruce. Rita.

**Rita Krishna:** I am the lead member for children in Hackney and although I am here for the LGA, I am pleased to see how seriously you are taking the submissions from Hackney. As a lead member, I do not particularly feel that we are in a crisis in relation to training, but I welcome the chance to give it the attention that you and the Social Work Task Force are giving it, as Bruce has said. We have tried to address some of these issues locally in Hackney, but we need the national framework to support that.

**Chairman:** Right. That gets us started. We will hand over the questioning on the first section to David and Graham. Graham, you are in charge.

**Q186 Mr Stuart:** Thank you, as ever, Chairman, for your leadership. My first question is what would be the most effective strategy for increasing the number of student placements in local authorities?

**Bruce Clark:** There are various things that can be done. The GSCC encourages employers to play their part in providing work placements for students. Of course, the three-year degree and the doubling of the number of placement days created an immediate gap, compared with the supply that existed before that point. The fee levels of £18 and £28 a day for the statutory and voluntary sectors respectively create some difficulties. CAFCASS makes a loss from providing student placements, but we think that it is worth it for various reasons, which I could go into. Were we to get to 120 or more placements, we would be able to break even, but, as I have said, there are all sorts of non-financial benefits to all employers from providing student placements, and we need to take those into account. That is especially true of employers in local areas, which local authorities are, with links to local provider institutions, from whom they can confidently expect to get a number of their future social workers and to which a number of their staff will have gone to become qualified.

**Rita Krishna:** There is a kind of circularity to the question. Some of the previous witnesses have said that you need to secure the quality of the supervision that people get in placements to make sure that they get what they need. This investigation is about the quality of training of social workers. Do you see the circularity that I am trying to point to?

**Q187 Mr Stuart:** Yes. I did a survey of all the institutions—the 79 universities—that do training, and 86% said that local authority placements were either good or excellent. They were quite happy with the quality. However, fewer than a quarter thought that the number of placements is sufficient. It appears to me from my survey that the big problem is not so much quality, although there are issues with that, which I am sure we will tease out, but that there are not enough placements. We need a strategy, and we hope that you will give us things that we can stick in our report, that the Government will accept and that will massively increase the incentives for local authorities to remove whatever blocks are in the way.

**Rita Krishna:** Okay. Some of your colleagues have talked about the possibility of having teaching practice units. That is something that we are enthusiastic about in Hackney. I know that you are looking at models from other professions—teaching schools in the teaching profession and teaching hospitals. You could have a number of teaching local authorities, for example. We need to develop the synergies between teacher-training providers and local authorities. There needs to be a greater degree of mutuality in that relationship.

**Q188 Mr Stuart:** We need a strategy to improve that and are interested in any contributions that you have to make to that. There is also a question about how cultural it is—teaching is built into the medical profession. I do not know how much it has to do with incentives and specific time for training. The medical profession trains the next generation, but it seems that social workers do not do that in the same way. Is it because there is not enough money? Is it because social workers are overloaded with cases?

**Chairman:** That is an awful lot of questions at once.

**Eleni Ioannides:** Obviously, it is a bit of all of that. With the incentives, as Bruce has already pointed out, the level of payment is insufficient to allow someone to release enough time to do the job properly. There is also the question of what practice teachers get out of it. There is no career progress, and it is not seen as part of their career progression to pick up practice teaching. That is a very big issue; in our case, they get paid an honorarium for doing it. It is not built-in as a salary progression, because they have attained the status of practice teacher. That would be a better model. Teachers receive responsibility payments for taking on additional work, which would be a better model for social workers as well. Most teams are glad to have students, who bring freshness and energy to a team. Most teams will do their best to give a good experience, but they are under extreme pressure, which can make things very difficult.

**Bruce Clark:** Let me assist you by telling you the ways that you can incentivise local teams. In CAF/CASS, we give a back-filled credit of 3 or 4 hours a week, because it is expected that students will receive at least one and a half hours of supervision a week. That creates space and time. The teams sometimes do not feel that they receive the full credit of £18, but we pass nearly all of that to them. If they take students, they have to think about not only the pressure on their own work load, but the pressure on their fellow team

members as a whole. That is one of the reasons why we are exploring cluster models of groups of students. You get an economy of scale and a benefit for the group of students together—there is a fully fledged student unit with funding support from outside in the case of Blackburn. That is back-fill and making space, but the other thing that I want to discuss is incentivisation within career progression. I am advised by my practice learning co-ordinator that the enabling learning module is no longer a core part of the post-qualifying award. The removal of the requirement to do that module and then have a student as part of one's first post-qualifying award removes what was previously an incentive.

**Q189 Mr Stuart:** Do all three of you agree with that point? It sounds like a practical measure that we could recommend, if you do.

**Rita Krishna:** You could recommend a 10-year programme of investment in the development and training of social workers, so that it more closely resembles the one for medicine. That would change the model for social work, so that it looks more like the ones for teaching and medicine.

**Q190 Mr Stuart:** How is the General Social Care Council funding for practice placements actually used?

**Bruce Clark:** I think I have given you some examples of how we use it, but I would make the point that individual institutions do not always pass the full sum to the local authority placements. Because we could potentially link-up with any social work course provider, we find that some of them are offering us as little as £4 a day rather than £18. We find ourselves preferring not to accept students from those institutions, instead preferring those who provide the full sum. I am sure there are good reasons why smaller sums might be offered—individual local authorities can offer placements at those lower rates—but I think money has got something to do with it.

**Q191 Chairman:** Schools get £10 a day for teachers on placement, don't they?

**Mr Stuart:** Rita, from the LGA's point of view it would seem that there has been a cash grab by local authorities, who are not using it for what it is there for.

**Bruce Clark:** Not a cash grab by the local authorities, but some holding back of moneys by the social work course providers.

**Mr Stuart:** Sorry.

**Q192 Chairman:** Can we drill down on this? Can we have a straight answer? Is it the money, or not?

**Eleni Ioannides:** It is, but it is not just the money—it is more than that, but the money obviously helps you to do some of that “more than that”.

**Chairman:** Rita?

**Rita Krishna:** I don't know. I have said that what is needed for the transformation of the social work profession is a 10-year programme of investment. The extent to which that would need to be directed towards placements is a moot point.

**Chairman:** But in 10 years we might have some awful child protection issues.

**Rita Krishna:** You are going to ask some more questions, but something that arose from previous ones is that—in my view—we need to have a specialised programme of training for social work. A five-year programme would need to include a specialism for children, because of the complexity that some of the previous witnesses brought out surrounding the challenge for children’s social workers of holding empathy and risk in the same head. That is connected with intellectual capacity, and there is a need for training in that area. Children’s social workers need that skill, and it needs to be in that “one head” rather than separated out into different teams.

**Q193 Mr Stuart:** At the last evidence session, there was a recommendation that every social work trainee should have one adult and one child placement. At the moment a trainee can do two adult placements, if they are differentiated, and then end up in child protection work. Do you three think it a good idea that we recommend that the situation should change, so that every trainee does one adult and one child placement? Also, do you think that, so as to pick up placements that are not of sufficient quality, there should be greater specification of what a placement consists of, to ensure that all placements are of high quality?

**Eleni Ioannides:** My association’s view is clear. It is inconceivable to us that somebody can come into the complexity of child care social work without having a specialism in that; the landscape is too difficult. We are clear that on top of a generic foundation, the third year should contain a specialism. Then, at the end of the newly qualified year, the trainee would be licensed to practice. In my authority, we will not employ social workers unless they have had not only a child care placement, but a statutory child care placement. Otherwise, we find that they don’t stay and we can’t use them.

**Rita Krishna:** I am not going to answer your question quite directly because I think the profession needs a wholly new framework for training that would include a review of study placements. There should be an extended degree course with long-term placements in front-line services in local authorities, and the structure of specialism to allow students to qualify in children, young people and families social work. There should be a postgraduate programme for advanced study in placement. Also, the providers of training and social work education need a thorough inspection regime, which would include practising social workers.

**Q194 Mr Stuart:** To be clear, you have mentioned an extended degree of three to four years. In New York, caseworkers are trained in eight weeks, which—admittedly—is fairly astonishing. Are you suggesting that we should have a four-year degree?

**Rita Krishna:** We need to recognise the complexity of what children’s social workers are trying to do. It is not that they cannot do it in terms of risk and empathy, but they need to be properly trained and have the intellectual capacity.

**Chairman:** That is quite a radical view, particularly as your deputy director told the Committee that he didn’t employ anyone from the UK—he employed people only from Australia, Canada and so on.

**Rita Krishna:** Yes, but that is because, as I understand it, their training is an MA with a specialism in children’s social care.

**Q195 Chairman:** So you agree with your deputy director?

**Rita Krishna:** That is correct. He could not have embarked on the programme of restructuring or reclaiming social work without the agreement of the Mayor of Hackney, Jules Pipe, and me. Of course I am going to agree with him.

**Chairman:** It wasn’t a criticism. We are just trying to find out the facts.

**Bruce Clark:** I will answer your question within its rather narrow confines. I agree with what Eleni and others have said. Assuming that the generic base is provided in the first two years, and a specialist placement in the relevant discipline or aspect of social work in which the student wishes to focus on beyond their qualification, I don’t think that any employer should employ as a children’s social worker someone who has not had a final placement, not only in a children’s social work setting, but in a statutory children’s social work setting. CAF/CASS provides, I think, the most statutory of statutory placements. We provide them only to final year students. Here is what one of them said: “This is my final year and if I hadn’t had this placement, I don’t think I would have known what social work was really like.” I don’t know what that student’s first placement was, but my experience as a social work manager over many years and in many agencies is that many social work placements are not in the mainstream and have little concept of the statutory construct within social work.

**Q196 Chairman:** That is pretty depressing. But CAF/CASS, when it eventually hires, hires only people who have three or four years’ experience.

**Bruce Clark:** That is right. During CAF/CASS’s short life, it has moved from employing people with at least five years’ post-qualification experience to those with only three years’, amidst, it must be said, accusations of dumbing down. In practice, the people that we employ tend in the main to be senior practitioners and team leaders from local authorities who have substantially more experience than our new lower minimum of three years.

**Q197 Chairman:** So you wait for somebody else to train them up and then take them?

**Bruce Clark:** That is true, but I would like to make clear that the contribution that we make to social work education—194 third-year placements in the last three years—shows that we are not merely parasitical robber barons poaching across the border. We are playing our full part in bringing in the next generation of students, some of whom we hope will join us in time.

**Chairman:** Thank you for that, Bruce. We are going to move on now.

**Q198 Paul Holmes:** There is an interesting dichotomy between the first three witnesses today, who were from higher education. They said that the problems are that local authorities are not delivering properly, because local authorities are so obsessed with ticking boxes to meet the Government's requirements. You are saying, as the written evidence we received from the employer side said, that the training of social workers and the higher education institutions are the problem, and that employers do not get a say on how those courses work. Which is true? Is the higher education and training at fault, or is your side at fault?

**Eleni Ioannides:** We need to get into partnership on this—it is the only way forward. We need some national leadership and to grasp the nettle on quality assurance systems for courses, practice placements and practice teachers. We need to make a fully understood, clear and credible system. I agree with Rita that it is not a quick-fix issue. We might be able to do some quick-fix things in the meantime, but a long-term investment is needed. It is a whole-system of recruitment and retention for social workers, and it involves career progression and everything that goes along with that.

**Bruce Clark:** Like Eleni, I do not think that the blame game is a fruitful one to enter into. There are so many opportunities for improvement that there is very little point in pointing the finger at one side. As a policy civil servant in 2002–03 in the Department of Health, I was involved in the discussion that led to the national occupational standards, which represented a compromise. My desire as a policy civil servant for far more of the statute, regulations and guidance to be formally inserted into the curriculum was not wholly successful. I am fascinated that it looks like that is what we are going to do this time around. To be fair to governments of the past eight years, we have seen them, a little tentatively to start with, mimicking the initiatives from teaching that began as long ago as 1995. In 2001, we saw the first national social work recruitment campaign. Until that point, the view had been taken by governments that the employment and development of social workers was a matter for the individual employers, not a matter in which central government had a role. Increasingly since 2001, and especially this year, as evidenced by your Committee's interest, you are seeing a key role—with lots of comparisons being made, even this morning, to what has gone on in teaching—for Government in driving forward and leading that process alongside employers.

**Q199 Paul Holmes:** In teaching and medicine, there is much more clear input from central government, and there are more requirements on what training takes place in higher education and how much of that is on-the-job training in placements. Are you saying that you need much more of that for social workers?

**Bruce Clark:** Yes, I think we need to do that. The split, in 2003, of adult and children's social care between the Department of Health and the then Department for Education and Skills created some new boundaries, but we are getting over that now.

Having read what the GSCC has had to say, it is clearly putting itself to you as a lovely new car that is purring in the driveway ready to be loaded up with additional responsibilities and take forward that role on behalf of government.

**Q200 Paul Holmes:** Rita, your director has said—and you have said that you agree with him—that taking social workers who have been trained by British universities is not acceptable in Hackney, and that you want people from Canada or Australia, because they have been trained properly. That is a fairly stark bit of the blame game, is it not?

**Rita Krishna:** I don't know quite how much he talked to you about the model as it was in Hackney. We want our consultant social workers, or advanced practitioners, to exercise their responsibility at that particular level, which is why we have been recruiting overseas. As a lead member, I was quite surprised that we were in the position of having to do that. I suppose that is why I hope that we can make a difference through this Committee and the Social Work Task Force. We want to delegate that level of responsibility to the consultant social worker. The director has probably told you that we have multidisciplinary teams, and you are thinking about the possibility of recommending that there should be collective working between social workers and clinicians, family practitioners and so on, in that sort of unit form. In answer to your question, it is basically because we want to be able to devolve that level of responsibility to the consultant social worker.

**Q201 Paul Holmes:** So, as employers with that perspective, have you or your director been to the training providers in London and asked, "Why aren't you doing this on your courses?" If so, what do they say?

**Rita Krishna:** I guess we haven't so far, but I don't know—I would need to check and come back to you. I felt some guilt about the question of placements, and I knew you were interested in it, so I inquired as to how many we offer and, apparently, we usually say no. However, we train our own, so people who are already employed by us are put on to social work courses, or they apply and get on to social work courses, and we accommodate their placements.

**Q202 Paul Holmes:** Eleni, you have worked in a number of different authorities in your career in both the north and the south. In your experience, do employers, whether in Nottingham or London, get to work with higher education and say, "This is what we need on the training courses," or are they blocked out?

**Eleni Ioannides:** I think the difficulty is that the situation is in pockets. You get some really good, forward-thinking higher education institutions and authorities that can really make things happen, but it is left to that accident, if you like, as to whether they can make those partnerships and make them strong. That is why I say that we need a little bit more

national prescription and leadership on the whole issue to take it forward. It can't be left to those local partnerships, because they won't be standard.

**Q203 Paul Holmes:** This is my last question: what should central government prescribe? What should they say about how social worker training should take place from the HE perspective? For example, a few years ago, they said that teachers should spend much more time on placements in schools and less time in the lecture theatre.

**Eleni Ioannides:** We are looking for something that mirrors teacher training and the sort of systems and structures that are around that. First of all, the Government should define the tasks of the social worker, because, at the moment, they do what anybody else does not do, which cannot be good enough. We have to be really clear about what their unique contribution to the mix is. So, we should start with that and then have clarity on the curriculum. We should have some much clearer quality assurance processes for the people involved and for the curriculum than currently exist, and we need some clarity about the commissioning of courses as well. There should be much closer working on that commissioning, and the funding should be brought together with the course commissioning.

**Q204 Chairman:** You are pretty good at taking on people, are you?

**Eleni Ioannides:** We try to be. But, it is a moral obligation on our social work departments to contribute.

**Q205 Chairman:** So that has imbued every authority you have been in, because you have made that decision?

**Eleni Ioannides:** I have either made that decision or it was already in place, which was the case in most places. I think that it is fairly widespread.

**Q206 Chairman:** So, you are very different, because CAFCASS only takes people on after they are quite experienced, and Hackney only takes people from overseas.

**Eleni Ioannides:** I understand that CAFCASS has a particular type of role, but that it takes students.

**Chairman:** I know. I heard what Bruce said, and he rebutted our criticism very well indeed.

**Rita Krishna:** We do grow our own, Chair. I did say that.

**Q207 Chairman:** You did, but what I am not getting from any of you is whether there is a real problem in getting these training places.

**Eleni Ioannides:** There is, because as Bruce said, there is a growing requirement for them. They place a great strain on the host team, which at the moment is under the greatest pressure. Our referral rates since the Baby Peter case have gone up by about 30%, but I spoke to a colleague who is London based who told me yesterday that their referral rate went up 105%. You are having to battle the moral panic and

everything that has come with that and be thinking for the greater good of the whole system that we need to be bringing these social workers on and putting some time aside. We need to be giving some case load relief to some people to do a proper job of student supervision, but case load relief is really difficult and puts a strain on the whole team. You start to look at things like whether we can share the student supervision and oversight between workers. How can we manage all of that? It is difficult.

**Chairman:** You are spreading a little capacity very thinly.

**Eleni Ioannides:** We are. We have not talked a lot about resources, but I would not be a director of children's services if I did not come and say that resourcing is a major issue.

**Chairman:** You ought to talk to the HEI providers about taking too many social workers on to courses and the fact that the system cannot cope with how many they are turning out.

**Eleni Ioannides:** At the moment, in the way that it is currently conceived, it cannot cope.

**Chairman:** Right, we are going to move on. David, you are going to talk about post-qualification development and we are going back—it might seem strange, but we have our reasons—to the subject of newly qualified social workers with Edward.

**Q208 Mr Chaytor:** First, a question to Bruce. CAFCASS has been quite critical about the lack of coherent structure in relation to continuing professional development. How could it be made more coherent? What is missing; who should be responsible for it; and what are the next steps?

**Bruce Clark:** To answer the last bit first, it is very clear from the proceedings you have had so far who is offering to fulfil that role for you. Bodies now exist—the Children's Workforce Development Council and the General Social Care Council—that previously simply were not available to central government when providing that sort of co-ordination. We have switched horses from time to time during the past 20 years and thus far the PQ attempts that have been made have proved, by in large, to be false dawns. CAFCASS has tried to take seriously its commitment to its staff in post-qualifying awards, but for a variety of reasons—the relevance of the courses to the specific role fulfilled by CAFCASS is one—the pressures of front-line practice makes it hard for people to make that commitment. Even if the employer makes the right noises, creates the right culture and offers backfill, unless you can take back your money and turn it into another body to do the work, it is a nice gesture but it is essentially an empty one. There are real world factors relating to the difficulties of recruitment and retention that impact on CAFCASS as much as they do on local authority employers and make it hard to deliver PQ frameworks. Eleni has already talked about the fact that the PQ award is not the currency it would be in some other professions for taking you forward in terms of continuous professional development. We were joking outside that if you survive five whole working days as a social worker, you are probably in the frame to be appointed as a

manager. That is a comment about the casualisation of social work that has taken place over the past 10 years, linked to the lack of supply of competent people and the departure from the trade of those who prefer not to do it any more for various reasons, which is why we are having these come back to social work attempts, mimicking what has been quite successful in other areas such as nursing and teaching. There is a whole range of things that we need to do. I would not be critical of the quality of the PQ courses in isolation from the wider context. There are lots of reasons, some of which are not reflected in the quality of the courses or of the providers who put on those courses for employers to second people to attend.

**Eleni Ioannides:** I also think, perhaps in relation to practice teaching, that we might need a stand-alone qualification that is not necessarily linked to PQ. The module that is about management comes right at the end of the PQ and it is rather too late. We might need something that we can bring forward to make sure that the practice teachers are skilled up. I take on board as well and concur with the point about continuing professional development. We need a systematic process for that which currently does not exist in the way that it does, for example, in the health service where you have to get so many points a year to keep practising. In social work you have to do 15 days' development over three years, but what those 15 days can consist of is very loose. You can read some trade magazines. You can have some discussions at team meetings. It is not very clear or systematic.

**Q209 Mr Chaytor:** May I just pursue that with Eleni. Where is the Association of Directors of Children's Services? You are the managers of the service, so what has the ADCS done to bring this greater coherence and give greater priority to the need for continuing professional development.

**Eleni Ioannides:** It is a difficult question. The ADCS is a professional body. It is not a trade union and it is not an employer body either in the way that the LGA or the Government are. We will have a stance on it, but it is not in the gift of ADCS to insist on a level of standard for all local authorities.

**Q210 Mr Chaytor:** So what is your stance on it?

**Eleni Ioannides:** My stance would be that we would like to see a clear system of continuing professional development that is systematic and understood by everybody.

**Q211 Mr Chaytor:** Do you think it now needs to be nationally funded—a single national funding stream absolutely dedicated to CPD?

**Eleni Ioannides:** We need some national prescription and some national resources to go with it.

**Q212 Mr Chaytor:** Which are the priority areas? What are social workers losing out on most through this lack of coherence and the fragmentation of post-qualification development?

**Eleni Ioannides:** In which areas of work?

**Q213 Mr Chaytor:** Which areas of professional development are not properly covered?

**Eleni Ioannides:** Part of the difficulty is that different courses focus on different areas. I am not sure that there is a single answer. Different social workers I have spoken to have said, "My course overemphasised this" or "My course overemphasised that", but it was not necessarily the same thing. What they regularly said they missed was the sort of court work that Bruce talked about. They were not ready for the level of paperwork. They were not ready for some of the intensity of the work. Somehow we have to build all that into their preparation.

**Q214 Mr Chaytor:** Is the GSCC's code of practice relevant to all this? Could it be strengthened and could it play a stronger role in this, or is that a side issue?

**Eleni Ioannides:** I think it is relevant and it is useful, but whether it is sufficient is another matter. Perhaps we should look some more at what we can do to strengthen it.

**Q215 Mr Chaytor:** Finally to Eleni, and to Rita as well perhaps, what is the impact of the use of agency staff and the lack of focus on professional development? Would it be possible for local authorities to take a stronger role in boosting professional development if they were less dependent on agency staff? Or is there no relationship?

**Chairman:** Eleni, that is an interesting one.

**Eleni Ioannides:** Yes, it is. In a sense, if we were not dependent on agency staff it would be easier to take a stronger role. On the other hand, if you need a body you are better off with the agency staff. So, there is no simple answer. We have taken the line that we will not keep any agency staff long term, because they were getting comfortable with us, being paid at a higher rate and not moving on. We finish them after three months, and if they want to work for us they have to apply. That was a risky decision and it has worked for us, but it might not have. Not everybody is in a position to do that. Certainly in London you cannot be in a position to do that; it is locality based as well. The agencies are very important to us at the moment, but it is disappointing that they have to be.

**Q216 Chairman:** Are the agency people well trained?

**Eleni Ioannides:** Some are and some aren't. It is very hit and miss.

**Q217 Chairman:** What is the quality control then?

**Eleni Ioannides:** Each local authority probably has its own systems for working with particular agencies that they trust more, have greater faith in and work in partnership with. Again, it is down to the individual authority to make those links, and the more desperate you are, the lower level your quality assurance process will inevitably be, because some things have to be done regardless.

**Mr Chaytor:** Rita, on the question of agencies, and then I have one more question.

**Rita Krishna:** It is quite a complicated question. We are carrying a high number of agency staff, and, as Eleni says, that is common in London. Locally we see that as part of our change programme, and will do until we have secured the model that we want. The intention is that everybody is well supported by CPD. I cannot really answer the question of whether or not it is more complicated with agency staff.

**Q218 Mr Chaytor:** Another question to the LGA, and perhaps to the whole panel. In terms of the current arrangements for work force development, we seem to have three overlapping bodies: the General Social Care Council, the Children's Workforce Development Council and the Social Care Institute for Excellence. Is each of you confident that those three organisations have distinct roles, or are overlapping responsibilities part of the problem?

**Chairman:** We will start with you Eleni because I know that you have only five minutes left with us.

**Eleni Ioannides:** Yes, I am sorry, but I will need to go in a minute. As an association we have already submitted a response to the remit review for the sector skills councils, and we think that there is a case for better co-ordination and some merging.

**Bruce Clark:** I am less concerned about the Social Care Institute for Excellence, which seems to have a rather separate role from CWDC and GSCC. Ironically, one waits for years for co-ordinating bodies to come along and within a decade three come along at once. There is the opportunity and the need to create greater clarity about the distinct roles and functions of all those bodies. I have been impressed by the evidence that has been put to you by the leaders of CWDC and GSCC, in teasing out what those possibilities might be.

**Rita Krishna:** Similarly, I think that there could be greater clarity. For the LGA, I sat for a little while on the board of CWDC before it became an executive non-departmental public body. How I articulated myself was that we have not really had the Children Act, in its wonderful simplicity of trying to keep people focused on the needs of children, for that long, not long enough when what you are trying to do is substantially change professional cultures and get integrated working. I think that we have had this multiplicity of bodies because we are in a process of transition. It may be the time to rationalise that, or not, depending on how we have progressed along that route, but it is certainly something to think about.

**Q219 Mr Timpson:** Before you go, Eleni, may I take you back to something you mentioned earlier in your evidence? You said that many newly qualified social workers were entering the profession and deciding that, because of the melting pot of pressures, they were not going to stick it out, but leave. In your written evidence, you state that the "degree courses do not produce graduates who are immediately ready to enter the workforce as fully-qualified professionals." Is that the problem? Is it

that they are unprepared for what is ahead of them? If so, in what ways are they unprepared for the task ahead?

**Eleni Ioannides:** That is what my own social workers are saying to me. They are telling me that they felt unprepared. They are particularly unprepared for court work and the statutory end of things, but they are also saying that they did not get from the course a sense of what the job was like, so they were not ready for the realities of the role. That is why I am saying that this is not a blame game. We must all work together to ensure that social workers know what they are coming into, and the essence of defining the role and the tasks much more clearly is part of that, as are training, ensuring that practice placements deliver, and so on.

**Q220 Mr Timpson:** Does the social work degree include a module, whether in the first two years or as a specialism in the third year, in which social workers, as part of their practical training, go to a court room, and take part in a mock evidence session so that they have the opportunity to see what it is like to go through the process? Is that a mandatory part of the degree, and if not should it be?

**Eleni Ioannides:** As far as I know, that is not a mandatory part of the degree. Some people may do that, and some may not. Some social workers start with no court experience, or would if we appointed in that way. That is a real problem, and we must think about the essential ingredients that we absolutely must have. That is why specialism is necessary.

**Mr Timpson:** Do the others agree?

**Chairman:** Edward, sorry. Fiona, one quick question for Eleni before she leaves.

**Q221 Fiona Mactaggart:** Eleni, in your most recent response to Edward and earlier, you were talking about new entrants to the profession having lack of readiness for the intensity of the role. That seems to highlight the importance of clinical supervision as opposed to management supervision in social work. How can we fix that, which seems to be a gaping hole in practice at the moment? What would you suggest we do?

**Eleni Ioannides:** I think we must pay real attention to the continuing professional development of workers when they have come through so that we have good, clear career pathways for them. At the moment they are not that great. We must also recognise, as we said earlier, that we need not a quick fix, but a long-term solution. We will have better quality managers and supervisors after we have better quality workers coming in. At the moment, experienced workers are thin on the ground, and when looking for principal managers and assistant directors they are as rare as hen's teeth in social care parts of the work. It is very difficult to find high quality people.

**Q222 Fiona Mactaggart:** Is there a difference between supervision and management, or should there be?

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**Eleni Ioannides:** You can do it through the same processes. There is a difference in what is done, but it does not need two systems to do it.

**Chairman:** Eleni, we must let you go. Thank you very much for giving such good evidence. Will you keep in touch with us.

**Eleni Ioannides:** May I thank you. We really appreciate the opportunity to come and speak to you. Thank you again for that opportunity.

**Chairman:** Good luck with the transportation.

**Q223 Mr Timpson:** May I take us back to the point about newly qualified social workers coming into the profession and the pressures that are put on them. It is clear to those of us who have been in practice and come into contact with newly qualified social workers that they are often given cases of great complexity that are way beyond their level of experience, and they simply cannot do those cases justice, which can lead to difficulties with cases being dealt with as they should. What can we do to safeguard or protect newly qualified social workers from being exposed to cases beyond their capability, bearing in mind that, as you said Bruce, there is a lack of competent people, and a lack of supply, full stop? How can we ensure that social workers are not given cases beyond their capability?

**Bruce Clark:** You have asked me several questions, and I will try to wrap up the various issues in a single, brief answer. In my experience, there is not adequate focus on court skills in initial qualifying courses, although students who get CAFCASS placements get that experience. The Research in Practice consortium, of which many local authorities are members, ran a three-year court skills development programme for a number of local authorities, which came to an end in 2008. Many authorities are acutely aware of the fact that what they are getting from courses are social workers who, in Michael Preston-Shoot's words, are ready to begin to practice, but who are not yet the finished article. The single thing that will most effectively safeguard children and families, the courts and workers who are still at too early a stage in their post-qualification work from inappropriately burdensome and complex cases is a clear newly qualified social worker period in which there is genuine protection. There has been talk about protection in the first year or two after qualification for as long as I have been in the businesses, and longer. The NQSW offers the first real prospect that that will actually be delivered. I want to pick up something that David Chaytor asked about in relation to agency staff. The presence of agency staff on the current scale in children's social work is entirely corrosive and injurious to the interests of children and families. There are mixed issues about their quality, although they are no doubt all registered social workers, but the discontinuity that is created in the lives of children and families is evidenced in the recent Judith Masson care profiling study, which showed that the majority of cases before the family courts in care proceedings involved more than a single social worker during their 40 or more weeks. That cannot be a good way to deliver sensitive, positive engagement with

children and families in these most difficult cases. We have heard about the different approaches that local authorities take—employees from overseas, growing their own—and all those things are helpful, but Mike Leadbetter in Essex started this South African social worker thing a decade ago, and that, on its own, is not the solution. The areas that you are exploring offer us real, home-grown, enduring solutions that will make us work together and do not leave us divided and sorting out our own local patch, as we tend to do, although to be fair to local councillors, that is what they must do, because they cannot take national responsibility for all children's services and all children's social work.

**Rita Krishna:** I agree with Bruce. My instinct is that you should not put a newly qualified social worker in that position. You need that year after qualification, as you do with a newly qualified teacher—a protective year in which someone is a newly qualified social worker. You have asked me to say how we would accomplish that, and we should just not put people in that position. I suppose that the LGA should come back with a more considered view on that. I don't have any immediate suggestions on how we might achieve what you say, other than to say that the principle is one that we support.

**Q224 Mr Timpson:** I have just one last question, because I am conscious of the time. Do you think that social workers, and particularly newly qualified social workers, are paid enough?

**Bruce Clark:** In reading your proceedings, I have been interested to see how few witnesses have been keen to get into the vulgar subject of how much social workers are paid.

**Chairman:** Or whether they knew how much, which is worrying.

**Bruce Clark:** Let me be vulgar. There is a definite connection in life between what you pay and what you get. The mission and vocation that brought me into social work more than 30 years ago are still present in the young student social workers I meet in the course of my work, and it is inspiring and encouraging that they are still there. They might not be there sufficiently often, but I am delighted to see them, and we need more of that. We need you, as leaders of society, to encourage that as well. That is a very soft and easy thing to say, but it is true. CAFCASS recruits at the senior practitioner and former team leader level, so we pay £37,000 to £39,000, which is soon to rise by another £1,000. At the other end, especially out of London, social workers are in the low twenties of thousands, so people have to have a level of vocation to want to do the work. Of course, people start at that level in other professions, and that is certainly true of teaching, which is the most directly and commonly compared one, but you are not likely to progress as far in social work as you can in teaching because of the efforts over the past 15 years.

**Q225 Fiona Mactaggart:** I want to follow up the question that I asked Eleni about the supervision of social workers. One of the proposals to the Committee from the British Association of Social



Workers is that each local authority adopt a chief social worker post to provide leadership and protection for the professional development of social workers. That could also exist in other agencies and organisations, couldn't it, Bruce? Would you comment on that?

**Bruce Clark:** I am aware that there have been calls, for some time, from a range of bodies for there to be chief social workers. To my mind, it smacks of the rosy days that we are all too young to remember, of the '50s and '60s, of having the children's officer in each local authority. I think it sets a tone, but I am not sure that it makes a difference. I think what employers have to do is ensure that there is leadership, supervision and management training for their first-line managers, who manage social workers. In CAF/CASS, we make huge use of the reflective supervision models developed over many years by Tony Morrison—a leader in the field. We have also supported that with our Quality for Children performance management system. I know there will be those who feel that is mechanistic and over-scrutinising, and we all hate form-filling, but I would just pause to say that, in 1978, Community Care did a survey of how much time social workers spent in face-to-face work, and it was 22%. That was identical to the surveys today, so complaints about form-filling are older than any of us. It might be real, but it is also about a feeling. You come into work to work directly, but, none the less, there are bureaucratic roles that you have to fulfil. To return to your actual question, you need to have properly trained leaders and management within social work down at the first line, not just in the national colleges of leadership, which, again, we are borrowing from the schools world, and quite appropriately so. I am doubtful that we should over-formalise that; I think we should build it into the PQ structures, particularly the specialist higher PQ awards, and we should be incentivising employers to send their staff on those PQ awards.

**Rita Krishna:** I am not sure that I am going to answer your question, Fiona, but I want to disagree slightly with what Bruce says. I think that unless we say that it is critical that social workers should be allowed to do front-line practice, we are not recognising it as a distinct profession in some sense, nor the kind of skills that it brings, specifically to work with children and families that I was speaking about before. You need to have the capacity to hold these things in your head, which you cannot do if you are distracted with paperwork. I think some of the previous witnesses made that point as well. Your question was about the difference between clinical supervision and managerial supervision—is that right?

**Q226 Fiona Mactaggart:** Effectively, yes. How can we get better supervision of practice, rather than of management of the whole system?

**Rita Krishna:** I don't know whether this is exactly correct, but it seems to me, on the issue around methodology that you talked about, that if a particular methodology underpins the practice in your particular authority, then that is how you secure the quality of your clinical supervision. The

National College for School Leadership model that Bruce was talking about, which you are also considering, is a way of making sure that you are developing your leaders and managers, so the issue of methodology, rather than values, that you mentioned earlier, Fiona, is quite critical to the future of social work training.

**Q227 Fiona Mactaggart:** But what we keep hearing is that this is the optional extra that gets squeezed out in highly pressured social work departments.

**Rita Krishna:** What is, sorry?

**Q228 Fiona Mactaggart:** The capacity to supervise and the time to give that practical support of front-line workers in a clinical way.

**Bruce Clark:** I think this goes to the heart of the performance indicator criticisms that we have heard repeatedly. There is some truth in them, but there is also some mythology about them. What we have begun to do in CAF/CASS is measure the regular delivery of supervision and the fact that it actually addresses the quality of the safeguarding work of practitioners within that supervision. I think it was a former Prime Minister who said, "What works is what counts," whereas I think that what is counted is what is made to work. So you have to be very sophisticated in your delivery, development and administration of your local performance measures, and not hide behind the perceived inadequacies of those that operate at the national level—but not at the level of the individual case and case worker.

**Q229 Fiona Mactaggart:** You are pointing out that if the national system does not count that kind of supervision, you need to develop a local system that does. Is there a recommendation that you would suggest that the Committee makes to tackle that issue? You have said that the chief social worker is not, perhaps, the answer.

**Bruce Clark:** I think I said that it was not the whole answer. At the very least, I cannot see it doing any harm, which is always a good start.

**Chairman:** Rita, you were smiling and shaking your head.

**Rita Krishna:** I just didn't want to have additional performance indicators.

**Chairman:** That is understood.

**Bruce Clark:** About performance indicators, we move across the generations, don't we? There were 50 performance assessment framework indicators for a number of years in the Department of Health era. Now we have the national indicator set. In my experience, neither of those ever bit on what an individual social worker discussed with his or her line manager on the front line on the day. There is a notion that the performance improvement that we have seen across the past seven years in the proportion of initial referrals that result in timely initial or core assessments is to do with inappropriate pressure from first line managers on the social workers. I have heard that said, but I have not seen a shred of evidence and I have been in 30 of

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our teams in the past year alone. It is not the discourse that happens on the front line on the day at the duty desk.

**Rita Krishna:** I want to come in to say that I wonder who the performance indicators are really for. For me, as lead member, I don't know that they actually tell me anything about the quality of the experience of the child receiving the service, as Bruce has said. I try to do it locally with my DCS by doing visits, so that you are seeing something on the ground that cannot be communicated in a report.

**Chairman:** We have suggested that Ofsted should take that lesson on board.

**Rita Krishna:** Indeed.

**Q230 Chairman:** I note that you did impressive work on the recruitment and retention of teachers in your borough. You did not get the chance to answer Edward's question: do you think that social workers are paid enough? Is this about pay? If you transfer your experience in recruiting and retaining teachers to social workers, do you have any advice for the Committee?

**Rita Krishna:** It is a question of how you want to couch your recommendation. I suppose that I want to say that there should be a review of terms and conditions for social workers, as there was for teachers. Going back to the original point about the models that you are looking at for how professions have developed, I do not have the answer to the question of whether they are paid enough. I just think that it should be reviewed so we look at it in

detail. It is about the totality of it—everything that we have said. You cannot disaggregate pay and look at it in isolation as being a particular issue.

**Q231 Chairman:** Thank you. Bruce, would you like the last word on this? We are coming to the end, so is there anything that you should have told the Committee that we did not ask the right questions to elicit?

**Bruce Clark:** One point that I wanted to make in response to David Chaytor was that we have such a mixture of possible routes by which people who are about to take on students might become practice educators or teachers that it would be a good thing to narrow to a single set of standards and a single route the ways that people become competent enough to become practice teachers. I would also add that we need to incentivise organisations to do it. I have some sympathy with your first set of witnesses, because both employers and the educational providers must play their parts jointly. I am glad that we have nearly always resisted the invitations to point fingers at one another. We are in it together and we must climb out together.

**Q232 Chairman:** To suggest that you have to "climb out together" means that you agree with the first panel about there being a crisis.

**Bruce Clark:** There is a set of challenging factors at the moment. It has never been easy, but it is a bit harder than usual at the moment.

**Chairman:** Right. Thank you very much; it has been a really good session.

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**Wednesday 24 June 2009**

Members present:

Mr Barry Sheerman (Chairman)

Mr David Chaytor  
Paul Holmes  
Fiona Mactaggart

Mr Edward Timpson  
Derek Twigg

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**Memorandum submitted by the Family Rights Group**

**1. ABOUT FAMILY RIGHTS GROUP**

1.1 Family Rights Group is the charity in England and Wales that advises parents and other family members whose children are involved with, or require, social care services. We run a confidential telephone and email advice service for families, staffed by experienced, qualified childcare social workers and lawyers and advocates with an equivalent level of expertise in advising families.

1.2 Established as a registered charity in 1974, we work to increase the voice children and families have in the services they use. We promote policies and practices that assist children to be raised safely and securely within their families, and campaign to ensure that support is available to assist grandparents and other relatives who are raising children who cannot live with their parents.

**2. INTRODUCTION**

2.1 The social work profession is seemingly in disarray since the death of Baby P in Haringey. The role of the childcare social worker is constantly vilified and debated and frequently it appears to be the social worker not the actual person causing harm who is blamed for the death of or injuries to a small child.

2.2 Although there is frequent mention in the press of things going wrong, there is seldom any attention given to the benefits of social work, including successful interventions and early stage support provided by social workers that have prevented problems in families' escalating.

2.3 Indeed a more preventative refocusing of services underpins the current child welfare agenda set in place by Lord Laming in response to the tragic child death of Victoria Climbié. We welcome the introduction and expansion of facilities for families, such as children's centres and increased childcare provision. Our concern however, is that many of the staff working in these facilities may be inexperienced in dealing with safeguarding concerns and are ill equipped to deal with children and their families who are on the edge of risk. Safeguarding Board training or other equivalent courses for these workers is essential. Moreover, facilities such as children's centres, don't remove the need for or importance of specialist services. Yet high thresholds for accessing such specialist services, mean too many children and families are deprived of the skilled intervention they need until their problems escalate into a child protection or the child has become embroiled in the youth justice system.

2.4 Amongst the social work profession generally there appears to be confusion over the tasks and roles of the social worker, which has become over bureaucratised and dominated by systems which often aren't fit for purpose, in particular ICS. Staff are often inadequately prepared for these electronic systems and the IT infrastructures have not been developed in a way that assists the social worker in their role. Consequently, social workers are spending too much time at their desk and too little time working directly with children and families.

**3. ENTRY ROUTES TO SOCIAL WORK**

3.1 Confusion as to social work training and subsequent pay doesn't encourage mature entrants into the profession and the current media reporting of the social work profession further acts to inhibit recruitment of suitable applicants. The profile needs to be raised and the government and the profession itself need to take more responsibility to highlight the good practice and preventative work undertaken by children and family social workers, as well as raising issues when mistakes are made or tragedies occur.

3.2 Social work is a skilled professional requiring complex judgements. This should be reflected both in the selection processes for social work courses and in academic standards set by Universities. Qualified social workers should be expected to have good literacy skills, be able to gather, disseminate and analyse findings and present often complex information in appropriate ways to a variety of people in different settings eg families, professionals, courts etc. It is important that social workers can articulate their views drawing upon relevant evidence and research etc. Concerns have been raised in a number of inquiries regarding the poor standard of English of some social workers, for example. We are aware from academics that they can be under intense pressure from their institutions to maximise numbers of entrants to social work courses and not fail students. Our view is that students should not be able to obtain a social work degree until they are able to demonstrate the necessary skills outlined above.

3.3 Universities should consider BOTH the academic skills of applicants to social work courses and the applicant's own history and motivation in choosing to train as a social worker. In the past applicants to social work training courses have been required to demonstrate appropriate prior experience either in a professional or voluntary capacity which ensured they had some understanding of the reality and complexities of the work. Many parents to our advice line and advocacy clients express concern about their social worker's perceived prejudices or lack of knowledge about issues affecting them.

#### 4. STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF SOCIAL WORK TRAINING

4.1 Children's Services are the lead agency in child protection and social workers need to be able to liaise effectively and communicate with other professionals such as police, medical staff including paediatricians, teachers, legal professionals etc. If social workers are perceived to fall short in their ability to communicate their professional views and lack confidence in their dealings with other professionals then their views will not be respected nor given credibility. This again reinforces an earlier point that the status of the profession that could be assisted by a clarity of expectation.

4.2 Newly qualified social workers (and those with experience) need to be supported by employers, colleagues, and other services to build upon their existing knowledge and training through a range of strategies (many of which are already in place but not necessarily always utilised) such as co-working, joint visits, regular supervision, team meetings, access to research and relevant literature, specialist training courses, some of which could be accredited, etc.

4.3 We would have some concerns in requiring social work students to have to specialise at an early stage—we believe that there is merit to students experiencing different types of social work on a course. Indeed we fear that by specialising early, the unintended consequence may be a further fracturing and break down in understanding between adult and children's services. We believe there is merit in supporting social workers to specialise post qualification (with appropriate post qualifying training).

4.4 More emphasis needs to be given by local Safeguarding Boards to the quality of supervision provided by frontline managers and the opportunity this gives to the social worker to question, challenge and reflect. Supervision should provide workers with the space to critically think about his/her intervention, analyse why they are taking or not a particular course of action and the impact on the child, wider family but also on the worker themselves.

4.5 There should be better integration of the theory taught with the reality of practice on the ground, including a constant movement of practitioners back into universities for continuing professional development. The structure should facilitate rather than act as a barrier to:

- creating checks and safeguards;
- dissemination of research and best practice to practitioners;
- enabling academics to keep up to date with practice issues on the ground;
- ongoing support from the universities for newly qualified social workers;
- research opportunities based on data from local practice; and
- opportunity for trends of good and bad practice to be addressed at a systemic level eg where social workers repeatedly fail to follow the law, such as *Southwark LBC v D* [2007] 1 FLR 2181.

Universities should be encouraged to utilise external people with expertise, such as service users, judges, lawyers, voluntary sector organisations etc, to become involved in social work education. This should include support and payment where appropriate, particularly for service users and voluntary organisations to cover their preparation time as well as lecturing/training.

4.6 There needs to be a greater acceptance that there is a very large applicable body of law, some of which is complex and which is fundamental to the job. This should impact on the level of ability required to access and successfully complete social work training. There needs to be adequate time spent studying this in practice scenarios at an appropriate level. It would further assist understanding of the law in social work practice if Children's Services lawyers could be based in social work teams not situated separately in legal departments. In this way law, including the Human Rights Act would be more integrated into practice and legal advice easily on hand to practitioners.

#### 5. QUALITY AND SUPPLY OF TRAINING AND PQ FRAMEWORK

5.1 The social work task has become increasingly specialised and bureaucratic but is still essentially about forming relationships with children and family members and knowing the legal basis for intervention. Our advice service demonstrates that this does not consistently happen. More practice guidance from more experienced workers should be provided in post but there are huge problems with the retention of staff meaning that experienced workers are leaving. Consequently front line services are quite often staffed by newly qualified practitioners or overseas practitioners not familiar with UK systems. Practitioners from overseas wishing to practice social work in this country should be required to undertake a conversion course, to enhance their understanding of UK child welfare law and systems, to the benefit of the children and families they serve.

5.2 Our discussions with academics in social work education indicate they know of little regulation from the GSCC in terms of quality. The issue of social work placements is a very thorny one and students in placements can be given too much work and not adequately protected in the current climate of high vacancy levels.

5.3 There is a shortage of social work students who want to go into children and families frontline work from courses and the crisis with student placements mean they often aren't offered a flavour of this work. This is a problem. Bursaries and grants offered to unqualified staff within departments to become qualified used to be very popular. But we would suggest that further steps are now required. We believe there is merit in considering how lawyers are trained and applying this to social work ie academic study, following by an in-work traineeship during which the trainee is paid, albeit at a lower rate than a qualified social worker.

5.4 We believe that more could be done to encourage employers to allow for movement across specialisms in children and families work, in order to prevent burn out and enable social workers to increase their expertise whilst remaining in front line practice. This needs to be reinforced through organisational and career/pay structures, so that experienced social workers who stay in front line practice rather than going into management are appropriately rewarded.

5.5 At the moment it is very loose as to what constitutes PQRTL and there is not an accreditation process as such. There are moves afoot to implement a PQ framework but confusion remains and it's not yet in place. Some social workers complete the PQ pathway through to a Masters but what would very experienced workers do if they did not want to complete a Masters in social work? Other Masters degrees need to be recognised and allowed for. This goes to the heart of employers' support as a lot of social work feedback to training questionnaires is that they are not given enough time to complete training courses, training budgets are squeezed and even when training is available it is often not accessed due to the overwhelming demands on the time of social workers. At the moment—maybe because of the fall out from Baby P—much is being discussed about supervision in training circles. A lot of Safeguarding Boards are providing courses on supervision for the multi-agency audience as the integration agenda moves forward. These courses are too basic and aren't mandatory for social workers, nevertheless some direction is required to address this gap.

May 2009

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### **Memorandum submitted by 11 MILLION**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 Children and young people have told us that, following the trauma of family breakdown and removal into care, they want and need someone in children's services with whom they can have an enduring and trusting relationship. The social worker is often the person to whom they look.

1.2 This submission is predicated on the critical importance of ensuring that social workers have the emotional and intellectual capacity to undertake this difficult and demanding task and that the support and development framework encourages and supports them to stay in their roles for a sufficient length of time such that they can provide enduring support for troubled children and families.

#### **2. ENTRY ROUTES TO THE PROFESSION**

2.1 The most important issue with regard to entry is to ensure that the profession attracts people of the right intellectual and psychological calibre to deal effectively with the emotional and cognitive demands of the job. Entrants need to have high levels of self awareness, be psychologically minded (ie tuned into the underpinning emotional factors which influence behaviour of self and others), have excellent analytical and writing skills (or demonstrate the capacity to develop these rapidly), be effective communicators and have strong boundaries. Ease of entry should not dilute these requirements. We believe that the introduction of a two year diploma focused too strongly on accessibility resulting in too many social workers entering the profession who struggle with assessment, analysis and report writing—all key skills for effective social work.

2.2 Having said that, more part-time training should be available to ensure the pool of suitable entrants is not deterred by the standard three year full-time course. Allowing students to complete their academic and placement requirements over a longer period (maximum five years) may increase access.

#### **3. CONTENT AND STRUCTURE OF INITIAL TRAINING**

3.1 A three year bachelor's degree/two year master's degree is the minimum level for initial social work training. We favour a move towards social work becoming a master's only profession in the way that teaching is evolving. This would have the dual advantage of raising the standards of the profession as well as its standing. Social workers attaining NQSW status must work a probationary year in protected roles with full professional status only being attained on successful completion of the assessed NQSW year. With the introduction of the mandatory master's programme, the undergraduate degree would become part one of social work training, with completion of the master's forming part two, within a nationally determined timescale.

3.2 NQSWs must, as a minimum, have protected case loads which include the shadowing of a child protection case led by an experienced social worker. NQSWs should be allocated a mentor who would be separate from their line manager and provide ongoing support and advice. Line managers should observe a range of practice on a nationally agreed basis and successful completion of the year should be contingent upon observation of effective practice. Line managers must also provide formal supervision on a minimum of a monthly basis. Learning needs must be clearly identified and action taken to ensure learning outcomes are achieved. As a minimum, NQSWs must be able to demonstrate effectiveness in: assessment and analysis; accurate record keeping and report writing; effective engagement with children and families (including the active participation of children and young people in the process of assessment and on-going planning), and ability to work in partnership with other agencies and professionals. Training should also include input from police as well as health and education professionals to ensure NQSWs are fully aware of the roles and responsibilities of key partners in the children's workforce and are prepared for the requirements of integrated working. Dual assessments with other professionals eg health visitors, should be part of placement requirements. Shared/joint training modules with others in the children's workforce would be an advantage.

3.3 Views on whether the generic social work degree is fit for the purpose of training children and families social workers are highly divergent. It is our view that, as recommended by Lord Laming, specialisation should commence at the end of the first year. Working with children and families with complex needs is a highly demanding specialist area of work that requires students to absorb and digest significant quantities of evidence and research. The final two years of the undergraduate programme give limited time for this to be done comprehensively, even less so if the work to be covered spans the whole age range. There needs to be a detailed and substantial focus on: attachment theory; child development (physical, intellectual, emotional, social); neurological research regarding the impact of early nurturing on the development of the brain; child protection (signs, symptoms, protective factors, investigative requirements); systems theory; training in direct work with children and families; legislation; equalities and diversity; understanding best practice in relation to early intervention and prevention, and the ecological and environmental factors affecting children and families and their impact on healthy development and functioning. There needs to be integration between the academic and the practice elements so that they are complementary and actively enhance learning and progression. This onerous workload cannot be effectively achieved within a generic three year programme. Progression to a master's only qualification would allow for much greater in-depth study spread over the whole training programme. This would include a detailed infant observation and, in part two, a more specialist focus on child protection and other key areas such as drug and alcohol abuse, etc.

3.4 In addition to the above, placements must have minimum requirements to ensure effective coverage of core areas of knowledge and experience. These must include: assessment of a complex family (including taking a detailed history and completing a genogram); direct work with a child in need and securing appropriate multi-agency collaboration and intervention; acting as lead professional, and shadowing a child protection investigation. Student social workers must be able to demonstrate progression as they acquire experience on their placements, taking on increasing levels of responsibility as they near the end of their programme.

3.5 We have focused primarily on knowledge, skills and experience in the above. Social workers must also appreciate and internalise the values underpinning the profession including being non-judgemental, placing a high premium on equality and diversity, developing their capacity for reflective practice, and understanding their own responses to emotionally and psychologically challenging situations. Issues of class, race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality and disability need to be explored and students need to develop an acute understanding of their own conscious and unconscious reactions to these matters.

#### 4. QUALITY

4.1 We have limited knowledge of the effectiveness of the General Social Care Council (GSCC), however I will comment on the basis of having made one referral regarding a serious allegation against a social worker. Despite submitting detailed evidence to the GSCC (including the results of the local authority investigation), and numerous phone calls, emails and letters chasing the case, it took the GSCC more than two years to consider the matter. This was unsatisfactory.

4.2 The quality, suitability and supply of practice placements must be monitored by both the placing institution and the GSCC. All practice teachers must be suitably qualified, and assessment of the placement should include oversight of records kept on the student and scrutiny of placement plans. Students should evaluate placements as part of the process. Poorly performing local authorities must satisfy the GSCC that placement supervision and practice will meet required standards.

4.3 Low entry requirements for many social work undergraduate programmes and poor expectations of students mean that it is difficult to fully assess whether the shift to a degree level course has had a significant impact on the calibre of the people entering the profession.

## 5. POST-QUALIFYING TRAINING AND CAREER PATHS

5.1 Post-qualifying training must be thoroughly quality assured by the GSCC.

5.2 Overload, low morale, inadequate supervision, and case loads dominated by an unremitting diet of child protection too frequently lead to social workers leaving frontline service for alternative careers. Duty work is undervalued with work such as fostering and adoption and working with disabled children often being referred to as “specialist”, with the implication that duty and assessment can be done by any qualified social worker. Frontline child protection and provision of children in need services, including duty and assessment, should be seen as a specialism in its own right. This would potentially raise the standing and morale of frontline workers, and this could be further reinforced by the implementation of Lord Laming’s recommendation for the establishment of consultant social workers. This proposal should assist in keeping the most experienced social workers in practice. Consultant social workers could, once established, be responsible for the monitoring of student social work placements and observation and oversight of NQSWs. Salaries must reflect the enhanced requirements of the role.

5.3 Post-qualifying training in child protection must include input from other key agencies, notably the police, education and health. It is essential that all social workers are aware of the requirements for joint working in child protection investigations and are competent to contribute.

5.4 Many employers are strongly committed to supporting the development of social workers. However, standards are at times sacrificed to the necessity of maintaining an adequately staffed workforce and putting qualified workers through post-qualifying courses. I am aware of courses that deliver poor quality in terms of content and standards and make few demands upon the PQ students. The good intentions must be matched by rigour in terms of training and standards if performance is to be of a sufficiently high calibre.

5.5 Supervision has moved a long way away from the focus on reflective practice predicated on a psychodynamic model. Clearly, while supervision must cover oversight of cases, quality standards (including file monitoring) and management issues, space must again be made for full consideration of the impact of the work on the supervisee and the complex dynamics affecting families, the social worker and the wider professional and community context. This is a highly skilled task for which training should be mandatory and accredited.

5.6 A system of spinal points awarded on the basis of taking on additional responsibilities or acquiring specialist skills would enhance the career opportunities of social workers and help to make the profession more attractive, as well as help keep more experienced practitioners on the front line.

*May 2009*

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### Memorandum submitted by the NSPCC

#### SUMMARY

1. There has been investment in education and generic training around the “Every Child Matters” agenda but insufficient attention has been given to two things: (a) the depth and detail of knowledge required for child protection work, and (b) the practical skills development needed to fully equip practitioners and managers to make sound professional judgements, especially when it comes to safeguarding.

2. To create and maintain a workforce that is experienced and skilled, interventions are needed at all levels. This means:

- Increasing the diversity of the pool from which applicants can be drawn and this requires a range of routes into social work;
- Social workers need to emerge from courses with a minimum skill set and some experience of statutory work;
- Attention needs to be given to the provision of quality practice placements and practice teachers provided the time to ensure the placement provides a suitable experience for the student, and
- A clear framework of training and support is needed to enable a student to progress to a competent practitioner over the first few years of employment.

#### INTRODUCTION

3. Our evidence is drawn from the NSPCC’s experience as an employer of social workers and other children’s services practitioners involved in children’s services, and as a provider of training and consultancy to a diverse range of statutory and voluntary sector organisations.

4. The Government announced a number of measures<sup>1</sup> to transform the social work profession as part of its action plan for implementing Lord Laming’s recommendations for improving the child protection system. These, and the work of the Social Work Taskforce are welcome, and will help address some of the issues we raise in our evidence.

5. A recent study<sup>2</sup> found that a doctor is likely to remain a doctor for about 25 years; while a social worker is likely to stay in their profession for only 7.7 years. Explanations for this can be found in a study by Coffey *et al.*<sup>3</sup> who noted that the highest levels of organisational constraints, sickness levels and mental distress were amongst child-care social workers compared with social workers working with other user groups.

6. The questions asked by the Committee are very relevant in the context of what is known about stress in the profession and how it can be managed. Collins in his study of stress in social work<sup>4</sup> noted the need to assess hardiness [resilience] as part of recruitment into courses, ensuring that courses facilitate the understanding of stress and the promotion of an environment which supports and empowers practitioners in the workplace.

#### ENTRY ROUTES TO THE PROFESSION

7. There has been a recent focus on ensuring that young people understand social care and social work as a potential career choice. This is welcome but should be one element of a wider strategy. Our experience has demonstrated that there are many people who would like to work in child and family social work but they need flexible and adequately funded routes to do so.

8. A diverse workforce which reflects the communities it works with is important if children and families are to receive good quality services. To achieve this, more flexible routes into social work are required with much greater use of Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) being encouraged and facilitated by educational establishments. In our experience the majority of universities are not receptive to the accreditation of prior learning and do not give due value to qualifications such as National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). In introducing an NVQ route to a social work qualification the NSPCC faced a number of hurdles: academic elitism, the extra work involved for universities, and less revenue from courses, if students are exempted from some elements of the course. We have now developed a very successful traineeship scheme which attracted over 3,000 applicants from a diverse range of backgrounds in its first year.

9. More could be done by central government to support such approaches by arranging for a mapping of relevant qualifications against the social work degree and making clear what exemptions could be awarded. There is also a need to provide incentives for universities to introduce flexible routes into training, which meet the needs of students, including mature students and those with caring responsibilities who cannot afford to study full time or on a grant. As Parker and Whitfield note, *“Without attention to finance and bursary issues, it is likely that the composition of the workforce will change over time, having implications for the sector. If mature students with responsibilities are precluded from study, social work agencies must consider how to deal with a younger qualified workforce, or workforce planning initiatives must develop along the lines of work-based routes, secondments and traineeships”*.<sup>5</sup>

10. The Children’s Workforce Development Council (CWDC) is investigating a fast-track employment-based route to attract graduates into social work. This is an encouraging development, but focusing solely on graduates will not open up access to able, experienced and mature applicants without a degree. Alternative routes, such as that described above, also need to be considered.

11. Alongside flexibility of entry routes, funding is required, especially for mature students who may be changing careers. This is especially important for enabling applicants from black and minority ethnic communities to enter social work.

12. Suitability for social work is the other issue. Currer’s study assessing student social work suitability identified a wide variation in practice by universities and notes that there is *“little consistency in the procedures followed by the different HEIs [Higher Education Institutions] in England, and that the professional body might take a lead by offering examples of good practice and some more detailed guidelines for universities.”*<sup>6</sup>

13. The NSPCC has developed an approach to interviewing that helps organisations to recruit more effectively, to probe in more depth in order to really understand not just what people do but how they do it, and importantly why they do it, thereby giving a more rounded and complete picture of a candidate. We have found this approach, known as Values Based Interviewing (VBI)<sup>7</sup> effective in predicting an individual’s behaviour at work once recruited into post. VBI was shown to be widely acceptable to managers, interviewers and candidates as a selection method that increases confidence in recruitment decision-making, greatly reducing or eliminating the “gut feel” element of decision-making in interviews.

14. Both interpersonal and intellectual skills are essential to effective children and families social work. The NSPCC welcomes the measures taken to raise the academic standards and intellectual rigour of those entering the profession, however this must be combined with selecting people with strong inter-personal skills and emotional resilience.

#### STRUCTURE OF TRAINING

15. Becoming an effective social worker who is able to work with complex and challenging family situations cannot be achieved in two or three years. Qualifying is only the first step. Support and opportunities for continuing professional development are needed to learn, apply, test and build on the foundation provided by the qualification programme. We recommend a minimum degree-level qualification



of three years, plus a protected and assessed “probationary year in practice”. We endorse the Newly Qualified Social Worker pilot programme; this is a good starting point and should be built on and extended so that it is available to all newly qualified social workers.

16. The Scottish government-funded programme for teachers is also worth considering.<sup>8</sup> Teachers are on probation for one year, but are guaranteed a maximum of 70% teaching time with the rest available for development; they also have access to an experienced teacher for support. The NQSW has some of these elements. A key issue however is that social workers must be able to demonstrate competencies at an appropriate level to be able to progress—for example, being able to develop relationships with children, being comfortable preparing a court report and being able to respond appropriately to a child protection issue arising within their caseload.

17. A distinction needs to be drawn between what a social work qualification should be, and the level of skill and experience needed to deal with a situation as complex and serious as Baby Peter’s case. It is not appropriate for someone who is just qualified to be expected to deal with that level of complexity. A career path for social workers needs to map out how to take people from initial qualification to the level of expertise to cope with such cases. A structured framework of continued professional development and required competencies for undertaking particular responsibilities for protecting children is required, with social workers needing to demonstrate competence before being able to move onto the next level. This would be akin to the model used for doctors and would ensure that complex cases are led by those with demonstrable skills and experience. Such a framework may assist in lengthening the time that someone chooses to stay in social work. The NSPCC has developed a process for assessing the competence of all newly appointed practitioners, linked to the provision of development opportunities. Only those who demonstrate essential competencies are confirmed in post.

#### CONTENT OF INITIAL TRAINING

18. There are a range of views on whether and to what extent the degree course should be generic. Social workers do need to have a breadth of knowledge and we recommend that students should be expected to spend a third of their degree on generic/other areas and two thirds on their chosen specialism, such as children and families, mental health or older people. The breadth of what is currently expected to be covered does not leave enough time for key specialist skills to be developed. For example, the NSPCC is aware that a very valuable component on the observation of children has had to be dropped at Nottingham University because of a lack of available time in the curriculum. Such components should be essential elements for any student wanting to work with children and families, so that they are skilled in recognising concerns about a child’s developmental progress or in their interaction with a parent or carer.

19. The NSPCC believes that knowledge and understanding of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child has to be an integral element of any work relating to children. It is thus important that a rights-based approach is embedded in social worker training. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has recently expressed concern “*that there is no systematic awareness raising of the convention and the level of knowledge of it among children, parents and professionals is low*”.<sup>9</sup>

20. Irrespective of specialisms, there need to be clear mandatory elements in all social work qualifying programmes around child protection and safeguarding. There needs to be a stronger emphasis for those specialising in children and families on:

- An understanding of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and an ability to demonstrate how they put them into practice;
- Statutory duties, all the regulations, child protection procedures, and the Working Together to Safeguard Children guidance. Social workers need a sound knowledge of core legislation, namely the Children Acts of 1989 and 2004, the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Children and Adoption Act 2006. This knowledge base needs to be a central core of the course that is tested through placement experience and examination;
- Working directly with children and communicating with them effectively. This includes assessing a child’s developmental needs and progress and knowing when to be concerned about developmental delays, which could indicate abuse or neglect or the need for additional support and services;
- Integrated working and information sharing. Students need this knowledge, and must know what it means and how to put it into practice on the front line;
- The lead professional role they may have on the front line and during inter-agency working;
- The skills and ability to write reports (early on) both for formal meetings such as child protection conferences and also for court, to understand the welfare checklist and how to take a lead role in court, and
- Being equipped to analyse and critically evaluate information in order to be able to make sound evidence-based judgments in situations of risk to children.

## QUALITY

21. The NSPCC is aware that a lack of practice placements has meant that some social workers are currently qualifying without necessarily having had any experience of statutory work. An increase in students undertaking social work has also placed burdens on the numbers and types of placements available.

This is of major concern and puts an added burden on the team they join on qualifying, many of which are already under resourced and over stretched. As an employer, we cannot be confident about the abilities and knowledge of new social workers. We therefore assess the competence of each new member of staff and provide a range of in-service training for our recruits (for example on communicating with children and therapeutic skills). We have to date been in the fortunate position of being able to do so but this should not be necessary.

22. The experience of having to make sense of legislation, understand the guidance and then apply it in writing a report for a court or a foster panel is one that should not be left until someone is qualified; this is too late.

23. There was a move in the 1990s to raise the quality and consistency of practice placements and to work towards ensuring that all practice teachers had undergone a recognised programme of training and some form of accreditation in order to set out some minimum expectations for placements.

24. However this emphasis on quality has been lost because of the difficulty meeting the increased demand for placements, the move to the new degree, vacancy rates and increased workloads. The quality of the practice teacher therefore becomes more variable and work pressures mean practice teachers may not have the same time to focus on enabling and enhancing a students learning.<sup>10</sup>

25. Our experience tells us that there are also issues about courses not being prepared to fail students. Our practice teachers have on occasion advocated that a student should not be allowed to progress but have come under pressure to pass them. It has been suggested that the NSPCC expects too much.

26. A separate issue is the use of social workers qualified from overseas. We welcome the proposals set out by the Secretary of State in the Action Plan for ensuring that overseas workers meet basic skill requirements and to be able to participate in the Newly Qualified Social Workers.

## POST-QUALIFYING TRAINING AND CAREER PATHS

27. Collins in his study on stress commented that “*statutory social work organisations obviously need to care for, value and recognise workers also by providing regular, well informed, sensitive supervision emphasising care and appropriate autonomy, rather than an excessive focus on standard setting, or ‘inquisition’, whilst also providing appropriate advice and clear information about agency procedures, policies and practices . . . All these elements combine together to enhance support opportunities and better coping strategies for social workers. It is in such circumstances, along with the absolutely prerequisite provision of essential resources and manageable workloads, that social workers can thrive and develop positively*”.

The provision of good quality supervision that addresses the above issues is essential. In an in house survey of NSPCC representatives on LSCBs a number commented that supervision of front line staff was often found to be inadequate:

- “*Quality of supervision, analysis and professional judgement is variable across agencies but [of a] markedly poor standard at frontline social worker level.*”
- “*. . . above all, reflective professional supervision on a regular basis, and consultation with other skilled, knowledgeable professionals [is required to safeguard children]. Very few local authority social workers, in my experience, have access to these.*”

28. CWDC are running a pilot on supervision as part of the NQSW programme and this is welcome. Early indications suggest it is proving to be beneficial.

29. The post-qualifying (PQ) framework for social workers has been reshaped in recent years with new qualifications being introduced and universities given lead responsibility for provision. However, the take-up of these programmes is variable, with employers struggling to release and support staff to attend and funds not always being available to enable participation.

30. The PQ framework needs strengthening, and without funding it cannot operate effectively. To maintain registration, social workers are required to undertake 15 days of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) over three years; yet there is no process for assuring the quality or relevance of the training undertaken. The NSPCC would like to see a requirement for social workers to demonstrate that they have refreshed and updated their knowledge of child protection as a condition of maintaining their registration.

31. Learning on the job is one key element of staff development. The NSPCC is therefore concerned about the actual spend on training and learning. Recent findings from the “Learn to Care” survey<sup>11</sup> on social care workforce expenditure found that, “*There is a clear mis-match between last year’s expectations and this year’s reality for the retention of workforce grants in both adult and children’s sectors. In last year’s [2007] survey, about 7 in 10 ‘Learn to Care’ members estimated they would be able to retain all of their workforce development grants. In this year’s survey, just 2 in 10 members actually secured all the National Training Strategy and Human Resources Development grants . . .*” The actual figures for 2007–08 show that, “*the children’s sector*

was able to retain an average of just 30% of their National Training Strategy Grant and 30% of the Human Resources Development Strategy Grant for workforce development in social care". The allocated funding needs to be used for its original purpose.

32. There has to date been little in the way of a career pathway that encourages social workers to stay at the front line. We therefore welcome the creation of the Advanced Social Work Professional role, announced by the Government on March 12, 2009.<sup>1</sup>

#### REFERENCES

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- <sup>5</sup> Parker, J & Whitfield, J (2006) Linking Practice Learning and the Recruitment and Retention of Staff, unpublished research report, University of Hull.
- <sup>6</sup> Currer C (2008) Assessing Student Social Workers' Professional Suitability: Comparing University Procedures in England. *British Journal of Social Work* (p 1–18).
- <sup>7</sup> Cleary (2008) Value Based Interviewing: Report into the development and evaluation of the effectiveness of a value based interviewing method used in recruitment and selection of individuals to work with children and young people, NSPCC.
- <sup>8</sup> <http://www.gtcs.org.uk/Probation/probation.aspx>
- <sup>9</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child 49th Session Concluding Observations UK Oct 2008 CRC/C/GBR/CO/4.
- <sup>10</sup> Parker J Developing Effective Practice Learning for Tomorrow's Social Workers. *Social Work Education* Vol 26, No 8, December 2007.
- <sup>11</sup> Local government social care workforce development expenditure: a survey of trends and funding (2008)—Learn to Care 2009.

May 2009

*Witnesses:* **Cathy Ashley**, Chief Executive, Family Rights Group, **Sue Berelowitz**, Deputy Children's Commissioner, and Chief Executive, 11 Million, **James Brown**, Managing Director, Social Work 2000, and **Enid Hendry**, Director of Training, Consultancy and Safeguarding Information Services, NSPCC, gave evidence.

**Q233 Chairman:** I welcome Sue Berelowitz, Cathy Ashley, Enid Hendry and James Brown to our deliberations. It is nice to see them here this lovely practically midsummer morning. Some of us have been on a sponsored walk in Hyde Park, so excuse the fact that I did not have a tie when I got back to change, but never mind. I understand from the Clerk that I shall be barred from Prime Minister's Questions unless my staff deliver one to me, but we are all right here and not on television. We have such good witnesses that we could ask them questions all day, but we only have an hour. Do they want to spend a couple of minutes addressing the subject that we are dealing with? We could add value with this inquiry because the training of children and families' social workers could do with some change. We have taken quite a lot of evidence already. We met a whole bunch of young social workers on Monday. We would like you to help us to add value. However, you might not think that that is necessary and that everything in the garden is perfectly rosy.

**Sue Berelowitz:** I very much welcome the

opportunity to say something brief. You obviously have received my full submission, but I want to raise two points. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to be here and to do that. As we all appreciate, this is a very difficult and complex area and it is a real challenge to get it right. It is of crucial importance to ensure that those who come into social work have the right academic and emotional capacity, and resilience, to operate effectively. The training is critical to that. The other thing that I wanted to raise is the message that we have had consistently from the children and young people to whom we have spoken about this matter. From their perspective, it is absolutely vital that the support and development framework encourages social workers to stay in the profession for long enough, such that they can provide enduring support for troubled children and families. Children have told us that they really value their social workers. They want them to listen; they want them to like them; they want them to understand them and they want to know that they will really stick with them. I can just encapsulate that

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24 June 2009 Cathy Ashley, Sue Berelowitz, James Brown and Enid Hendry

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with a quotation from a young lass of 15, who said to us, "I've gone through so many social workers. I think that I have had seven in two years." If we get the training and support right, I will be confident that children will be able to get the enduring support that they so desperately need.

**Q234 Chairman:** Sue, you are the Deputy Children's Commissioner. When will we get a new Commissioner?

**Sue Berelowitz:** The process has commenced in that the advert is out. It is not being run by us, so all I can do is to report.

**Chairman:** I thought you would have good information.

**Sue Berelowitz:** The current Commissioner retires at the end of February next year, so the new incumbent should start on 1 March. My understanding is that the interviews will be completed by the middle of October and that the announcement will be made on 20 November.

**Chairman:** Thank you. Cathy.

**Cathy Ashley:** I concur with Sue. We advise families, parents and kinship carers. In our experience, there is significant variation in practice. We get the excellent and the very poor. Families distinguish. Even if they don't like the decision being made by the social worker, they distinguish between poor and good practice and between people being honest with them about who understands the legal framework. One of the points we wanted to raise was that there is some very poor practice out there in terms of knowledge around the legal framework. That means that not only poor decisions but illegal decisions are being made.

**Q235 Chairman:** When you say "patchy", do you mean patchy across local authorities or between different social workers?

**Cathy Ashley:** It is patchy between and patchy within. It is not only the question about newly qualified social workers and their understanding of the legal framework. It is also social workers recruited from abroad and the support given to them, or lack of it, in terms of understanding the British legal system. It is also in relation to developments in case law and legislation, so it is also about practising social workers and the fact that there is often no system within the local authority for keeping social workers up to date in relation to legislative developments. So what we get, for instance, is the Manchester judgment about family, friends and carers being paid the same—if they are foster carers—as stranger foster carers. In fact, you still find local authorities not instituting that even though the decision was made I think in 2003, so we are six years on and we still get illegal practices going on.

**Chairman:** Thank you.

**Enid Hendry:** Thank you very much for the opportunity to present NSPCC evidence.

**Chairman:** Can I just ask our staff if they can move the microphones a little. They are all to one side. We only have three. This is a very expensive way to use a highly qualified Clerk. That's much better. Thank you.

**Enid Hendry:** The evidence that is presented is based on our experiences of a large voluntary sector employer, with a focus on protecting children, but also providing training and consultancy to a wide range of other people. On the basis of that, there are three points that I would like to raise. There is a significant skills and confidence gap in relation to protecting children from abuse, and we do not believe that that is going to be solved by purely generic approaches. We think any solutions have to be based on an understanding of what it really takes to keep the most at-risk children safe. We believe that intervening to protect children requires courage as well as skill and good relationship and interpersonal skills. Getting that balance right in the recruitment, as well as providing people with support so that they can handle risk, uncertainty, huge levels of stress and conflict, and stay with some of the pain that this work involves, requires really high quality support. We do not think social workers are ready at the point of qualifying to take on complex child protection cases on their own, but we are aware that many are being expected to dive in and get out of their depth very quickly. We do not think that is fair on the children and families or on the social workers themselves. So what we call for is an assessed probationary year so that, after qualifying, people have a protected year where they are assessed in practice before they are fully professionally qualified, and during that period they have protected case loads. On top of that we believe that there is a need for a structured and properly resourced framework of continuing professional development—required competencies—so that people only move on to particular areas of work when they have demonstrated that they are ready for that and have the competencies for that. We have a framework—a matrix—within NSPCC that does that kind of thing. We believe that ought to be more widely available.

**Q236 Chairman:** So your social workers are better trained than the regular social workers?

**Enid Hendry:** I wouldn't say consistently so. I would say that some local authorities have invested and made really very impressive development programmes.

**Q237 Chairman:** But you would be happy if everyone did as well as you did?

**Enid Hendry:** I think we can learn from one another and I think we have some good models that work that could be shared.

**James Brown:** Thank you for inviting me. I would just like to give my background to set a bit of context. I qualified as a CQSW social worker 31 years ago, and I have watched the three decades since that time and I have operated as a practitioner. For 10 years I have been running an employment business, which in common parlance is an agency.

We see a large proportion of the work force in a multitude of different working environments. We sit on boards of five universities and consult with them on the degree course and how the work force can be best served by the education. It is a very large group that comes through agencies into the employment market. The particular interest that we have is in newly qualified social workers and how they are best looked after, in order to retain them in the profession. We are very interested in the point at which they enter their training. The other group is that of the very experienced social worker; we are interested, again, in how we retain them in the service, and in maintaining and developing their standards. Much of what has been said by the NSPCC I echo. Also I would support those thoughts from Sue at the end, on the communication skills with children and families specifically, which we are here today to look at. The last point is that there is a trade association of nine or 10 agencies such as ourselves, the Association of Social Work Employment Businesses (ASWEB). A lot of time is spent in raising standards of education for that group of agency workers. I am here to answer questions.

**Chairman:** Thank you, that was a very good start to our questioning. Because it is such an intense session, my colleagues will be brief in their questions, if you could be sharp in coming back. I know that is a bit demanding. Thank you for not minding us reverting to first names, which makes it all more rapid and pleasant. Edward will lead us on the views of children.

**Q238 Mr Timpson:** Can I pick up on one of the remarks made by Sue in relation to the value that children place on their social worker, assuming that they have one. You talked about how they wanted to be listened to, liked and understood and that they want their social worker to stick with them. Also, Enid remarked on the need for social workers to have both the intellectual skill and the interpersonal skill, in order to empathise with children and to be able to develop those relationships of trust, which are so important for children finding themselves in such circumstances. How good are universities and employers at actually spotting those interpersonal skills, the more emotional capabilities that are so important for the whole social work ability that is needed? Have we got that right?

**Sue Berelowitz:** It is hard for me to comment on how good the universities are at doing that. What I can certainly comment on is whether it is important that it gets done—I would say that it is absolutely critically important. That is part of the assessment process in determining whether someone should be admitted to a training programme or not. They need both the academic and the psychological and emotional capacity to do this work, and they need the capacity to make relationships. What is so clear from what the children say to us—this went in our submission to Lord Laming—is that it is the nature of the relationship that gets built up with the social worker that is so important. Among what the children are saying in relation to that is also that they

quite clearly understand that social workers need to be able to do assessment. They don't talk in those terms, but they are not just talking about getting on with someone, they are talking about needing to be well settled somewhere, not having lots of different placements, and how good it is when they finally have a really good placement. That is about the assessment, the social worker's capacity to think clearly, to analyse and so on. All those things are critically important. Children have said to us that they would like to be involved in the recruitment process, in terms of social workers going on training programmes and in terms of local authorities. They would like to be involved in the recruitment of social workers, because they feel that they have something to contribute. That is our experience when we recruit staff—we involve children in that process and they have a lot to contribute. There are some interesting options that can be looked at, in terms of the assessment process, but those things are very important indeed.

**Enid Hendry:** The involvement of children and young people in the selection process really adds value. We do that with our staff and I know that some universities do that too. They are very shrewd and perceptive and very quickly pick up on how comfortable adults are at relating to them in a genuine way. What children and young people want is quite simple. They tell us that they want people who listen and who seem genuinely interested in them and who want to know what is best for them. It's nothing hugely sophisticated—it's basic things. The other things that universities could do more about it is making sure that their assessment involves observing how social workers work with children and young people. We have a competence programme in NSPCC and we will not confirm anyone in person until we have observed their interaction. People can write about, and tell you, what they do, but seeing the quality of that makes a difference. Recruitment and observation are two points. The third point I would make is that we have developed a process of looking at values and behaviours in our interviews—not just people's technical skills and knowledge, but really digging down into how people think, value and relate to others and how they manage boundaries. That gives you a different quality of information than you can get from a purely technical interview.

**Q239 Mr Timpson:** So really what we are talking about is, in part, in terms of recruitment and training, that there is a greater emphasis on assessing, as best we can, the ability of those newly qualified social workers in the year after graduation to deal with the interpersonal aspects of their job. I know, Enid, that you have touched on how you assess people, but isn't it quite difficult to assess how someone is going to react in all sorts of situations in the future that cannot be anticipated? What is the best way of us assessing, and being confident that the children are going to get all those features that Sue spoke about right at the beginning?

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**Sue Berelowitz:** You are absolutely right. It is not going to be possible to assess for everything, but what you need to be able to assess for is, first, whether someone has enough ability, and secondly, whether they have the potential to do what is required. In any interview, part of that process is always assessing whether someone can make relationships. That is required at different levels, according to the nature of the job. We have just been interviewing for a director of communications, for example. Yesterday, we had children on the panel with us, and one of the things that was very notable with some candidates was that they didn't even talk to the children. If they can't communicate with them and aren't interested in doing so, then that tells us something. There is something about what goes on in the interview that will give you quite a lot of information. You can then ask people about their experience, give them scenarios and so forth, but it is just as important that the assessment, while people are training, is very rigorous, so that these things are looked at. I agree absolutely that trainee social workers should be assessed on the job, so that when they are working with service users—clients, children, whatever term one wants to use—there is someone there, watching. That happens with teachers, where someone goes into the classroom to see what they are doing there and how they work with the children—both in terms of the quality of the teaching that they do, and the nature of the relationships, such as their classroom management, all those kinds of things. It needs to be a holistic, rounded assessment, and if people are not meeting the standard, then that needs to be looked at and addressed. If they can't meet the standard, then they shouldn't pass.

**James Brown:** The point of entry into university is absolutely critical. The selection process has to be more than an interview. It has to be the same as the selection process that is subsequent when you are selected for jobs, with role plays and group exercises. Others than just the university need to be involved in the selection process—employers and young people. To go back to 1978, when I was selected, getting in to even start the qualification was a massive process—checking motivation, asking someone why they are doing this. The risk is that you have the selection so great that you have a finite number of social workers that come out of the other end, so we have an absolute elite squad, but that is insufficient to meet the demands of the job market. The broader perspective has to be looked at. I have consulted several people and they certainly have strong views that people with good life experience and good experience of working with people in the social care environment don't lose the opportunity to get into education to which they might actually contribute something.

**Chairman:** We are going to move on. We shall go now to Derek, and parents.

**Q240 Derek Twigg:** There is much strong evidence to suggest that too much emphasis is placed on developing relationships with the parents and families as against trying to protect the child. What do you say to that?

**Cathy Ashley:** You can't protect the child unless you actually have a strong relationship with the parent. That doesn't mean you accept everything that the parents have to say or that you are not thorough in the investigation assessment, but all research into the protection of children shows that they are best protected if there is a partnership and co-operation between the family and the local authority. In a sense, it is a false dichotomy. You need both, but you also need social workers who are supported and who have the confidence, the supervision and the time for reflection to make the right judgments about the child and the need to protect the child. One of our concerns is about families who end up with a multitude of different social workers. They have initial assessment after initial assessment, but no one is standing back and looking at the whole picture in terms of the needs of the child. Because of the way in which our system works at the moment, there are often severe inconsistencies between what social workers are advising families in the same case. We have callers to our advice line where, say, for example, the father was a schedule 1 offender, where one social worker has agreed that the children can remain at the home, then there is a change in the social worker and basically they were looking at care proceedings. There is that real question for me around what support, what supervision, what time for reflection.

**Q241 Derek Twigg:** So you refute the assertion that too much is being put on the relationship with families, and not enough on protecting the child.

**Cathy Ashley:** A lot of families are still coming to us for help who are at the point of desperation, and who aren't accessing the support that they need. We are still getting a lot of families in that situation, and then basically crisis comes and they enter into the child protection arena.

**Q242 Derek Twigg:** Have you got a number? What is the number of families who come to you to ask for help?

**Cathy Ashley:** We answer about 5,000 calls a year from families. It is a routine problem that the threshold for specialist services and support is so high that, basically, unless you enter the child protection arena or you are in the youth justice system, it is exceptionally hard to get the right support at the time when children and families need it.

**Q243 Derek Twigg:** Is it nationwide, or do particular sectors or authorities generate a lot more of these calls from parents?

**Cathy Ashley:** No, it is nationwide, but obviously some pockets are more severe than others. I wouldn't say that one local authority has got it right, but it is clear that some are better than others—and some are under a lot more pressure than others.

**Q244 Derek Twigg:** What are the top three complaints about social workers?

**Cathy Ashley:** The three things, I would say, are lack of clarity from the social worker about what the concerns are and what their options are in the situation. That's a big problem for us around family and friends carers. You have the midnight granny scenario, when the mum is out of her head on the Friday night. The social worker goes round and says to grandma that either she takes the children or they go in the care system. The grandmother takes the children. The social worker says that they are not allowed contact with mum. The grandmother expects follow-up support on the Monday, but nothing happens. The grandmother has no idea what her legal rights are, what she can do or cannot do and what support there is for the children, etc. That is a really common problem. So it's about follow-through, consistency and expecting from social workers what we rightly expect from parents, which is that they follow through and do what they say.

**Chairman:** Let's move on. David, you are going to look at social workers outside the statutory sector.

**Q245 Mr Chaytor:** Can I ask James about agency workers. In particular, James, what is your assessment of the profile of the pool of agency workers now? Do they tend to be predominantly newly qualified social workers who are not able to get jobs with local authorities, or do they tend to be more experienced social workers who want the freedom of picking and choosing where to work?

**James Brown:** It is not an "or"; it is both of those groups. There is a very large group coming out of universities who believe that they are not able to find work in the permanent sector and they are coming to us for guidance, to find their way into work. So that is a very large group. The other big group is the very experienced social workers and their profile is, "We are very good at what we do, we are very experienced, we want to have control of our careers and we will go in and do a very good job." We are successfully placing those people in a work environment.

**Q246 Mr Chaytor:** With that very diverse range of experience, how can the system develop post-qualification training? Presumably the needs of the very experienced social workers are quite different from the needs of the newly qualified social workers. Furthermore, people working for agencies are divorced from the local authorities, where they would do the front-line work. How does the system manage an effective programme of post-qualification training?

**James Brown:** Working through an agency, those social workers can be very closely linked with a local authority. The newly qualified social workers in particular should have access to training opportunities. There are greater opportunities for the permanent work force.

**Q247 Mr Chaytor:** But there is no requirement on them to participate?

**James Brown:** No opportunity for the newly qualifieds to participate?

**Mr Chaytor:** No. I said that, for an agency social worker, there is no requirement on them to participate in the local authority's programme of training.

**James Brown:** Not currently.

**Q248 Mr Chaytor:** Is that a weakness?

**James Brown:** That varies from authority to authority. Some local authorities form very good relationships with ourselves and we work together very successfully, and we can develop people. The long-term objective is that a newly qualified social worker moves from an agency into a permanent situation; we would applaud and encourage that development.

**Q249 Mr Chaytor:** Can I ask Enid a little about the newly qualified social work programme and how it links with agency workers. Indeed, should it link with agency workers?

**Enid Hendry:** It is very promising. I am involved in the advisory group on the newly qualified social worker scheme and I think that the scheme is hugely promising. I think that it will only work if you ensure the right quality of supervision; people have a right to a certain level of supervision. We have had some involvement in training supervisors who are on that first pilot group. They say that, although they love what they are being told in training, it is not real to their world. They take their skills and knowledge and that approach back into their local authority setting, but with all the huge pressures that exist in that setting they find that it is hard to practise what they know to be good practice. So they want to practise in that way, but they do not have the environment in which to do it. Unless we enable people to get really good supervision, the newly qualified social worker programme will not deliver what it is meant to deliver. Also, it will not deliver unless we get proper work load management and time for reflective practice to be built in. That is really hard to achieve, with the pressures that exist in some local authority settings. I think that we must have real clarity about tasks. We need clarity about what a newly qualified social worker should do and should not do on their own, and about what they should do with others. I think that there is a great benefit for newly qualified social workers in shadowing people and working alongside them, rather than doing some of those tasks on their own. We must closely define those tasks to protect social workers in that period. We should ensure that we have an objective assessment of competence before people are allowed to move on. When there is a huge supply problem, there is a tendency to pass people and let them through. However, that is the time at which we must be most rigorous. It is hard for people in agency work to get a planned, phased process to go through that year in a measured way. I do not know how they would fit into a probationary year. You would need a structured development plan, working in partnership with the employers, which would be a challenge.

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**Q250 Mr Chaytor:** So presumably, newly qualified social workers working for agencies are being plunged straight into the deep end and are going on to the front line with minimum opportunity for supervision and no opportunity for work shadowing.

**James Brown:** Yes.

**Enid Hendry:** That is a risk. In places where they are so stretched that they don't have the capacity, that is happening.

**James Brown:** The expectation is too high at the outset and the risk is that errors will be made in practice. In the first year after qualification, you have to be protected and supported. If not, you may come out damaged on the other side.

**Q251 Mr Chaytor:** Enid, what is your assessment of the general quality of post-qualification training and continuing professional development programmes? In particular, should they be better co-ordinated within national standards? Are they too fragmented?

**Enid Hendry:** That is a really difficult question to answer because it is so varied. As an employer, you don't know what you are going to get from different post-qualifying programmes until you have sent a student on them. You then learn whether it has been a good investment. We have had some positive experiences at post-qualifying courses, but some have been disappointing, out of touch with the working reality and not of sufficient quality or depth. I cannot give you a consistent picture, which is a problem for us. Post-qualifying training has gone through a lot of changes and has not been allowed to settle. The post-qualifying award in child care was very valuable, but then the whole system changed. There needs to be some stability, consistency and quality assurance so that we know what we are getting.

**Q252 Chairman:** So where is the third sector in this? You are from the third sector. You should be championing high standards and providing courses. Surely you should be part of the answer, not just asking the questions.

**Enid Hendry:** We are part of the solution. We provide practice placements, develop high-quality programmes and we run a post-qualifying certificate for therapeutic work with Nottingham university.

**Q253 Chairman:** But in your first answer you said that it was all so difficult. It's not that difficult. Any profession must have continuing professional development and most people don't find it that difficult. There may be charlatans, death by PowerPoint and such awful stuff, but there is also good stuff. It isn't a different world, is it? What irritates the Committee is that some of you come to us as though this is a different world and that it is so difficult to train social workers. However, some of us know about the training of teachers and others. There doesn't seem to be a problem for them.

**Enid Hendry:** If I could just clarify, the difficulty I have is in giving any answer that says emphatically that this is the whole picture because the quality is so variable. You cannot give an answer that says it is all good or all bad. It is very patchy.

**Cathy Ashley:** Can I just raise a point about continuing professional development. At the moment, although social workers are required to have X amount of hours' continuing professional development,<sup>1</sup> they could go on any course and it would count towards that. We could learn from the legal profession and others that accredit the courses that qualify for CPD. That would be quite an easy step.

**Q254 Chairman:** Are we all too polite about this, James? On Monday, we talked to a lot of young social workers, who weren't just newly qualified, but were in their 20s and early 30s. They griped most about you and your agency workers because you don't do CPD, do you?

**James Brown:** We do have continuing professional development.

**Q255 Chairman:** Why do they think you don't?

**James Brown:** It's about existing resources. Over the last five years, the marketplace has changed to the point the procurement model for agency social work drives down exactly what the agency can take for what the worker does. That does not leave a great deal, if anything, to fund CPD, but as I said, there are local authorities that work very co-operatively and include agency workers in their programmes, and we can access them.

**Q256 Chairman:** Shouldn't the agencies be doing this themselves? The Committee has been told that there are good agencies and bad agencies—as you would expect, some are better than others. Surely, the onus should be on agencies to make sure that they supply suitably qualified and continuously professionalised workers.

**James Brown:** We can organise continuing professional development, and the Association of Social Work Employment Businesses does do that and puts together a programme. Individual agencies also have their own programmes. We have our own programme. The opportunities are absolutely there.

**Q257 Paul Holmes:** Sue, in the evidence that 11 Million sent to the Committee, you say that there are "low entry requirements for many social work undergraduate programmes and poor expectations of students." Do you want to elaborate on that?

**Sue Berelowitz:** Yes. I am not going to mention any institutions by name, obviously—

**Q258 Chairman:** Why is that? Why is everyone so polite? When we talk to social workers, they say, "Some of us know that this higher education institute is awful. We didn't have a very good experience there." But everyone who gives evidence to the Committee says, "We couldn't possibly name

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<sup>1</sup> *Note by Witness:* Social workers are required to have 90 hours of continuing professional development over 3 years.



names. We can't tell you names of bad local authorities or bad universities." Why are you so polite?

**Sue Berelowitz:** I don't know why I'm so polite. My apologies for being so polite. It is perhaps easier to mention those that are doing well and those that tell me they are taking in just students with As and Bs at A-level because their reputation is so high, and so many people are applying to them, that they can make those choices. But there are others where that is not the case, and which are taking in students with Es. I know from people's submissions—somebody mentioned this today—that there is talk about making sure that the social work force reflects the community at large. However, I really make a plea that we ensure that we are rigorous about who comes into the profession. This is rightly a very demanding profession in terms of people's intellectual capacity to think about what they see, to assess, to analyse and to write good court reports, and that demands academic rigour. I was at a meeting recently, and somebody—she was an assistant director of a local authority up north—said that she was a moderator on a social work course, although she also didn't mention the name of the university concerned. She said that the pass rate for essays and exams was 30%, and that that shows, in terms of the calibre of the people going through the university. That is not the only story like that that I have heard. It is a bit like teaching. Teaching has been through a huge loop. There has been quite a lot of pain, but the net result is that potential applicants are hammering at the doors of teacher training institutions to get in. There is huge competition to get in and then to get into teaching afterwards. The pay at entry level is no higher than it is for social workers. In Brighton, where I live, there are 60 to 70 applicants for every job in the primary phase. We need that kind of situation in social work. That is not about lowering the benchmark. There is a paradox: if the standards are high, the standing of the profession goes up, and that becomes a virtuous circle. We need to get out of the vicious cycle that we are in now.

**Q259 Paul Holmes:** Although you say that the starting pay for a social worker is much the same as that for a teacher, I would have thought that the progression in pay levels is better for teachers than for social workers. I speak as a former teacher who is married to a former social worker.

**Sue Berelowitz:** Absolutely. It is very variable in social work. Some local authorities offer very big golden handshakes. It is difficult to say exactly what the levels are, but the entry level is around £20,000. You can stay on the front line and earn up to about £32,000 by taking on supervisory responsibilities and so on. I think it would be good to have something like the spinal points system that we have in teaching, whereby if you take on additional responsibilities, you get financial recognition but continue to operate on the front line. The equivalent of advanced skills teaching and all those kinds of things would be very beneficial to the profession.

**Q260 Paul Holmes:** Cathy, the Family Rights Group made similar points. You said specifically, for example, that "we are aware from academics that they can be under intense pressure from their institutions to maximise numbers of entrants . . . and not fail students". Do you want to elaborate?

**Cathy Ashley:** Yes. I think that there is also a question of whether students who should be failed are being failed, and the pressure put on for them not to fail and so on. It is partly the funding. It is also true in terms of how difficult it is to fail when it comes to practice assessment. People have to go through a lot of hoops to actually fail a student. I think you could shift the system to make it easier to fail, in a sense. You might then weed out some of those who are unsuitable to be in the profession. I also think that in terms of the question of pay and status, you also need to do it in terms of the gender of who is coming in. One of the pieces of work that we have been doing around fathers is not just about the legal ignorance, often, among social workers about engagement of fathers but also about the fact that a lot of social workers are scared of what they regard as violent men. There is a real problem in terms of the gender profile of the social work profession. We have seen in teaching that actually, the higher the standing, the more likely you are to attract men into the profession.

**Q261 Paul Holmes:** For 2003–04, only 3.2% of social work students actually failed, although about 17% withdrew voluntarily. In teaching, 30% or 40% do not finally enter the profession, but again, many fewer actually fail. Do we need to be failing more people, or do most people drop out because they are not suitable and they recognise that?

**Cathy Ashley:** There is a question about entry points. Looking at the variation—you have done this, I know, in earlier sessions—it is 160 to 498 in terms of social work, whereas the variation in nursing, medicine and teaching is actually much narrower in terms of who gets to the starting block, if you like. But I do think that it is an extremely complex job being a social worker. It is a job in which you are investing the state's responsibility for protecting the most vulnerable children and families, and the standard that we should expect from those going through that should be high. It should be easier to fail students, and there should not be a financial disincentive, in effect, for higher education institutions to fail students who are not up to it, because the people who will suffer, although it is obviously the profession, are, more importantly, the most vulnerable kids.

**Q262 Paul Holmes:** Are people collectively saying that we need the Government to lay down stricter criteria for common entry standards and failure and to intervene rather than leaving it to lots of individual HE institutions?

**Cathy Ashley:** I would go along with that line, yes.

**Q263 Paul Holmes:** Enid, the NSPCC has made lots of similar points. You said in your evidence: "As an employer, we cannot be confident about the abilities

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and knowledge of new social workers”, so you assess each individual and then run your own training courses. Is that not what any good employer should do? Is a school with newly qualified teachers any different?

**Enid Hendry:** No. It is good practice, but we wouldn’t have to do it so thoroughly or in such detail if we had more confidence and people were coming to us better prepared. We are finding significant gaps that need to be addressed. We consistently find that people don’t have the assessment and analytical skills that you would expect people to come off a course with, so we are having to do more of the ground work. We cannot be confident that the foundations are there. Yes, it is reasonable to expect employers to assess individuals and do individual development plans, but the gaps are significant.

**Q264 Paul Holmes:** You talk about analytical skills. What other major gaps are there? You mentioned in the memorandum that you often have to run training courses on communicating with children and therapeutic skills, but surely that ought to be a basic part of any social work degree course.

**Enid Hendry:** People don’t seem to have the skills that we are looking for in the depth of communication with children and young people. They may have done a small introduction to it, but not the depth of theory, and particularly not observing children and knowing about behaviours, developmental norms and what it is reasonable to expect a child to be able to do at a particular age. That detailed knowledge and applying it in practice—not just in a clinical setting but in a family home, where all the things are going on—is the sort of thing that people need a lot more help with.

**James Brown:** There is some doubt as to whether what you were saying are the things it is assumed would be covered in a course, are things that are in fact covered in a course—a lot of the core skills. My personal expectation would be that in three years—you’ve got 1,000 days—you blooming well have got to make sure that everything possible is covered to get you on to the starting block best equipped: communication skills, confidence, public speaking, report writing. All those things have to be covered. Three years is actually a long time. In your apprenticeship, you come through, and then you need protecting for that first year, and for many years afterwards as you grow and develop and stay within the profession.

**Q265 Paul Holmes:** As an agency, how far do you run the in-house training courses, such as for the NSPCC, and how far are you just a clearing house for employment?

**James Brown:** Sadly, it has to be more the latter, because we are restricted by resource—simple.

**Chairman:** Sorry, we have to get a move on, but this is a fascinating area. The Committee would like to know why this 17.5% drop-out rate? Perhaps they counsel that they have not got the right qualities—it is very important. I can remember the thrust of the Robbins report, which was that if you have fairly

large numbers of students your selection processes are not very good. However—David, content of training.

**Q266 Mr Chaytor:** I would like to ask Sue in the first instance. One of the issues over initial training is the point at which specialisation should take place. What is your view on this? Some people think that it should be after year 1, some after year 2. What is your view?

**Sue Berelowitz:** I am aware that there are some strong views. I have said in my submission that I thought it should be in year 2. I didn’t say that because I am fixed on the year in which this ought to commence, but my starting point—which I want to emphasise this morning—is that we need to be clear about what competencies children’s social workers need. When they come out into the field and start, they need a qualified social worker year. That is the starting point. I find that helpful, in the sense of then tracking back and thinking when that should actually start. I don’t mind which year it starts, I just want them to have the competencies. There may well be things, such as analytical skills, report writing and so on, that are common to both children’s and adults’ social workers and that can be part of generic training. Indeed, even things like attachment theory I think should be common to both adults’ and children’s social workers, because adults who are troubled are products of their childhoods. You can only work with them if you understand what happened to them in their childhoods. A lot of things are common, but it is really important that children’s social workers come out of their training with the basic skills—by basic, I don’t mean low level but a sophisticated level of skills—to undertake that work. I have given quite a long list in my submission. I mentioned attachment theory, and I shall say it again—as a children’s social worker, you need a very sophisticated understanding of attachment theory, in order to work with the family as a whole, never mind with the child. I shall say child development too, clearly. When I did my training, I was already a qualified speech and language therapist. The training that I had as a speech and language therapist, in terms of child development, was hugely more extensive than anything that I got on my social work training. If all that I had had was what I got on my social work training—which was a good course—I don’t think it would have given me as much as I required in order to do the job. I was at an advantage, having already trained as a speech and language therapist. It is about looking at what is required, working back from that and then thinking through how we put that into a course, such that all the components are there, and what needs to follow on afterwards, in the newly qualified year and in subsequent post-qualifying training. Those are the questions that really need to be answered.

**Q267 Mr Chaytor:** In view of the enormous variability of the content and structures of initial training, is there a need for greater co-ordination at a national level?

**Sue Berelowitz:** I would say that there is. The reason that I say in my submission that I favour year 2—as does Lord Laming—is simply because in my view there is a lot to be accomplished, and I'm not sure you can do it all in a generic three-year course with a specialisation commencing towards the end. There may be other ways of doing it—for example, by having generic components in years 1 and 2 and the capacity for some specialisation with separate models in year 2 that enable those who know already that they want to be children's social workers to take on the kind of learning that will equip them for the task. There are a number of ways of doing it.

**Q268 Mr Chaytor:** The next question is who should take the lead on this, given the autonomy of individual universities?

**Sue Berelowitz:** One of the things that came up in the evidence given by the Social Work Task Force is that there are a lot of people in the field who have responsibility for regulation and so on.

**Q269 Mr Chaytor:** Too many?

**Sue Berelowitz:** Possibly too many. Certainly there needs to be some clarity—perhaps that could be done through the General Social Care Council, which currently has the responsibility. We need to be absolutely clear about who sets the basic benchmark for what needs to be covered in social work training. There is too much variability. There needs to be a basic benchmark set in terms of standards, and the regulators need to assess against those agreed standards, so that we can be confident that, wherever somebody is trained, they will come out sufficiently competent and will be able to do the job—whatever needs to come afterwards in terms of continuing professional development. We need to have some standards set. If it is a case of the Government setting standards, that would be absolutely fine—although I can see difficulties around that. If I go back to the teaching model, again, there are standards around what is expected of teachers when they come out. There is a good system for assessing the teaching and training institutions to make sure that they are delivering, and there is a very good system for assessing teachers when they are doing their PGCEs to make sure that they are coming up to the mark. We need to learn from that and absorb those lessons into social work training.

**Q270 Mr Chaytor:** Could I ask Enid specifically about child protection. What is your view of the extent to which initial training covers child protection? Is it sufficiently thorough?

**Enid Hendry:** We are often asked to provide input for courses on child protection. That is great; it is part of what we should be helping with. But we are sometimes asked to do half a day. Half a day on child protection in a three-year training programme seems to be grossly inadequate. Obviously, other things relate to child protection, but you cannot cover the knowledge and practical skills that you need in that time—for example, the application of the law, how you engage with families and talk about some of the difficult things, how you probe. There is so much

that you need to cover in that course beyond the basics of what is abuse, how do you recognise it and what do you do about it. That is about all you can get in a half day.

**Q271 Mr Chaytor:** But surely you are not saying that the typical social worker initial training programme only has half a day on child protection. That is just the time you have been invited to give your input.

**Enid Hendry:** On a number of occasions, our experience has been that it is a half day or day that is specifically focused on child protection out of three years.

**Mr Chaytor:** Out of three years?

**Enid Hendry:** Out of three years.

**Q272 Mr Chaytor:** I am looking at other members of the panel to see if that is their understanding as well because that seems quite staggering.

**Sue Berelowitz:** The expectation is too often that that kind of training should come while you are in placement. There is too great a reliance on that. Such training is fine if you are in a good placement with a good practice teacher and, indeed, if you are in a statutory placement. But there are problems if you are in a placement where you have not got a good practice teacher. The reality is that there are good ones and not such good ones, which comes back to the point you were making earlier about how these things should be regulated. If you are not in a placement where you are dealing with child protection or where your practice teacher is dealing with child protection and you can do some shadowing work, you are not going to see very much of it. So the content of courses in terms of child protection is, like everything else, variable, but it can be very light.

**Cathy Ashley:** May I raise one point on how social workers or students are taught relationship work and about identifying abuse and so on. Our concern about specialising too early is that those are skills that adult social workers need as well as child and family social workers. One of our concerns is that often you get parents who have been dealing with adult social services or mental health specialists who have not looked at that adult as a parent and, in effect, not noticed the child in the room at the same time. Our worry about specialising too early is that those are skills that all social workers require, almost regardless of what areas they later specialise in and work through.

**James Brown:** How does a social worker know on day one of their course whether they want to be an adult social worker, a child care social worker or a mental health social worker? They do not really know what social work is. Practice placements, and the opportunities to get them, are absolutely key. The only analogy I can think of is that you get to year three in a teaching course, enter a classroom for the first time and say, "Well, this is not for me." There is an exact parallel in social work. Get in and find out what the job involves, then, in your mind, say, "Right, when I go back to my course, back to my college, these are the things I really need to be listening for: child protection and report writing,"

because you know what you are going to do. I will quote an example from De Montfort university from three or four years ago. All the students were straight out on placement early in the course, found out what the job was about, then went back to their courses, and it was a perfect start. For the ones who begin the actual practice in year three, it is too late. Some get to the end of year three and still have not had a statutory placement.

**Chairman:** James, that leads us right into Fiona's question; we are going to talk about placements, so we will drill down on that.

**Q273 Fiona Mactaggart:** When we spoke to young social workers we had some frank horror stories about inappropriate placements. I think that the social worker who intended to get into child protection was placed in a GP surgery with no social worker attached, and so on. I want to know what we should be recommending, very specifically, to ensure that the right quality of practical experience is inherent in social work training. Placements from the start, you suggest, James. That is perfectly reasonable. I remember that when I taught teachers one of the things we did was send them out a day a week, right at the beginning. But what can we do to make sure that these placements are good? Because clearly, at present, they are frequently appalling; not in every case, but there is a pattern that tolerates inappropriate placements to train future social workers.

**Cathy Ashley:** I think there is a question about the suitability of placements in authorities that are deemed to be failing, and whether the culture of the organisation sometimes reinforces poor practice, so you get students going out with the wrong culture. You want at least one placement in a statutory child protection setting. That would be a strong preference, with a qualified social worker overseeing that.

**Q274 Chairman:** We had an example on Monday of a young man, a social worker, one of whose placements was in a GP surgery.

**Cathy Ashley:** That is clearly ludicrous, but if you are going to ask for what would be ideal, you also have to look at what support and incentives are being given to employers to encourage that, because at the moment it is seen as an onerous extra responsibility, given all the other pressures on child protection departments. You have to shift what you are offering to employers if you are going to expect that.

**Sue Berelowitz:** No social worker should be on a placement with no practice teacher on site. That just seems absolutely basic. There are problems at the moment with the number of placements; people are desperate and they take whatever they get. I think that, in order to qualify, whether in adult services or children's services, there need to be some basic standards. One is that you must do, and pass, a statutory placement. Practice teachers should go through some training themselves; they should get financial recognition for that. They should be able to demonstrate that they have reached a certain

standard so that they know what they are looking for; what work and reading they are setting their students; that they are involved with, and pulled together by, the course; and that they get together with other practice teachers from time to time, so that their professional development is also kept up to speed and feeds into the course.

**Q275 Fiona Mactaggart:** Are you telling me that that is not happening at the moment?

**Sue Berelowitz:** It will not be widespread; I cannot think where it is happening. But that does not mean it is not happening, because I certainly will not know about everything that is happening. It certainly will not be widespread. But I think that those are absolutely basic requirements.

**Chairman:** Enid, you are nodding.

**Enid Hendry:** I agree with those views completely. There was a big investment a few years ago—I have forgotten exactly how many—in raising the standards of practice teachers, so they had to have a qualification, and it became a valued thing to do. Then as the size of the social work programmes increased, and the numbers of people being put through and the length of the placements increased—for good reasons—the demand and the lack of supply meant that standards were eroded dramatically, so our robust investment in good quality has been lost over the past three or four years.

**Q276 Fiona Mactaggart:** What I am hearing is that too many students are recruited who are not intellectually up to the rigours of the job, that there are too many poor-quality placements, and that in those poor-quality placements they are not properly supervised. Is this a strong argument for reducing the number of training places and the number of people who can supervise placements, but insisting on standards and some kind of continuing commitment to the students? Will that produce a better qualified social work work force?

**Enid Hendry:** That makes sense in terms of quality. My hesitation is about supply and whether that will make it more difficult for employers to fill the gaps and to meet the needs of the service users.

**Q277 Chairman:** There is a lack of placements, and you have a system in which something like 50% of the social work staff in some local authorities are from an agency. Are agency people able to supervise a trainee social worker? Is one of the problems that you would not give that sort of role to an agency worker?

**Enid Hendry:** I had not thought about that. I would be worried about continuity and what their previous experience was.

**Chairman:** That is what I mean.

**Enid Hendry:** You would need to know that they were going to be able to see through a placement from start to finish.

**Chairman:** Is that right, James?

**James Brown:** There is no reason why an agency worker could not supervise a practice placement.

**Q278 Chairman:** Enid just said the continuity would not be there. Some local authorities say three months max.

**James Brown:** Yes, there would need to be the tie-in on the contract. But some contracts are quite lengthy and would be able to cover that period.

**Q279 Chairman:** Some of the evidence we have taken says that the high percentage of agency staff is a sign of instability and churn, which surely does not provide the environment for good supervision.

**James Brown:** If you are talking about an individual piece of supervision for a student social worker, you have to take it on a case-by-case basis. If there is a very experienced agency social worker, they are as well equipped as any other, and perhaps better equipped. We have looked at working with universities to match our agency workers to practice placements, and it has actually broken down as an idea.

**Q280 Fiona Mactaggart:** One of the solutions offered—Enid, you said it was promising—was the newly qualified social worker programme, but that is not what we were hearing from newly qualified social workers, frankly. They were not impressed with the kind of thing being rolled out at the moment. The thing I got was that where there were strong team practices with shared direction and leadership in a local authority, the students felt best prepared and most confident, and as practitioners you could see they were going somewhere. It seems to me that we are running down the wrong road. The critical thing is to centre on the working model. It has small teams where the way in which decisions are made and responsibility is shared actually helps the inexperienced member of the team learn in a safe way and take on the things for which they are responsible. That is just not happening in many authorities.

**Sue Berelowitz:** I want to link that to your earlier question, which was terribly important. If I may be impolite, I think the profession is bedevilled by the fact that we had a diploma entry route—it has gone now—into the profession for a long time. There have been very low thresholds, people have come in, and the net result is that those who are practice teachers now—the experienced social workers—have not been required to go through the same academic rigour, the same standards and so on. In relation to your earlier question, we need to stop at some point, have a smaller cohort coming through, and say, “No more.” It is not just about numbers; we really need to raise the standards and the standing. We also need to be quite constrained about how we do that in terms of who comes in before it begins to expand again. I think that that needs very careful

consideration. I link that to your most recent question, because one way of achieving that—the numbers of children requiring support will not disappear at the same time—would be a system in which small teams in locality areas do duty, front-line work, child protection work and so on, while a highly qualified social worker heads them up. Underneath them, you would have a cohort of non-social work qualified people, who might have other kinds of qualifications. The complex assessment work would be done by the social worker, but the ongoing, more enduring work would be done by other people, who are much easier to recruit and who often stay much longer. They will need to be very closely managed by the qualified social worker. You can have a highly qualified social worker, basic qualified social workers and some assistants, so I think there are some models that are worth looking at.

**Q281 Chairman:** It is very interesting that you seem to be moving social work further and further away from the pattern that is developing in teaching, which is going for a more diverse, out-of-teaching experienced work force with more entry points into the profession. What you have just described is a highly academic route that is about getting more out of the highly academic, but you started off by saying that you need more than just academic qualifications to be a damned good social worker.

**Sue Berelowitz:** You have to have both. Those things are not mutually exclusive; you must have a psychological, emotional and relational capacity to do the work, as well as an academic capacity. I think we have gone too far the other way in a desperate attempt to get more and more people into the profession. The emphasis has been too much on people's life experiences, which are very important, but they should not be to the exclusion of people's cognitive and intellectual capacity to do what is intellectually a very demanding job. The parallel that I would draw with teaching is that there are now more teaching assistants in classrooms. A combination of assistants plus social workers may enable the profession to get to a point—there needs to be a cut-off somewhere—where it has a sufficient number of the right people coming in, while still being able to do work in the intervening period.

**Chairman:** I have to call an end to the questions, because we have another session. We could go on for much longer, because your evidence has been first rate. Will you remain in contact with the Committee. If there are things that you should have told us, or that we should have asked you, please let us know. James, Enid, Cathy and Sue, it has been an excellent session. I had to drive it through, which was unfair to my colleagues and to you, but that is my job.

**Supplementary memorandum submitted by the NSPCC**  
**YOUNG PEOPLE'S VIEWS ON SOCIAL WORKERS**

**INTRODUCTION**

The NSPCC's submission to the Inquiry into the training of social workers reflected the knowledge and experience of our staff and our practice base. As an additional contribution, we agreed with the Clerk to the Committee to undertake a very brief consultation with some of the children and young people involved either with our services or with other parts of the NSPCC. Their views are presented here. They are not representative of all children and young people, but they do offer an important insight into the key qualities and skills that social workers need if they are to be able to work credibly and effectively with children and young people.

**METHOD**

We have a number of young people who are involved in groups or who we contact by email or text to seek their views on a range of issues. We asked these young people some open ended questions using email/text and face to face meetings. We have collated their responses under each question. The quotes have not been edited, in order to preserve the voice of the young people. The young people who responded varied in age from 15 to 18, some with experience of the care system and others without this experience. The young people came from a range of backgrounds including African and Asian communities.

*What makes a good social worker?*

"A good social worker is someone that listens. They need to understand that sometimes young people find it difficult, and have to accept that sometimes things are said, and people behave in different ways because of how they are feeling. So if swear and get a bit pissy and leave the room it's because I'm stressed and that's my way of dealing with what's going on around me, so don't tell me off about it, let me deal with it in my way. A good social worker is someone that doesn't just say what you wanna hear or pretend they know how you feel when they don't because that more than anything annoys young people, well from what I know anyway . . . it's something that irritates me". (Female, 18, left care)

"The ones that are polite in the first three seconds of seeing them. The ones that help and try to understand and listen. People that achieve goals and make something happen". (Female, 15, in care)

"Is someone that is easy to talk to and approachable. They have to look happy and be positive". (Female, 17, not in care)

"I think a good social worker . . . needs to be interested in young people and not just the case and focused on the young person". (Female, 17, in care)

"I think a good social worker should be honest, reliable and someone who you can trust and keeps things confidential". (male, 17, in care)

"I think a good social worker is understanding and never patronising, they must be sympathetic. They must always encourage". (Female 17, not in care)

"I think a good social worker can listen and understand situations. They must act professionally but also considerately. They must be prompt and alert to domestic situations; neglect of these fundamentals means neglect of fulfilling their role". (Female, 16-year-old, not in care)

*What skills/qualities/experience should social workers have?*

"I don't think that there are any certain qualities or skills social workers should have as such, because sometimes no amount of training can help them deal with some of the things they come up against. They just need to be genuine and a good listener". (Female, 18, left care)

"Just help out and be there and someone who had good communication and working with people. Manners". (Female, 15, in care)

"Good people skills, communication with all ages, honesty, respect". (Female, 17, not in care)

"Social workers most of the time need to be as excited and loud as a child or young person. Young people like people who don't seem afraid or anxious when talking to them". (Female 17, not in care)

"Social workers should have: consideration, adequate training, sufficient awareness to address situations, sensitivity, confidence to propose their findings on situations, calm and collected to deal with a range of people". (16-year-old, Asian girl, not in care)

"Social workers should have experience with young people in general ie primary school work, youth clubs, those with different experiences and working with different social backgrounds and ages. Having a social worker qualification does not mean you can or have the experience to work with young people". (Female, 17, not in care)

"Social Workers should be good at their jobs and not just brand new to the job". (Male, 17, not in care)

*What are the bad things about social workers?*

"I think the bad things about social workers are quite a few of them fail to understand what it is like to be a young person in this era. They easily become parents and start lecturing young people". (Female, 17, not in care)

"I think the bad things about social workers are their portrayal in the media. They are stereotyped as intervening but these views are clearly due to ignorance of their roles. In some circumstances situations are overlooked and these negatives are what society focus on". (Female 16-year-old, not in care)

"I think the bad things about social workers are too concerned with paper work and regulations. The bare minimum is acceptable to social workers ie if need to do two visits a year that is all they do". (Female, 17, in care)

"A lot of the time young people are made to feel as if there [sic] not important or as if there not being listened to. I know that social workers have a lot of young people to deal with and I understand that but I think they forget that the young people also have a lot to deal with and it's a lot more stressful for them because they are actually in the situation rather than seeing it from an outside point of view, and I think that social workers need to take a step back sometimes and think about how others are feeling and not about themselves". (Female, 18, left care)

"A bit intimidating and rude. Think they are better than you". (Female, 15, in care)

"Negative, dishonesty, disrespectful and aggressive". (Female, 17, not in care)

"Keeping things private. Some social workers seem like they can't be bothered and view their role just as a "job" rather than really wanting to help people". (Male, 17, in care)

*Do you have a view on the age of social workers?*

"I personally don't think age matters because any one can be a good listener. I just think it all comes down to the person themselves rather than how old they are". (Female, 18, left care)

"Young ones seem to understand more and be more appropriate whereas 50+ are arrogant". (Female, 15, in care)

"That they can be of any age with the right communication skills and approach". (Female, 17, not in care)

"Most of the time the age of a social worker is irrelevant as long as they can relate and understand the youth that they work with, but I do think it helps to have young social workers because young people respond better to people more like them". (Female 17, African, not in care)

"My view about the age of social workers is I am unaware of it". (16-year-old girl not in care)

"My view about the age of social workers is. . . It is not about age it is to do with experience". (Female, 17, in care)

"Social Workers should not be too young. They need to have experience and this comes with age". (Male, 17, in care)

*Anything else you would like to add?*

"My advocate always understood that I needed to let off steam, shout and scream about stuff first, then I could deal with what the social worker needed me to do. But the social worker could never understand that; they would refuse to talk to me and say I couldn't behave like that and I was in the wrong. They took it personally and I wasn't always angry at them; it was the situation and the system that made me mad. But they would just take it personally". (Female, 18, left care)

"Their [sic] always try to hurry and rush people with the conversation. Not really listen to what you have to say". (Female, 15, in care)

"Different ages of children and young people need a different approach and communication". (Female, 17, not in care)

"There needs to be a BIG change in the way social workers are changed and the way social workers think". (Female, 17, in care)

"They should not be pushy.

They should have enough time to listen and solve problems.

They should be young and you should be able to trust them and tell them stuff.

They need to know what you're going through.

You should be able to talk to them in confidence.

They need to know how you feel.

They might have been through the same and know what to do.

They need to understand you". (Male, 14, experience of care system)

“We want:  
 Someone who is attentive.  
 Someone who doesn’t rush us.  
 Someone who helps us find the best way forward.  
 Someone who listens to how we want things done.  
 Someone who is real and doesn’t act like they know how we feel, when they don’t.  
 Someone who keeps things confidential where necessary.  
 Someone who isn’t pushy.  
 Someone who speaks clearly”. (Female, 12, experience of care system)

“It can be upsetting if you have a worker who comes and goes because they are training and you have to keep repeating your life from the past loads of times. Trust is important and their manner. What you say should stay with them and should not get told to anyone else”. (Female, 15, past experience of social service involvement)

Trust, should be understanding and professional, need to know it is safe to talk and they won’t blurt everything out. If there is something serious, they will do something. (Female, 17, no experience of care system or social services)

*June 2009*

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### **Supplementary memorandum submitted by James Brown, Managing Director, Social Work 2000**

I found the experience very interesting and sensed that there was a keenness from the Children, Schools and Families Committee to hear more about the part that social work agencies play in Children’s Services. Having sat through the following session with Baroness Morgan I heard a continuing theme. This week I attended a Public Policy Exchange session looking at Recruitment and Retention in Children’s Services. There I heard some very negative views about the role of agencies.

Hence, the committee may be interested in the perspective of one agency.

#### **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE AGENCY WORK FORCE**

Agencies play a very large part in the recruitment and retention of social workers in the market place. Our own agency alone supply a significant proportion of the social work force in 5 local authorities and one Primary Care Trust. They would be left with serious shortages if we no longer supplied. There is a great deal of appreciation of the service provided and the organisations work well together.

#### **JUST A SHORT FIX?**

The temporary work force can provide a focused and effective solution to specific needs of organisations providing children’s services. The service is considerably more than a “clearing house” and at it’s best involves skillful matching between locums and the needs of the organisation.

#### **CONTINUITY**

There is evidently a view that the temporary workforce can lead to a lack of continuity in service to children. This is not always the case. Locums can undertake extensive pieces of work over more than short periods of time. Our very skilled workers have strong values and professional skills and will see their work through to conclusion. We have evidence of permanent staff starting and finishing periods of employment in shorter periods of time than a locum.

#### **DOING IT FOR THE MONEY**

I did hear a view suggesting that Newly Qualified Social Workers leave permanent work after gaining some experience because the rewards are greater with agencies. There does need to be some real like with like comparisons. The locum may achieve what appears to be a higher net pay in the short term. However, when balanced with the value of sick pay and pensions the gap may not be as great as imagined. The locums also place themselves at considerable risk in terms of job security, effectively placing themselves on 24 hour notice.

#### **TRAINING**

My ASWEB colleagues felt that I significantly understated the level of input from some agencies into training post qualifying.



## SAFE RECRUITMENT

The expertise of the best Social Work agencies in Safe Recruitment practices must not be underestimated. They apply the highest standards in vetting and selecting social workers and should have an opportunity to contribute to national standards.

## CENTRALISED PAY FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

Very close to my heart. Up to the late 1980s there was a very clear set of pay scales for social workers which left every single social worker in the country in no doubt as to what they would earn according to their level of experience. Progression from Level 1 to Level 2 to Level 3 and on to Senior Practitioner and management did not leave a great deal for manoeuvre for employers. It also ensured safe development and career progression for practitioners. The abolition of centralised pay has blown the market wide open. It has possibly led to the proliferation of agencies. It must be said that many very inexperienced social workers demand and command an income far in excess of their ability. As an agency we are powerless to prevent this as it is fuelled by demand from hiring managers.

*What type of induction or support do newly-qualified social workers get if they come to work for an agency?*

In some agencies there is a considerable level of support as we help them pick their way through a difficult job market. Induction varies from employer to employer but where it is good it leads to best performance. There can be restricted access to developmental opportunities.

*How is post-qualification training managed and funded when someone might be moving around to different employers?*

Access to funding is very definitely restricted. All agencies now operate on very restricted margins which make it difficult to invest in development.

*Is there a problem with lack of continuity in professional supervision for agency social workers?*

Yes.

July 2009

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**Joint Letter from the Rt Hon Ed Balls MP, Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families and the Rt Hon Alan Johnson MP, Secretary of State for Health**

Social workers are critical to the nation. They are key figures in the lives of the most vulnerable people in this country and they need to be excellent in their practice. We are committed to making sure that social worker training equips professionals with the skills, knowledge and experience they need to practise to the highest professional standard.

The training of social workers is of extremely high priority to both of us and we welcome the Select Committee's inquiry into this issue. Last year the Secretaries of State for Children, Schools and Families and for Health jointly established a Social Work Task Force, chaired by Moira Gibb CBE, to conduct a "nuts and bolts" review of social work, including consideration of training. It is of vital importance that the training of social workers is effective. We have asked the Task Force to think widely about what change is necessary in the system and are prepared to consider radical reforms of the social work education system if that is what the Task Force recommend.

The Task Force has been very active in gathering evidence over the past few months. Its first report on 5 May highlighted a number of concerns in relation to social worker training, including the extent to which the degree prepares social workers for practice. Similar concerns were also raised by Lord Laming in his recent progress report on the protection of children in England.

As a measure of our commitment to reform of the social work system, Ed Balls announced a new £58 million Social Work Transformation Fund on 6 May to increase the capacity of the system to train and support social workers and implement change in the immediate term. This fund brings Government investment in the children and families' social work workforce to just over £130 million between 2008–09 and 2010–11. It will support a number of activities including:

- the expansion of the Newly Qualified Social Workers programme to be available to all new children and families' social workers in statutory children and families' services and the third sector from this September;
- an additional 200 places on the Graduate Recruitment Scheme from this September;
- a Return to Social Work Scheme to support former social workers to move back more easily into the profession;
- the Advanced Social Work Professional status which will create senior practice-focused roles for excellent and experienced social workers in local authority children and families' services;

- introducing a practice-focussed Masters for qualified social workers, to be piloted from 2011, and
- Additional support for frontline managers to help them develop their leadership, management and supervision skills from this autumn.

Attached as an annex to this letter is a short paper that provides information about Government's current interaction with social worker training ahead of the Task Force's recommendations later this year.

The Select Committee's Inquiry into social worker training is timely and will provide a welcome contribution to the work of the Task Force. We will be pleased to support the work of the Select Committee and await its recommendations with interest.

**Joint memorandum submitted by the Department for Children,  
Schools and Families and the Department of Health**

**SUMMARY**

- The Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department of Health share responsibility for policy relating to social work. Both departments are committed to ensuring that social workers receive the support and development they need to practise at the highest standard.<sup>1</sup>
- DCSF is investing nearly £131 million between 2008–09 and 2010–11 in supporting the children's workforce—this includes the £73 million announced last year and the £58 million Social Work Transformation Fund announced on 6 May. This overall funding pot will be used to support commitments from *The Children's Plan* and *The Protection of Children in England: Action Plan*.
- There are 78,635<sup>2</sup> registered social workers who work in various care settings encompassing services for children, older people, mental health and people with disabilities. Prior to 2003, the Department of Health (DH) was responsible for social care policy for both adults' and children's services. In 2003 responsibility for children and families' social care transferred to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF, formally DfES) as part of the Machinery of Government changes to bring together policy on children under *Every Child Matters*.
- Whilst the introduction of the degree has brought about a number of improvements in the training of social workers,<sup>3</sup> Government has recognised that more must be done to prepare social workers for practice.
- Last year, DCSF and DH officials carried out a number of joint visits to talk to students, social workers, employers and academics to get their views on social worker initial training. Whilst most participants believed that the establishment of the degree had been a very positive step forward, it was generally felt that further improvement in the training of social workers was needed. This work fed into the development of the 2020 Children and Young Persons' Workforce Strategy and the establishment of the Social Work Task Force.
- The Task Force has been asked to consider social work practice and from that make recommendations to Government not only on the training of social workers but also on other key issues such as leadership, recruitment, supply and role. In doing so, they will build on Lord Laming's recent report on the protection of children in England. The Task Force made its first report on 6 May and will make its final report in the autumn. The Government will consider radical reforms of the social work education system if that is what the Task Force recommend.
- In light of this ongoing work, this submission of evidence to the Select Committee describes the current training system and intermediate work being undertaken to support the training and development of social workers.

**ENTRY ROUTES TO THE PROFESSION**

1. One of the aims in introducing the social work degree and bursary was to encourage higher numbers of people to train to be social workers. This aim has successfully been met. The numbers of social work students beginning training have remained steady since 2006 and represent around a 37% increase in student numbers compared with five years ago. In 2007–08, 5,221 students were enrolled on the social work degree course. 2,669 students graduated from the degree courses in summer 2007. Whilst numbers training on courses are high, not all go on to practise as social workers and a key challenge for the government will be to increase the number of social work students going on to practise.

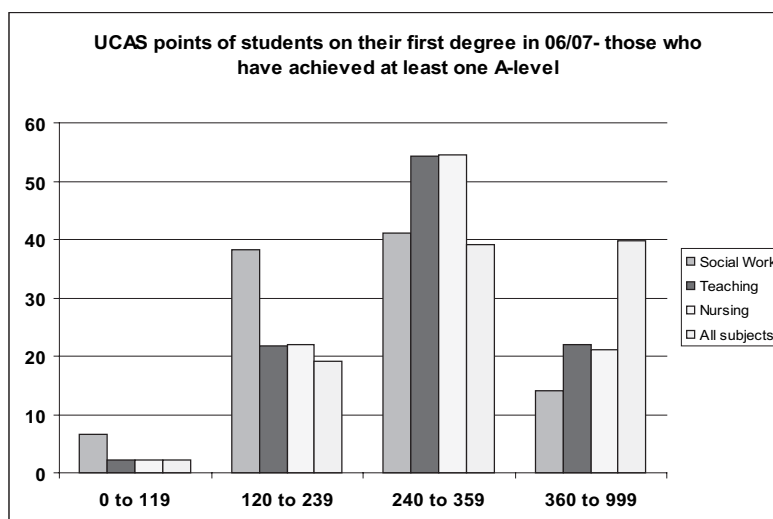
2. Whilst the increase in student numbers is positive, the serious and complex nature of social work means that attracting high numbers into training is not enough. The profession must attract people with the ability to become excellent social workers. The system already produces many excellent social workers, however, as a recent analysis of the UCAS points of social work, teaching and nursing undergraduate students shows,

<sup>1</sup> Key documents which set out the Government's commitment include *The Protection of Children in England: An Action Plan* (DCSF May 2009), *2020 Children & Young Person's Workforce Strategy* (DCSF Dec 2008); *Working to Put People First: The Strategy for the Adult Social Care Workforce in England* (DH April 2009) and *Building Brighter Futures: Next Steps for the Children's Workforce* (April 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Source: General Social Care Council.

<sup>3</sup> Source: Evaluation of the Social Work Degree (DH, 2008).

social work is attracting fewer students with high academic ability than other similar professions. Effective social workers need not only good academic ability but also must have a range of other skills, including interpersonal skills. However this analysis does suggest that the profession is not currently attracting high academic performers in the way that similar professions do.



Source: 2020 Children and Young Persons' Workforce Strategy: the Evidence Base<sup>4</sup>

3. This funding is being used in a number of ways to support the workforce; one of these is introducing greater flexibility to social work training, with a particular emphasis on attracting mature career changers. DCSF has introduced a Graduate Recruitment Scheme which sponsors graduates with a minimum of a 2:1 first degree to undertake the social work Masters route into the profession. A further 200 places on this scheme for September 2009 were announced on 6 May. In the Children's Plan, DCSF also committed to a work-based fast track entry route into children and families' social work and CWDC is currently developing proposals for how this may be delivered.

4. DCSF is introducing a number of measures to increase retention in the workforce, and these will also help make the career a more attractive prospect for potential students. Last year DCSF asked CWDC to introduce a career framework for children and families' social workers. CWDC launched the first stage of this, the Newly Qualified Social Worker status, in September 2008 and later this year will launch further stages of the framework; Early Professional Development for those in their second and third years' of practice and Advanced Social Work Professional status which will offer credible senior frontline roles for experienced social workers to enable them to stay in frontline practice.

5. In recruiting to the profession, the public standing of social workers must also be considered. Many people will never come into contact with a social worker in a professional capacity and this feeds into a general lack of public understanding about the role. Misconceptions and stereotypes about social workers easily take root. The Government wants social work to be a profession that has the confidence and respect of the public. To bring this about, a better understanding of the various and important roles played by social workers in our society must be fostered. In the Children's Plan, DCSF committed to launching a social work marketing campaign to attract high calibre recruits to the profession and to address perceptions of social work as a career; this will launch later this year.

#### THE STRUCTURE, CONTENT AND QUALITY OF INITIAL TRAINING

6. The Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department of Health work jointly on issues relating to the social care workforce. Social work training at both degree and post-qualifying levels continues to be jointly managed by both departments, working closely with the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS).

7. The Care Standards Act 2000 introduced greater regulation of the social work profession through the establishment of the General Social Care Council (GSCC). To practise as a social worker, professionals must register with the GSCC and in doing so must demonstrate that they have achieved an appropriate social work qualification and have appropriate post registration, training and learning.

8. In 2003, the three-year degree level qualification in social work replaced the two-year diploma (DipSW) course as the main entry route into the profession in recognition.

<sup>4</sup> Available here: <http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DCSF-01054-2008&>

9. In 2008–09, the Government invested £90 million in social work initial training including over £60 million in financial support to social work students undertaking the social work degree. This is projected to increase to around £100 million in 2009–10. Funding for degree courses is distributed to Higher Education Institutions by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

10. Under the current bursary system (established in 2002), social work students are able to apply for a non-income assessed bursary whilst they train. The NHS Business Services Authority (NHS BSA) administers the social work bursary and the total amount of funding given out through the bursary each year is dependent on the number of eligible students rather than a pre-defined overall funding pot. Therefore the amount invested by government in social work bursaries increases or decreases in line with student numbers.

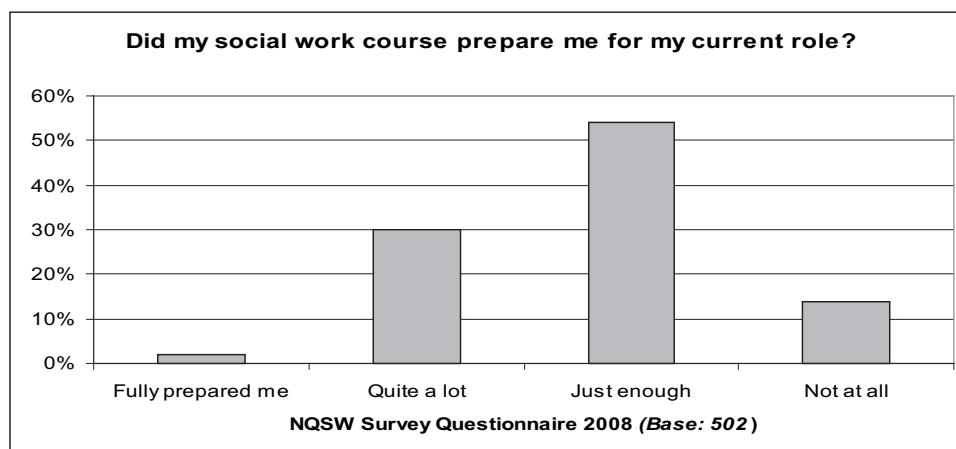
11. The amount each student receives is dependant on where they study and whether they are studying full-time or part-time. For undergraduate students, the amount of the basic grant is also dependant on whether they are subject to variable tuition fees. Postgraduate students may also apply for additional income assessed elements.

The number of bursary applications received and students funded is set out below:<sup>5</sup>

	2007–08 Academic Year		2008–09 Academic Year	
	<i>Apps Received</i>	<i>Students Funded</i>	<i>Apps Received</i>	<i>Students Funded</i>
Postgraduate	2,484	2,427	2,734	2,660
Undergraduate	9,546	9,305	10,134	9,848
Totals	12,030	11,732	12,868	12,508

12. The DH evaluation of the first five years of the social work degree which was published last year reported a number of positive improvements brought about by the social work degree, including an increase in student numbers and in the diversity of applicants.<sup>6</sup> However in other areas, the evaluation found that further improvement was needed.

13. Social worker training is currently generic in nature, enabling students to learn about social work with both adults' and children. Whilst it is generally agreed that no course could ever fully prepare social work students for practice, newly qualified social workers and their employers, particularly in the children and families' sector, have raised concerns about whether the degree goes as far as it could do in preparing students for practice.



Source: A report on consultations with newly qualified social workers, employers and those in higher education—Jan 2009, (CWDC 2009)

14. One of the requirements of the degree is that students must successfully achieve 200 days of assessed practice. The Requirements for Social Work Training (DH, 2002) in accordance with the Care Standards Act (DH, 2000) stipulate that in order to achieve the social work qualification, students must undertake 200 days of assessed practice in two different settings, one of which should include a substantial amount of statutory social work.

15. These practice placements are an important aspect of initial training as they help students start to translate theory into practice. However concerns have been raised with Government about the quality and quantity of placements, particularly in the statutory sector. The Social Work Development Partnership, established by DH and DCSF in 2008, is responsible for the development of appropriate, high quality

<sup>5</sup> Source: Department of Health statistics.

<sup>6</sup> Source: Evaluation of the Social Work Degree (DH, 2008).

practice education and continuing professional development opportunities for social workers. The primary focus on the work to date has been on developing quality measures for practice placements and developing additional capacity, particularly in the statutory sector. In addition to developing learning outcomes and supporting access to programmes for those who assess and manage practice placements. The Partnership has also been working on improving workforce data to support effective workforce modelling and planning so that demand for social work placements is linked to the supply needs of employers rather than HEI numbers. A separate submission to the Select Committee will be made from the Social Work Development Partnership Board.

16. In his recent progress report, Lord Laming noted the advance in social worker training brought about by the introduction of the degree. However he reported a number of concerns in relation to the quality, content and inspection of the degree. In particular he highlighted issues in relation to the lack of opportunity to specialise in children's social work during training. It is currently possible to start as a new children's social worker without any experience of child protection work because of a lack of statutory children's social work placements. Lord Laming recommended a number of reforms to social worker training, including:

- improving the quality and consistency of social work degrees;
- introducing opportunity for specialising in children's social work during the degree, and
- underpinning this with a comprehensive inspection regime.

17. All the recommendations made by Lord Laming in his progress report have been accepted. The Social Work Task Force has been asked to consider Lord Laming's recommendations on training as part of its comprehensive review of social work.

#### SUPPLY OF INITIAL TRAINING

18. The GSCC accredits HEIs to deliver the social work degree and inspects the quality of social work education against requirements agreed by Government.<sup>7</sup> In its latest report on Social Work Education in England (published in February 2009), the GSCC reported that there are 231 approved social work degree courses delivered by 71 universities and nine associated higher education institutions.<sup>8</sup>

19. Lord Laming has recommended that the Social Work Task Force should develop the basis for a national children's social worker supply strategy that will address recruitment and retention difficulties. The Government has accepted all of Lord Laming's recommendations and this will form a critical part of its comprehensive reform programme to be set out in the autumn.

20. In the immediate term, the Government is already taking a number of actions to address recruitment and supply challenges in the workforce, including:

- a national marketing and recruitment campaign to launch later this year;
- The Return to Social Work Scheme to support former social workers back into the profession;
- The Graduate Recruitment Scheme to sponsor high quality graduates to undertake social worker training, and
- recruitment and retention pilots in two regions with high vacancy and turnover rates.

#### POST QUALIFYING TRAINING AND CAREER PATHS

21. No matter the stage of career, continually seeking to further knowledge, skills and expertise is a critical function of being a social worker. Social workers are required to keep their skills and knowledge up-to-date and evidencing ongoing development is a requirement for their continued registration with the GSCC. Registration requirements state that *"every social worker registered with the GSCC shall, within the period of registration, complete either 90 hours or 15 days of study, training, courses, seminars, reading, teaching or other activities which could reasonably be expected to advance the social worker's professional development, or contribute to the development of the profession as a whole"*.<sup>9</sup>

22. GSCC is also responsible for the Post-Qualifying Framework for social work and in September 2007 launched the new PQ arrangements; the revised framework is divided into three specialist levels (Specialist Social Work, Higher Specialist Social Work and Advanced Social Work). To support access to training and development by the children and families' social care workforce access to training and development, including PQ, Government is investing £18 million through the Children's Social Care Workforce elements of the Area Based Grant in each of the financial years between 2008–09 and 2010–11. The Social Work Development Partnership are also responsible for the development and support of regional employer led networks to ensure employers are able to access the number and types of PQ programmes they require.

<sup>7</sup> Source: Social Work Degree Requirements (DH 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Source: Report available here:

[www.gsc.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/B5C9C1BA-B566-4103-8229-FBDB6032ECCF/0/SWEQAR\\_Assurance\\_doc\\_v03.pdf](http://www.gsc.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/B5C9C1BA-B566-4103-8229-FBDB6032ECCF/0/SWEQAR_Assurance_doc_v03.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Source: General Social Care Council.

23. The career framework in development at CWDC for children's social workers will provide greater focus on training and development needs and set out expected standard of practice at various career points. DCSF has also asked CWDC to provide training and support for frontline and middle social worker managers to particularly concentrate on management, leadership and supervision skills. On 12 March, the Secretary of State also announced that over time, social work should become a Masters-level profession and a practice-focused Masters for qualified social workers will be piloted from 2011.

24. It is important that social workers at all stages of their career receive the support and development they need but the transition between training and practice is an especially important time in the career of a social worker. The GSCC Code of Practice for Employers sets out the expectation that social workers should be properly inducted into the profession.<sup>10</sup> Where proper and supportive induction does not occur, new social workers are often left feeling vulnerable and overwhelmed. In consultations undertaken to help develop its NQSW programme, CWDC found that one in six of the newly qualified children's social workers who took part in their online survey felt that their training needs were rarely or never met. In the same survey, whilst two thirds of participating newly qualified children's social workers reported that they wished to carry on in the profession, 10% of respondents said that they were considering alternative career options.<sup>11</sup>

25. In order to tackle issues relating to variable induction of social workers into the profession, Government has introduced NQSW programmes for the adults' and children's sectors.

26. The pilot NQSW programme for children and families' social workers, delivered by CWDC, launched in September 2008 and is currently providing support to the first cohort of around 1,000 newly qualified social workers. The main objective of the programme is to provide a bridge from initial training to confident and competent practice that is based on a firm foundation of skills and knowledge. Participating NQSWs receive additional support and development, and work towards achieving 'outcome statements' which set out clear expectations of the level of practice that new social workers should be operating at by the end of their first year. This programme also offers 10% protected time for training and development purposes as well as regular and effective supervision.<sup>12</sup>

27. Lord Laming considered the issue of transition from training to practice in his report. He stated that, *"social workers must have guaranteed support and supervision during their first year to enable them to develop their skills and their confidence as a professional in a relatively safe leaning environment whilst still having exposure to children in complex and difficult circumstances."*<sup>13</sup> DCSF agreed and in response to Lord Laming's report announced the further roll-out of the Newly Qualified Social Worker pilot programme to cover all new children's social workers in statutory and voluntary settings from September 2009.

28. DH recently announced its NQSW programme for adults' social workers. Skills for Care was commissioned by DH to develop a Framework for Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSW) in adult social care, together with key partner organisations. This Framework is an important part of the transformation agenda, ensuring that social workers working in adults' services are able to deliver on *Putting People First*, creating career pathways and routes for skills development. The Framework is employer-led and will have a suite of tools to enable NQSWs to have the firm start they need in their careers to set the foundations for their professional careers longer term.<sup>14</sup> 1,149 NQSWs and their supervisors in 116 employers have stated their intent to be part of the programme.

29. Both NQSW programmes will be fully evaluated in order to understand their impact and effectiveness.

#### SOCIAL WORK TASK FORCE

30. In December 2009, the DCSF published the 2020 Children and Young Person's Workforce Strategy. This identified social work as a profession in need of substantial further reform and led to the establishment of the Social Work Task Force, set up jointly by the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families and the Secretary of State for Health. The Taskforce has been asked to conduct a "nuts and bolts" review of the social work profession and will report back to both Secretaries of State this autumn.

31. The Taskforce will be looking at a number of issues faced by the profession, including those which the Children, Schools and Families Select Committee will be analysing through their inquiry. The Task Force will be submitting its own paper as part of the Committee's call for written evidence.

May 2009

<sup>10</sup> Following Lord Laming's recent report, the Government is working with GSCC to review the Code of Practice for employers with a view to putting it on a statutory footing.

<sup>11</sup> Source: A report on consultations with newly qualified social workers, employers and those in higher education—January 2009, (CWDC 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Further information on the children & families' NQSW pilot programme can be found here: <http://www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/nqsw>

<sup>13</sup> *The Protection of Children in England: A Progress Report* (The Lord Laming, March 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Further information on the adults' NQSW programme can be found here: <http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/socialwork/NewlyQualifiedSocialWorker/NewlyQualifiedSocialWorker.aspx>

*Witnesses:* **Baroness Morgan of Drefelin**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Children, Young People and Families), **Marcus Bell**, Acting Director of Workforce Strategy, and **Andrew Sargent**, Deputy Director of Child Protection Policy, Department for Children, Schools and Families, gave evidence.

**Chairman:** Minister, what a pleasure it is to have you back in the Committee.

**Baroness Morgan:** Thank you.

**Q282 Chairman:** I was saying that the last time you gave evidence, you had just taken over your job, and it was really unfair to have you plunged into the Committee. We were coming to the end of a report, and we knew a hell of a lot about the subject and you had been in office for just three days. We have watched your progress with interest, and we are looking forward to a very good session on this particular subject today. I welcome Marcus Bell and Andrew Sargent as well. We will get started, but, as always, we will give the Minister a chance to open the discussion or, if she would prefer, we can go straight to the questions.

**Baroness Morgan:** I will say a few words. I do not think that I will ever forget my last appearance in front of you, Chairman; it was a great experience. It was a very good learning curve for me and I was very grateful for the opportunity. I am very pleased to be in front of you again to talk about social worker training.

**Chairman:** I am glad to have such consistency. From being a first Minister, you are now the only consistent Minister—apart from the Secretary of State.

**Baroness Morgan:** Well, yes. I have some great new colleagues to work with. I should like to start by putting it on the record that social workers are one of this country's most important resources and that their work makes a real difference to the lives of some of the most vulnerable people in our society. Equipping them with the knowledge, skills and experience that they need is essential to ensure positive outcomes for children and adults in vulnerable circumstances. Social work training is a highly important matter across Government, in particular for us in the Department for Children, Schools and Families but also for the Department of Health and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. We are all working closely together right now. There are some very important and positive things to say about the work that has been going on over the past few years on the training of social workers. The introduction of the social work degree and the associated bursary have reversed the downward trend in applications for social work training to the extent that now the numbers of entrants are around 40% higher than they were five years ago, which is important. Also, we have established the General Social Care Council as the regulatory body for social work. The introduction of the protected title of social work in 2005 and the remitting of work force delivery organisations have meant that the supporting infrastructure for social work is getting stronger. It is certainly stronger now than it was previously. The social work partnership board, which was established last year to work with higher education and employers to improve the supply and quality of practice placements for social work students, has

also been important. As you know, Chairman, in the last 12 months, work to smooth the transition from training to practice through programmes of induction for newly qualified social workers in both children and adult settings has begun. You will be aware that the Government recently announced that the initiative would be extended from September to include all new children and family social workers and all those who can benefit from it in the statutory and third sectors. All those are good news for the profession and the people it serves, but there is obviously an awful lot more to do, and I hope, Chairman, that you do not detect any hint of complacency in what I am saying about the challenge that we face. In the joint submission of evidence from the DCSF and the Department of Health, the Committee will have seen that we are aware of the concerns in the system about the quality of entrants to social work training, the relevance of training to practice, challenges in securing appropriate practice placements and the preparedness of newly qualified social workers for the task that they face. I also recognise that there is a need to ensure that there is appropriate support and professional development throughout a social worker's career if standards are to continue improving and skills are to be retained in the profession. That is essential. With that in mind, when the Secretaries of State for Children, Schools and Families and for Health jointly established a Social Work Task Force last year, they asked Moira Gibb, who I know you have seen, to chair it and to conduct what we have termed a "nuts and bolts" review of social work, which will expressly include consideration of current training arrangements. The task force has been asked to think widely about what change is necessary in the system, and I can assure you that the Government are prepared to consider radical reforms of social work education if that is what the task force recommends in October. In the meantime, of course, there are things that we can do to address the immediate challenges. I could go through those, but I have a sense, Chairman, that you might want to press on.

**Q283 Chairman:** Let us drill down and see how we go. Rather than going on to a list, I would prefer it if we could halt there. You can come back to this under questioning.

**Baroness Morgan:** May I just finish by saying one little thing about funding? We have made strong funding commitments. We recently announced a £58 million social work transformation fund, which brings our total DCSF investment in work force development initiatives to £130 million over the current spending period. We are working hard to make sure that every penny of that investment is put to good effect, is spent in consultation with the profession and supports whatever might come out of the Social Work Task Force. Those are my words of introduction, and I am happy to drill down.

**Q284 Chairman:** Thank you very much for that introduction, which has warmed us all up. There has been a lot of activity, but there seems to be more activity than delivery. There is quite a lot of discontent out there, judging by the oral and written evidence that we have taken. The need for change has been recognised, but it has been rather slow in coming if you look at things holistically. Do you think that all the things that you have mentioned this morning, including the task force, will sort it?

**Baroness Morgan:** It might appear complacent if I said that the Social Work Task Force would sort it. Obviously, it brings together a really broad cross-section of practitioners, experts, academics and so on, and it has a great opportunity to make some important recommendations. The job that we have is part of a long-term programme, which started some years ago with the introduction of the degree and making social work a protected title. We have made some significant progress, but—I am sorry that this is a bit of old, hackneyed phrase—we have got an awful lot more to do.

**Q285 Chairman:** May I give you some advice, Minister? The way to get the Committee inside is to say, “We are awaiting the report of your inquiry, Chairman. That will sort the whole system out.”

**Baroness Morgan:** If I may follow your advice—I am always pleased to do so—this is a particularly timely inquiry, because I have a sense that this is now a moment where there is a great commitment across Government. With the Committee’s interest, with the Social Work Task Force, and with the wider interest in local government and academia as well—I think there is a genuine commitment from employers too—all of us can work together to make the most of the opportunities we have got.

**Chairman:** We have been absolutely amazed by the quality of some of the people we have met and the evidence we have had in this area. There is no doubt that there is some extremely good practice and really fantastic social workers and social work partners out there. The trouble is that what we have found is very patchy across the 150 local authorities, and it should not be. One of the enormous breakthroughs for the Committee, if you remember the children in care inquiry—we have just agreed this morning to publish the Government’s response to that inquiry—was when we started listening to children who had been in care and who were in care. In this present inquiry, actually talking to social workers, especially young social workers in the first five and 10 years of the job, has been a real breakthrough for a lot of members of the Committee. It is a tremendous strength. They also seem to know what is wrong and how to fix it. As we drill through some of the questions, I hope those will be raised with you. Listening to some of the people in the profession is where we have started, or should have started, but we have certainly got round to it now. Derek, you are going to start us off with the recent initiatives in the Social Work Task Force.

**Q286 Derek Twigg:** I would like to go back to something you said before. We set up a task force to go and have a comprehensive look at reform. But on the other hand you are renouncing initiatives pretty frequently. So what was the point?

**Baroness Morgan:** It would be unacceptable for the Government to sit back and simply wait until the task force had finished its deliberation. We are on a journey to develop the social work profession, and the task force has been asked to look at practice and how to improve it. We had already identified some very significant steps such as rolling out the Newly Qualified Social Worker initiative to all statutory and voluntary sector providers in September. It was widely accepted that that was the right thing to do. The feedback we have had from social workers was that that was the right thing to do. The Social Work Task Force is grappling with some very difficult challenges and thorny questions. There are some straightforward things that we can be getting on with, which we are getting on with. We are working very closely with the task force to make sure that our communication is good and that what we are doing does not pre-empt, or undermine, what it might recommend later on. I know that Marcus Bell, who is leading the workforce work in the Department, is itching, probably, to nudge me on something, but we have taken on board, for example, the research work. The task force made a report in May. We specifically asked it to look at the computer system—the ICS system that social workers used—and we have taken on board their early recommendations. I have written to all local authorities about how we want to evolve that system, so that it can be more practical and flexible for social workers working on the front line. There is a synergy there, but we have to give it time as well. Actually, it does not have a lot of time; October is not that far away and it has a very challenging programme. We have to get that right, taking practical action now, but also responding—

**Q287 Derek Twigg:** So it is not looking at the initiatives you have already announced. It has not looked at them and been told, “Leave them, because they have been done, and get on with the rest of it.” Is that right?

**Baroness Morgan:** To be fair, we have asked it to look at the barriers to good social work practice. If the task force were to have anything to say about pretty much anything we are doing, we would welcome that.

**Q288 Derek Twigg:** When I met a group of new and experienced social workers in my constituency, the overwhelming view was that one of the biggest problems was the amount of paperwork that they had to do. Why not announce an initiative on reducing paperwork, if it is one of the biggest problems that social workers see?

**Baroness Morgan:** A lot of concern around paperwork and bureaucracy is the computing system. That was fed back to us, and the task force very clearly through a range of public meetings,



which were strongly attended by social workers. The advice we had was that one of the best and most practical ways to help social workers was to ensure that they were empowered to use their professional judgment. Part of good social work practice is about keeping good records, so we have to have a modern IT system that is good, flexible and serves social workers in their work. We have made significant changes to the integrated children's system—ICS—computing system to do just that. These days people worry more about the computing and how flexible it is.

**Derek Twigg:** There is a vast amount of information they have to put in—that is the issue—pages and pages of it.

**Baroness Morgan:** Yes. We have literally removed some of what are called exemplars in the system. Because of the way they had been implemented locally social workers were being forced to input page after page. The system now is being freed up to be made more flexible and easy to use locally.

**Q289 Chairman:** When we talked to young social workers on Monday, they said it was not so much the computing and the 32 pages that they had to fill in every time, but it was about having a professionally run and managed office with some administrative back-up. Highly qualified people with the qualities, background and training to make serious judgments about very difficult cases were spending too much of their time doing clerical and administrative stuff. Any well-managed organisation would not have highly trained, reasonably well-paid people doing that. Some people had good back-up. You could see the faces of some of the others saying, "Wow, I wish we had that back-up because it would free us to do the job we are trained for." To use a terrible cliché, it's not rocket science, is it? It's simple things, isn't it?

**Baroness Morgan:** I agree, Chairman. We know that there are places in England—Hackney is one that comes to mind—where they are looking at remodelling social work practice, where you can look at ensuring that social workers fulfil their professional role to maximum ability by defining roles in the team. Yes, administrative support is something a well-functioning team would benefit from.

**Q290 Chairman:** But it is also about having the management expertise to say, "You are the expert on that, why not deal with that case? You have different expertise, you deal with that." So you are playing your team in the way we play this team when we ask questions.

**Baroness Morgan:** I can do nothing other than agree with you. That is why we are so keen to develop the profession and to invest in supporting managers more. This is something we have been doing. I must get the terminology right. We are investing from the autumn in further support for coaching of social work team managers and improving training to deal with difficult decisions such as how you run a team, how you manage resources, division of labour and how you ensure you have time in your programme for bringing on the next generation of the profession.

This is something that concerns me. If you compare social work with other professions, we need to see engendered in the profession a responsibility among those who are serving in the profession for bringing on the next generation: coaching, training and having a shared ownership for training and development. Partnership between employers and higher education needs to be further developed so that the profession can tackle these kinds of challenges.

**Q291 Chairman:** Would you like to meet our little group of social workers?

**Baroness Morgan:** I would love to.

**Chairman:** We will arrange it.

**Q292 Derek Twigg:** You are a new Minister—indeed, it is difficult in your first appointment as a Minister to get to grips with everything and start to deal with all the issues. What most surprised you about the issues that are facing us today? What one issue particularly surprised you? Maybe one or two?

**Baroness Morgan:** I may be a new Minister—I have been there since October.

**Chairman:** Most Ministers only last two years.

**Baroness Morgan:** I know. So I am coming up to—

**Derek Twigg:** Remember all the last few months.

**Baroness Morgan:** The thing that really struck me—I started a month before the tragic events in Haringey unfolded—was how incredibly tough it is for social workers when some of the things that they are dealing with are the most difficult and challenging any profession ever has to deal with. One of the things was also how we really need to have a strong voice for social work. We need to have a strong, confident profession. That struck me because I used to run a charity in the health sector called Breakthrough Breast Cancer. The health profession bodies and representatives are incredibly strong. We all have very well-developed ideas about what those professions do. It is the same with teaching. Ed Balls, the Secretary of State, said that one of the things that he wanted to see was a strong and confident social work profession, with social workers really empowered to do their best, and that is what we need to facilitate. There are so many elements of the challenge to grasp. We have a lot to do, particularly on training and development.

**Chairman:** We are going to drill down on that now. Can I move you across to work force planning and national leadership with Fiona.

**Q293 Fiona Mactaggart:** If you want a strong, confident social work profession, surely the wrong place to start is excellent universities such as LSE and Reading giving up training social workers and social work education, and the Government being in a position where there is nothing they can do about it?

**Baroness Morgan:** I would not want to start there, no.

**Fiona Mactaggart:** That is where we have started.

**Baroness Morgan:** I am not sure whether that is where we started—that is where we are. It is very disappointing that places such as LSE and Reading

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have chosen not to continue to run social work degrees. What we can do is ensure that we are doing everything in our gift to attract highly qualified, excellent degree graduates into the profession, that we work hard generally to raise the status of the profession through communication campaigns, that professionals doing the work at the moment stay in the practice and become advanced practitioners. I would like to see the development of a strong link between experienced advanced practitioners and higher education. I think that by involving the profession very closely in higher education and research, we can keep people involved in the profession who are interested in research and continuing to practise. That is a way of doing it.

**Q294 Fiona Mactaggart:** That is true, but Dr Eileen Munro said that the current funding model makes it “very unattractive for research-intensive universities to” promote “social work training.” We seem to have a problem of leading from the back. Eleni Ioannides of the Association of Directors of Children’s Services told the Committee, like you did, that we needed to get into partnership on this. When we asked her how that could be done, she said that partnership was “left to that accident, if you like, as to whether they can make those partnerships and make them strong. That is why I say that we need a little bit more national prescription and leadership on the whole issue to take it forward. It can’t be left to those local partnerships, because they won’t be” started. I listened to your introduction. It was good and full of optimistic bits, but I feel that we are putting money in but not getting the bang for our buck on this, because we have not said, “This is what needs to happen!” I think that the Government should lead from the front, not the back.

**Baroness Morgan:** I am very happy to have that challenge. We are very concerned to hear from the Social Work Task Force about, as I said at the start, radical reform, if that is what they propose. I do not sit before you as a Minister scared to provide leadership from the front. I cannot second-guess what the task force will say about higher education. I shall be very surprised if it does not have something to say about it. However, we are not leaving partnerships between higher education and employers entirely to chance. We have set up the social work development partnership and, especially in the development of partnership, we are investing in placements, which are a very important element of the social work degree. We expect 200 days of practice placement time and are investing £5.5 million specifically to develop better partnerships and better practice placements. So we are ready. I welcome that challenge.

**Q295 Chairman:** I would like to bring in Marcus Bell and Andrew Sargent. As we have learned, this is a very polite sector. They are so nice to each other and won’t put the boot in—they just won’t say nasty things. We had to have a quiet private meeting with social workers to say, “What are the three things that will sort this out?” We didn’t get that from much of the evidence we received. If they are so polite, and

there are so many organisations and people in this partnership, the partnership won’t come together unless you show really determined leadership and, actually, are sometimes a bit unpleasant and knock heads together. The witnesses have been really nice, polite people, but they wouldn’t say, “That’s a rubbish department!”, or “This is the trouble with some of the firms supplying agency workers.” They won’t do it. They are terribly polite.

**Marcus Bell:** I would like to comment briefly on the supply question. The Committee will know that, in relation to the teaching profession, the Department takes, in effect, a strategic national approach to supply. We try to work out the likely national demands for teachers in the system, and then procure from higher education institutions in a position to do the work. That ensures that we have enough qualified teachers coming through. That system has been in place in the Department for some decades, in one form or another.

**Chairman:** And has survived, even with the history of the absolute disaster of person-powered planning in this country.

**Marcus Bell:** Possibly.

**Q296 Chairman:** It has always gone wrong, hasn’t it?

**Marcus Bell:** I wouldn’t say that. In recent years, at any rate, it has been quite good at predicting demand for teachers and directing funding into institutions graded for quality in terms of the teaching training that they provide. In the past, we have not tried to take a strategic national approach to the supply of social workers. Lord Laming said in his report that that was something that the Department should consider, and that is a recommendation that Ministers have accepted. I would be surprised if that was an issue that the task force did not have some views about when it brings forward its report in October.

**Q297 Fiona Mactaggart:** It is not just a question of supply, is it? It is also a question of regulation. We have clear regulatory bodies in teaching, which is one reason why they have the voice that you suggest exists in some other professions—a voice that does not exist in the social work profession. It is not completely clear what national organisation will lead work-force planning and the training provision regulatory process. A number of things are going on at the same time, and part of the ineffectualness is that we do not know who is leading it or what they are going to do. Stuff is going on, and it is progressive, but it is just stuff.

**Baroness Morgan:** I think that you are right; there is an awful lot going on now. We are seeing a crescendo of activity that started some time ago with the Care Standards Act 2000 and the establishment of the General Social Care Council, which is the regulator for the profession. I do not want to spend too much time on the analogy with health, but even if you have a regulator, the professional voice is not necessarily that of the regulator. The work force planning is more about the employers. Again, I don’t want to prejudge what the task force might say, but I don’t necessarily see that we are going to end up with one

body that can do everything. I cannot imagine that working, but I could imagine a system that is much more clearly understood and that works much more effectively. Ultimately—this is really what we ask the task force to look at—what are the barriers to really high quality front-line social-work practice? One of the big barriers is having a strong, competent profession. We are having young social workers—not necessarily young, but immediately after qualification—doing their degree and coming into the workplace. We are losing far too many from the profession far too quickly. The post-qualification year can be very difficult. We know from our work in polling students when they leave university that they do not feel prepared for what they are going into. They are not staying and developing their profession. So we need this comprehensive stuff; we have to do it, but I agree that we do need a simple process in the long run that everyone can engage with in the right way.

**Q298 Chairman:** Why don't you have something like the Teacher Development Agency? Why do you not have a proper focus on training? Wouldn't that be a good driving force at the national level?

**Baroness Morgan:** We are waiting for the report from the Social Work Task Force. We want to do the right thing for social work.

**Q299 Chairman:** But it must have crossed your mind that people will compare social work with teaching. We do, as we are doing a parallel and independent inquiry into the training of teachers. It is interesting how one informs the other. Andrew, you have a background in school education.

**Baroness Morgan:** I am sorry, but may I point out that Andrew Sargent is here to support me later on questions about allegations?

**Chairman:** Right. I'm sorry; I thought I was going to get two for the price of one. Andrew, you must remain silent until the next section.

**Marcus Bell:** We have a body, in relation to children and family social work, that carries out a lot of the functions that the TDA does for the teaching profession, in the form of the Children's Workforce Development Council. I think that you have taken evidence from it. Among other things, it is the body responsible for delivering a lot of the initiatives that we brought forward over the last year in relation to social work. There is a work force reform body. I think that there is a wider point here. In pretty much every profession—in teaching, social work and the medical professions—there is quite a complicated set of institutional arrangements which are all rather different from each other. There is typically a regulator, a work force reform body and an inspectorate, which all do slightly different things. Certainly in terms of what it has said so far, the task force's view is that there is a big issue about leadership of the profession. It may be partly an institutional issue, but there are also some other factors at work, and I think that we are expecting it to have rather more to say about that later on.

**Q300 Chairman:** The evidence that we have looked at clearly says that the real problems were lack of good placements, excessive pressure on newly qualified social workers, rapid turnover and the high percentage of agency staff in some situations. Time and time again, that has come back to us. Surely everyone working on this should know that those are the fundamental challenges. Are they not?

**Baroness Morgan:** I agree that they are fundamental challenges. We are working to address them. For example, I mentioned earlier the marketing campaign that we are launching soon, which will be very much based on creating a better understanding among the public of what social workers do, promoting their standing as an important profession—that is part of trying to encourage more people who could have an interest in social work to come forward—promoting greater uptake of training, encouraging those who are already qualified to come back into the profession and ensuring that we have mechanisms for successful graduates to come in through a work-based training programme. We are chipping away at those.

**Q301 Chairman:** But when we chip away, Minister, sometimes a Committee like this has to say, "Well, we had the Practice Learning Task Force." That cost quite a lot of money, if I remember, and a lot of time. That was chipping away, but did it actually achieve anything?

**Baroness Morgan:** I think—

**Chairman:** Perhaps Marcus could help. Whatever happened to the Practice Learning Task Force?

**Marcus Bell:** I think there were some benefits from it in terms of improving the quality of management and practice learning in the profession. Although the overall picture is that there have been a number of initiatives and changes in social work over the past seven or eight years—the Minister has mentioned many of them, such as the new degree, protected status and so on—when we in the Department looked with our partners last year at where our key challenges were in relation to the whole children's work force, a very clear answer came back that the biggest challenges were in relation to social work, and that despite some progress through some of the initiatives, we needed a more comprehensive and ambitious approach than we had had in the past. That explains, I think, why Ministers asked the task force to do that very serious bit of long-term work about how we could achieve fundamental reform in the profession. We need to learn from some of the initiatives of the past, but I think the—

**Q302 Chairman:** No one on this Committee is cynical, but if you were, or if you played the cynical game for a moment, you might say that there was a lot of dust being thrown into people's eyes about this and that—training and so on—but at the same time the base funding for social work capacity isn't there and hasn't been increased. The Government now have an enormous challenge, particularly in the last year with the dreadful tragedy of Baby Peter, because every local authority knows that it and the Government cannot afford, in terms of reputation or

anything else, such cases of vulnerable children being dreadfully treated and murdered. This is going to haunt any government and any local authority. But everybody knows, if you talk to people, that they need the capacity to increase their social work base. That is a lot of money, is it not? That is a real challenge, and we are at a stage when we don't have so much money around.

**Baroness Morgan:** I don't want to state the obvious, but the point about social work is that we cannot afford not to invest in it.

**Q303 Chairman:** But we don't have enough social workers.

**Baroness Morgan:** We are working hard. We are putting £130 million simply from the Department into work force development initiatives during this period.

**Q304 Chairman:** I met the leader of my local council last week. He said that this will be the toughest time for local authorities that we have known, and children's services are expensive, aren't they?

**Baroness Morgan:** That is a value judgment. I don't think children's services are expensive, because they contribute an enormous amount.

**Q305 Chairman:** I meant that a large percentage of any local authority's budget goes on children services.

**Baroness Morgan:** I don't have the figures to say that. I'm sure I can supply the Committee with the exact figures, but when I looked at the funding of children's services during the past 10 years in local authorities, I saw substantial significant increases in resources for the work that we want done. It is challenging for local authorities. I don't want to suggest that it is easy, but the problems with social work are not just about money. They are also about making sure that we do the right things in the right places, and that we get people working together. We must also have confidence, and we must have the whole system working coherently—the point that Fiona Mactaggart was making. That is a real challenge.

**Chairman:** It is our job to push you on these issues, but we want to push you on pay now—a matter on which Edward will lead.

**Q306 Mr Timpson:** When you meet the group of social workers we met on Monday, I hope you will discover that not only are they engaging and informed about their profession, but they come across as very bright individuals in their own right. However, we know from statistics on the UCAS points for social work degrees at entry point that, compared with other similar professions such as teaching or nursing, social workers have relatively low academic ability. What will the Government do about that?

**Baroness Morgan:** That is a very interesting question. Obviously, I have spent some time talking to social workers throughout my term of office at the DCSF and, like you, I found them—new or experienced—very bright, articulate, challenging

and interesting people, and dedicated to some of the most difficult jobs around. When I heard the UCAS points for the qualification entry for a social worker degree, I found it troubling. We know that, to do their job fully, social workers need to have advanced critical thinking, analytical skills and intellectual capacity as well as all the social, communication and interpersonal skills that we would expect. It is a demanding role and we would be interested to hear from the Social Work Task Force about how to address the issue. I wish to sound one note of caution: we look for people coming into social work who might have had a varied life experience. Sometimes, the UCAS points do not always tell a very straight story. We want to welcome mature students and people with life skills who may have come into social work through an unconventional route. That is why, for the degree, most universities would interview candidates as well so that they can get a better picture of the whole candidate. For other courses, UCAS applications would, of course, go through without seeing the candidate. The situation is slightly more complicated than first meets the eye.

**Q307 Mr Timpson:** Your answer seems to suggest that you are expecting the task force to look at the issue and give you a recommendation as to whether the threshold needs to be raised, or whether there needs to be a more cohesive point of entry for social workers. Do you expect the task force to address that issue?

**Baroness Morgan:** Yes, and I echo your concern about it.

**Q308 Mr Timpson:** I will move on to pay. You told us earlier about your marketing campaign for later this year, which will try to raise the perceived calibre and status of the social work profession and ensure not only that those going in are the best recruits that we can get, but that, in terms of supply, they are meeting the demand that we know is out there. One submission we have had, from the Joint Universities Council social work committee, suggested that recruitment of the best candidates may be helped by adopting a career and pay structure similar to that of health professionals. I know you have a background in the health profession, so you can perhaps understand the advantages of that. Is that something that the Government will look at introducing, and what consideration have you given to a national pay scale for social workers?

**Baroness Morgan:** Pay remains the responsibility of employers and I am not expecting that to change, but I am very interested in career progression. The evidence that I have seen on pay is that the entry point to the profession is comparable to other professions, but that, as you go through your career, progression is not as pronounced as in other professions. Perhaps that is to do with the fact that career progression in social work isn't as well codified and developed as it should be. A post-qualification programme is being developed, but I talked earlier about the concept of making social work a masters profession—it is something that our Secretary of State has talked about. We are very

interested in how we can develop the advanced practitioner role, the masters profession, and with that, retain more expert, experienced people, rather than the option, if you want career development and salary development, being to go into management, which is what happens now.

**Q309 Mr Timpson:** What the social workers we spoke to on Monday told us was that, within a year of their starting out as a social worker, there is a rather perverse incentive for them, purely on the basis of pay, to move into agency work. That breeds instability and results in children in the social work realm, who need that stability, losing it. We heard that, in some local authorities, over 50% of their social work force are agency workers and there is almost an unwritten rule that, if you want to earn more money, the quickest route, once you have done your first year, is to get an agency job. I hope you agree that that is not the way we want to go, but what will you do to stop social workers not only thinking like that, but actually doing it?

**Baroness Morgan:** I hope that, through our work, we can make the post-qualification framework very attractive for social workers to pass through, because pay is important, but conditions are important as well. That is the message that we have had from social workers. By that I mean the training and support you get from your manager and the amount of time you have for reflective practice. Those conditions are important as well. It is also important for a social worker to be doing work that they feel comfortable and confident doing. Having proper progression from a post-qualification year into a stage where you are—if this is the right term for it—a fully qualified, functioning professional, and then progressing to an advanced practitioner stage, is a way of encouraging social workers to stay in practice with their employers. It is very important for social workers to have stability in their placements—to begin with at least—because that is where professional development, and the embedding of skills and knowledge, can most easily take place. That is not to say that we don't need very good agency staff as well, because all employers will need to have that flexibility. It really is about making sure that we have got that high-quality progression through the professional post-qualification years.

**Q310 Paul Holmes:** On the development of a post-qualification framework, this is the second major redevelopment, and there is no national curriculum for it as such, and no clear transferability of knowledge and skills from one local authority area to another. Should there be a proper national structure rather than piecemeal change?

**Baroness Morgan:** Marcus may want to add something, but I would just say that we are very, very concerned to get this right. That is why we are beginning the development of the advanced social worker professional in the autumn and why we will be piloting the masters in 2011. I agree: we are expecting to have some strong advice on that.

**Marcus Bell:** The PQ framework was important progress at the time it was introduced two or three years ago, but it follows from everything we have been saying about our expectations of where the task force may take us that if we have some pretty fundamental reform of initial training and recommendations about career structure, and if we try and deal with all the factors that affect recruitment and retention that have been mentioned in the Committee, that is likely to bring with it the need for some pretty important changes to CPD and, I am sure, the kind of issues that you mentioned about transferability and so on. What social workers whom I have heard really want to know is, "What CPD am I entitled to in the course of my career and how can it be sustained?" Those sorts of issues will need to be picked up as well.

**Q311 Paul Holmes:** One of the common themes of the evidence we have been getting is that, whether you are looking at the initial training at social workers at university, for example, or at post-qualification development, or at quality assurance, there is no framework. It is all very piecemeal and there is so much around the country. Your answer to the next few questions might be, "We're waiting for the final report of the Social Work Task Force," but hopefully you can give a bit more guidance. Do the Government have any clear idea yet whether you will go down the road of producing a detailed national curriculum for social work degree courses? Is that a direction of travel?

**Marcus Bell:** We are not clear at the moment, to be honest. That may well be something that the Social Work Task Force wants to advise us about. I have heard a number of arguments personally around that issue. One point that comes up quite often is that there is some disagreement about exactly what work social workers do that is distinctive from a range of other roles that have grown up around them, like family support workers and so on. What we hope is that the Social Work Task Force will really help us to clarify that because, obviously, if you are contemplating reforms to initial training and CPD and so on, you need to be really clear about exactly what work it is you want the professionals concerned to do.

**Q312 Paul Holmes:** What about quality assurance? In the opening comments, we heard praise for what is being done with teaching. Do you think that you should have some clear quality assurance, so that students applying for courses, and people employing students coming off such courses, can say, "That one is rated very well, and that one isn't rated so well."

**Marcus Bell:** That would certainly be a benefit, yes. I suspect that lying behind your question is something that we have picked up on through our work with the task forces and that is unhappiness about the quality of what is available.

**Q313 Paul Holmes:** So, that is the clear direction that you think you will go in?

**Marcus Bell:** I think that it is an important issue, but we await the task force.

**Q314 Paul Holmes:** One improvement has been the increase in placements for social worker training from 130 days to 200 days. That has created a big demand for placements, which, as we have heard, is often not filled easily, with people going to placements that have nothing to do with social work. Have the Government any thoughts on how you can ensure that there are enough quality placements available to meet the 200 days' placement?

**Marcus Bell:** That is the sort of question that really exposes how interconnected a lot of the issues that the Committee is considering are. One of the key reasons why it is hard to get really good quality placements for students, particularly in the more demanding settings that are focused on child protection and so on, is because of some of the underlying pressures on supply and because of vacancy and workload problems. A lot of social workers working in those settings are under a great deal of pressure. With the best will in the world, it is very difficult for them to find the time to offer really high-quality placements. This takes us back to the need for a comprehensive strategy that addresses issues of supply, workload, support and so on alongside placements. If we don't try to address such issues, there are some quite severe limits on how far you can get in simply improving the availability of placements themselves.

**Q315 Paul Holmes:** There was a performance indicator for local authorities about how many placement places should be provided. Since that ended in 2008, there is anecdotal evidence only that perhaps the number of placements is now falling. It is no longer a priority for local authorities, and yet it should be if we are to train social workers properly.

**Marcus Bell:** I don't have clear evidence about the trend in placement availability. I have heard some of the same things that you have.

**Q316 Chairman:** It is worrying when you hear a young social worker saying that the first placement he had was with a GP's practice, which was useless, so he found his own one next time.

**Marcus Bell:** That is obviously an important problem. Everything we know about effective practice and training says that a really good placement is key to helping new social workers get to the point. All I can say is that some of those issues around the availability of placements are almost systemic and are to do with some of the much wider problems that the Social Work Task Force has been asked to consider to do with the underlying supply position.

**Q317 Paul Holmes:** I keep asking whether the Government have a view on those things, but who calls the shots? You have the Department for Children, Schools and Families, the Department of Health and the new Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. Out of those three working together on different aspects of this, who takes the lead? Who decides that we should have quality

assurance, that we should get in Ofsted inspectors or that we should do something about placement provision or whatever?

**Baroness Morgan:** The task force has been jointly established between DH and DCSF. I work very closely with Phil Hope. We have a shared interest in developing the social worker profession together. It is fair to say that we are, literally, cheek by jowl on this.

**Q318 Paul Holmes:** On newly qualified social workers, London Met university, Bournemouth university, Barnardo's and CAFCASS have all given evidence to the Committee to say that newly qualified social workers are being thrown in at the deep end too soon and that when things go wrong, as in the terrible cases that have been publicised, they lose their career, go through legal investigations, and are under house arrest with the media staking them out. On the other hand, the employer the Children's Workforce Development Council says that a newly qualified social worker, with supervision, ought to be able to go straight in at the highest level of competence. So, a lot of organisations are saying that you throw them in too soon but the Children's Workforce Development Council is saying it's fine.

**Baroness Morgan:** There is a challenge for employers and higher education to come closer together on this. Some newly qualified social workers—certainly some of the ones I have spoken to—have found it difficult when they start, perhaps working in a child protection setting. That is why we have newly qualified social worker status, in order to give them space in their first year and access to the right kind of support and supervision, so that they can learn and embed practical skills and build confidence, so that they can finish their post-qualification year as a really competent, confident practitioner. The task force may have some strong things to say to us about when one becomes a social worker. Is it when you finish your degree or is it when you finish your first year? We would be interested to hear.

**Q319 Paul Holmes:** Again, there are obvious parallels with newly qualified teachers.

**Baroness Morgan:** Yes.

**Q320 Chairman:** Minister, that's been a very good session, but Andrew Sargent has been enormously patient staying with us on this. We just wanted to ask you one thing. We have been doing a short inquiry on allegations against school staff. We found it very useful and got into the Guinness Book of Records for the number of witnesses we had in a short session, but we found it added a great deal of value and made a rather good short report. Could you briefly answer this. One thing that stood out was that so much evidence on that day suggested that there were many allegations and many were false, because only 5% led to a successful action of any kind. The evidence from teachers' unions and others was that an increasing number of allegations, however they were dealt with, led to many teachers going through great stress and long suspensions, at enormous cost to the education sector. However, from the

Department we had a written submission, and I quote from it: “It is rare for an allegation to be deliberately false or malicious.” That seemed to run counter to all the other written evidence and the oral evidence we had that day. If only 5% lead to a successful prosecution, or discipline, of any kind, surely we should check with you what you base that statement on.

**Baroness Morgan:** First, on this whole question of malicious allegations—

**Chairman:** Not just malicious, just allegations—some might be malicious.

**Baroness Morgan:** I am aware of the devastating effect that allegations can have on teaching and other staff. I take very seriously the concerns that teaching unions have. Guidance around the handling of allegations has been in existence for some time. As you know, we recently did a review, and as part of that we did a spot analysis—a kind of data-grab—collecting data from local authorities, and we had about an 85% response rate, which is quite good. We were looking at the whole of the children’s work force and the data showed malicious allegations to be 2.8%. That is a particular definition of a malicious allegation—where there is intent to be malicious. I think it is fair to say that that could be described as rare. However, I also need to be clear that the definitions that we use and the definitions that teaching unions might use to talk about these issues are not very comparable. It is quite difficult to pick through the figures.

**Q321 Chairman:** But in your written evidence you said false and malicious were rare.

**Baroness Morgan:** Yes.

**Q322 Chairman:** But if you have false and malicious, it seems that the 5% that end up leading to some disciplinary or legal action doesn’t square with that.

**Baroness Morgan:** I am not sure that I understand the question.

**Chairman:** I can see that you would like to refine the malicious. You say that it is “rare for an allegation to be deliberately false or malicious”.

**Andrew Sargent:** If I may, I think that that is a fair challenge. In using the phrase “false and malicious”, we have used false—deliberately and knowingly false—in the same category as malicious. As the Minister says, against the criteria that allegations have been made with deliberate intent to deceive or cause harm, the evidence, both statistical and from feedback in the report, was that that was rare. But there are other categories, for instance, unfounded

allegations, where after the investigation there is no evidence that supports the allegation or there is evidence that the allegation is untrue, but whether that is a “false” allegation is a matter of judgment. It may not be a malicious one; it may be a genuine misunderstanding by the person of what occurred. Plainly, whether malicious, unfounded or simply unsubstantiated, these allegations are exceptionally potentially or actually troubling for the individual. I think that the figures are encouraging but need to be better on how many of the cases are dealt with quickly—within one month, against a target of 80%.

**Q323 Paul Holmes:** I just have an observation on the definition of “malicious”. It is certainly not what the witness said to us. I was a teacher for 22 years; I was a union rep in school for five years and a teacher-governor in two schools. From all that experience, I have observed a number of these and I would say that malicious allegations are pretty widespread. They are the norm rather than the 2% exception, so I think that the definition of “malicious” needs looking at. I left teaching before we got all the modern wave of internet and text-organised allegations that go on now. I think you need to look at your definitions.

**Baroness Morgan:** We have had feedback following the review and we have set out our definitions in the new guidance that has been put out for consultation, so we would be very happy to receive feedback as part of that consultation on this question. For me, what really matters is that we make sure that allegations are dealt with effectively, promptly and fairly, and part of the feedback that we had when we did our review of the guidance told us that it seems to be working quite well, but actually professionals are not aware enough of its existence and that when you have these incidents—any head teacher, for example, can have one, two or three in a career—what really matters is to ensure that they feel equipped to deal with those allegations promptly and fairly. So we are producing practice guidance for the handling of allegations that will, I think, help to raise awareness of this issue further.

**Chairman:** Minister, thank you for that. I am afraid that we have to go to PMQs, which is not Peter Mandelson Questions, as you have in your House, but Prime Minister’s Questions. We thank you for your evidence. We enjoyed it and learned a lot. If you could give us, before we write our short report, some more detail on the survey that you carried out on what we were just talking about, we would be grateful.

# Written evidence

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## Memorandum submitted by the National Association of Social Workers in Education (NASWE)

1. The National Association of Social Workers in Education (NASWE) was founded in 1884 and is the only association representing staff in the education welfare service across all grades. The association has no paid officers and is run by its members for its members and has membership across the UK.

2. This NASWE submission to the House of Commons Select Committee inquiring into the training of children and families social workers may be summarised as follows:

- Education Welfare Service (EWS) staff, as a distinct workforce, have been recommended for social work training, following an earlier national review and the later introduction of statutory guidance under the Children Act 1989, but this has not been properly implemented in England. In Northern Ireland, all such staff now require a recognised social work qualification.
- Despite the fact that EWOs are often the first local authority staff to uncover and seek to resolve serious problems within a local family, in their pursuit of consistent school attendance, there are no entry qualifications at all for EWS staff. Recent research evidence points to only a quarter of EWOs in England holding a social work qualification.
- EWOs often deal with complex cases, according to a recent case file audit compiled by independent researchers and funded by the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC). There is a perception that many local social service thresholds have been raised, over recent years, leaving such cases to be addressed by EWS and similar staff.
- School attendance levels, and changes to pupils' behaviour in school, are good barometers of family wellbeing and the public are entitled to expect that an EWO visiting a family home on behalf of a local authority is subject to appropriate regulation, training and qualification. NASWE therefore recommends six specific measures to address the current difficulties highlighted and evidenced in this submission.

## BACKGROUND

3. The Education Welfare Service<sup>1</sup> is the oldest state-funded welfare service, tracing its origins to the late 1880s when education became compulsory. Whilst many aspects of the role, the ways in which services are organised and the profile of its workforce have changed, one core function, to ensure that children attend school regularly, remains intact and is the focus of its work. The only national review of the EWS was published in 1974 sponsored by the then Local Government Training Board. The report recommended that the appropriate training for EWOs was "social work; training suitably structured to take account of the educational setting in which that role is performed." In the past, there have sometimes been social work training courses offered with a specific EWS pathway but this provision was discontinued.

4. The recommendations of the national review were never followed through at national level, though some local authorities introduced this as an entry requirement, and others made provision for staff to undertake professional social work training. Following the introduction of Education Supervision Orders, under the Children Act 1989, a clear duty (in statutory guidance) was placed on Local Authorities to ensure that staff were appropriately trained to perform this role; it suggested, though did not demand, a recognised social work qualification. In most local authorities, this simply did not happen and, as a consequence, the majority fail to make full use of this holistic child-centred provision.

5. Following devolution, Northern Ireland introduced a recognised social work qualification for all EWOs, and all EWOs are either qualified, in the process of qualification or where retirement is imminent given access to appropriate CPD opportunities. We do not believe that the EWS role in England is substantially different. There are approximately 3,000 EWOs in England, most are employed by the local authority, and some are employed and managed directly by schools.

## QUALIFICATION AND TRAINING—THE CURRENT POSITION

6. Whilst there has been recent attention to the qualification and training needs of the EWS in England, this has been considered in the context of its place within the "LDSS" family (Learning Development & Support Services). The current recognised qualification for the LDSS family is an NVQ at Levels 3 and 4. This link with Connexions Personal Advisors and Learning Mentors was not based on systematic evidence—gathering, although we would agree that there is commonality. EWOs, however, also have significant commonalities with social care colleagues. One of the major concerns for the EWS is the absence of entry qualifications. Whilst there is some concern about the NVQ 4 LDSS qualification's fitness for purpose, the fact remains that it cannot be achieved unless a practitioner has been in practice for some time.

<sup>1</sup> The terms education welfare service and education welfare officer are used as a title for service to support and enforce school attendance. We recognise that local authorities may use a diverse range of service and job titles to describe their role. NASWE is not disposed to preserve the role within a discreet or separate service, but to ensure that this specialist role is recognised, retained and developed within whatever local structures are appropriate.



The nature of the NVQ route makes it impossible for a practitioner to undertake independently, it also lacks a period of supervised practice as would be the case for pre-qualifying social workers, pre-qualifying and newly-qualified teachers.

7. For those EWS staff based in schools or working to a service level agreement to a specific school or group of schools, there is little opportunity to differentiate workers skills and experience and the work they may be required to undertake. There has been some take up of the LDSS NVQ but the lack of any ring-fenced funding or external drivers such as regulatory or inspection requirements has made this ad hoc and extremely variable across England. Many NASWE members report that they have little or no access to training and development opportunities. We do not know with accuracy the numbers of EWOs holding relevant or appropriate qualifications. Research undertaken by NASWE in 2005, supported by CWDC, revealed that in a sample of just over 100 officers, 26% held a recognised SW qualification with more than half of those in management positions. Worryingly, the next largest category 18% reported holding no qualifications at all. The data includes EWOs at practitioner, supervisory and management grades.

#### WHAT TYPES OF FAMILIES DO EWOs WORK WITH?

8. There is a perception that social service thresholds have become increasingly harder to reach and that many support staff are therefore undertaking work that may exceed their agency's brief. There are serious questions about the competence, training and supervisory support for dealing with complex cases. Whilst not all casework is of a complex nature, increasingly, routine work is undertaken by ancillary staff or dealt with at an administrative level. Consequently, it is likely that the proportion of "routine" cases carried by EWS has diminished. In an attempt to understand more about the needs of children coming to the attention of education welfare services, and the ability of those staff to address those needs, a case file audit was undertaken (funded through CWDC) with four local authority education welfare services. Independent consultants undertook a matching needs and services audit to gain a picture of the pattern of need in these areas. A threshold exercise completed by those doing the audit was designed to measure the seriousness of children and family needs. Cases were scored using an adapted version of the levels of seriousness described in section 17 of the Children Act 1989: as 3 (serious/complex needs) 2 (moderate/additional needs) or 1 (lower level). These three levels correspond with the levels of need described in the Common Assessment Framework (CAF).

9. Key findings from the audit may be summarised as follows: It is clear that EWS in all four areas are working with children with serious and complex needs and there is little difference in the levels of seriousness across the four samples.

- All four agencies are working almost exclusively with children at levels 2 and 3.
- 37% are judged to have reached the significant impairment threshold.
- More than a third of the children have emotional/mental health problems.
- 25% of their parents have mental health problems.
- 22% of children have a parent who misuses drugs and/or alcohol.

#### A UNIQUE ROLE?

10. Long before the current joining of education and social services, the EWO has worked across the two major systems as broker, advocate and co-worker. Prior to the Children Act 1989, EWOs could bring care proceedings in the Juvenile Court in cases of poor attendance. The EWO has traditionally made operational links with child and adolescent mental health services, GP services, youth offending and police services. It is this quality that has been a major strength for the families that EWOs work with. The lack of a clear central government Departmental lead has meant there has been no sustained lead on the development of this job role. Even now, the policy lead for the EWS role is held largely with the DCSF schools division attendance and parental responsibilities team and with the workforce and practice issues held within the children and families division. Unlike other members of the LDSS family, education welfare services have duties and responsibilities, delegated by the local authority, to work within a statutory framework to support and enforce school attendance. EWOs do not have the luxury of declining to work with young people and parents who may not want to co-operate. In order to practice competently, an EWO would have knowledge of the Children Act 1989, a range of detailed statutory regulations and a working knowledge of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act as well as the ability to gather and present evidence in Court. The powers given to the local authority in respect of enforcing school attendance are complex and may involve civil, criminal and family law.

11. Experienced EWOs, including those who already hold a recognised social work qualification, do not necessarily aspire to work as children and families social workers. They generally have a deeply held belief in the long-term benefits of a good educational experience and understand that school attendance is key to that. EWOs understand that attendance at school, and changes in a child's behaviour in school are generally a particularly good barometer of family well-being. They also understand that truancy can be a complex behaviour; symptomatic of a range of different factors within schools, communities and families which in many cases are dynamically interactive. Supporting or enforcing school attendance and supporting wider

family needs need not and should not be mutually exclusive. EWOs recognise that sometimes providing family support services or using statutory enforcement measures is necessary—this relies on high-level assessment and intervention skills.

12. This paper concerns aspects of the EWO's work concerning direct casework with vulnerable children and families. It should be noted that EWOs are also routinely engaged in a support and challenge role in schools, policy development and data analysis. EWOs are also seconded to youth offending teams and looked after children's teams. Where regulatory powers in relation to the regulation of child employment are implemented, EWOs are employed to undertake this very specific function.

#### AN UNREGULATED SERVICE

13. Currently only those EWOs with a social work qualification are registered with the GSCC. As yet, EWOs without a recognised social work qualification have no timescale for any form of registration. Every day, EWOs in England are visiting children and families in their homes, seeing children and young people at school or in the community. It is likely that EWOs have more unsupervised access to vulnerable children and families than many other professional groups, including social workers. The decisions made, based on the recommendations of EWOs can potentially have a significant impact on a vulnerable young persons' future life chances.

14. The public have a right to expect that the person arriving in their home representing the local authority is subject to appropriate regulation and has a measurable level of competence. EWOs have invested in them considerable powers that may have an enduring impact on families. We suspect that the general public is unaware of and would be disturbed by this lack of regulation. Practitioners themselves have a right to work with vulnerable children and families competently, confidently and safely and have access to an appropriate level of professional casework supervision and support. Practitioners should not be expected to practice in circumstances that exceed their knowledge and skills.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

15. We would recommend, in light of the above considerations:

- A wider evidence-based review of the EWS role is commissioned which looks at the actual needs presented.
- Registration with GSCC is introduced at the earliest opportunity.
- Introduction of entry qualifications (linked to registration).
- A review of the relevance/appropriateness of existing LDSS qualification to this workforce (this could potentially be included in the current development by CWDC of the Qualification & Credit framework and proposed diploma qualifications).
- Targets for existing staff to reach a specified level of qualification (linked to registration) within a reasonable timescale.
- That Local Authority Children's Services are required to demonstrate that they have in place effective and appropriate casework supervision for EWOs that recognises the level of complexity, risk and responsibility and supports safe practice.

16. We trust the above points will be of interest to, and considered by, the select committee as part of its inquiry into the training of children and families social workers.

#### SOURCES

*The Ralphs Report*, Local Government Training Board, August 1974.

*Developing a Qualification and Progression Framework for the Education Welfare Service*, David Leay, 2008.

*An Audit of the needs of 197 children in touch with Education Welfare Services in four local authority areas*, Ryan Tunard Brown, 2008.

*LDSS EWS Case File Audit Project—Report & Recommendations*, NASWE 2008.

April 2009

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### Memorandum submitted by Warren Carratt, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report has been compiled by the Workforce Strategy, Planning & Development Manager, Director of Locality Services and Director of Targeted Services within the Children & Young People's Service of Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council. There are currently 143 qualified Social Workers employed in Children & Young People's Services in Rotherham, located throughout seven Locality Teams, Fostering and Adoption Services, Disability Services and Children's Residential Care. Rotherham's last reported vacancy

rate for Social Care was 9.89%, with a turnover rate of 10.3% in 2008. Rotherham is home to in the region of 69,000 children and young people, and Rotherham's statistical neighbours are Doncaster, Redcar and Cleveland, Wigan, Barnsley, Tameside, Hartlepool, St Helens, Wakefield, Dudley and Telford and Wrekin.

1. Whilst entry routes to social work do have flexibility, there is a University requirement for applicants to demonstrate evidence of experience in a related field, in the very least dealing with people. In regards to mature entrants to the field of social work, Rotherham currently employ social workers in the following age groups:

<i>Age</i>	<i>&gt; 30</i>	<i>21 to 30</i>	<i>31 to 40</i>	<i>41 to 50</i>
Total employees	59	29	27	28

There are no reported issues in Rotherham with mature entrants, re-entrants and people considering a career change accessing the social work field, though it is common for entrants of all ages to have a very limited conception of the role of social work and the broader Children & Young People's Service provision. Anecdotal evidence suggests this may be related to a lack of readily accessible information in the public domain, and that this—combined with the requirement for previous experience of working in a related field before being able to access social work training—could potentially hinder mature entrants and people wanting a career change.

2. The profile of social work nationally is considered to be the biggest debilitating factor for any entrants joining the profession, as negative publicity and reports of many staff leaving the profession re-enforces the image that social work is a high-pressured, thankless job, particularly when linked to remuneration and compared with other professions in Health and Education, where the public and media profile is much higher.

3. Rotherham has been running the “Grow Your Own” social work programme for the last two years, where staff have either been funded to attain the Bachelor's degree, or post-graduates have been funded through the MA route. During the roll out of “Grow Your Own”, 100% of the students have been 25 or over, with an age range of 27 years–50 years.

4. The consensus in Rotherham is that the three year bachelor's degree is the right format and level for initial social work training. With the role of social work existing now in a “one children's workforce”, the level of qualification reflects the qualification level requirement of Health colleagues (omitting Health Visitors who require a higher level of qualification than a three year bachelor's degree).

5. Feedback from students undertaking the MA route to social work cites the intense nature of the programme and the amount of work needed in a relatively short time as barriers to successful completion. However, the main area of concern for social work in Rotherham is the new “Combined Degree” being offered by local provider Sheffield Hallam University. Staff at Rotherham feel that a combined course diminishes the importance and identity of both social work and learning disability nursing, and there is little guidance for the structure of the practice learning opportunities, in particular relation to where responsibility for coordinating these placements sits.

6. Current proposals for a probationary year for newly qualified social workers with a protected caseload have been well received by teams, though there is the potential side effect of this putting more undue pressure on existing, experienced workers, as only a third of the usual caseload would be assumed by the newly qualified Social Worker. It may be appropriate to have a formalised “buddying” system for new starters, where they have a formal and recognised relationship with a more experienced worker. Beyond supporting the new member of staff, the organisation can also ensure that any workforce skills at risk from staff retirement could be sustained more effectively.

7. At present, there is no evidence in Rotherham to suggest that the generic social work degree is not fit for purpose, although many staff at Rotherham believe a specific Children and Young People route would be beneficial. Evidence shows that there is an extremely high correlation between final practice learning placements and first employment post. Serious consideration would need to be given to ensure links between the availability of practice learning opportunities within children's services and the recruitment needs of this service are running parallel, to avoid any future shortfalls, though this is an issue which should be managed by the nominated workforce planning lead within the Local Authority. Practice learning teachers have become—by the very nature of social work at the moment and the national shortage thereof—short in supply, and even with an honorarium scheme in operation, it is difficult for staff to balance students with their own caseloads. One area in which this could be remedied is by changing the nature of how existing social workers see students ie not as a drain on resources, but as an added resource to the social work team, and recommendations are made in point 12 of this report as to how this change could be achieved.

8. Whilst the content of training qualifications seems to be appropriate, it is Rotherham's view that the “balance of knowledge, skills, values and experience”, whilst ideally the correct ones are actually aspirational in the current climate and context.

9. There is no clear or anecdotal evidence that the shift to degree level qualification has improved the calibre of recruits or the effectiveness of newly qualified social workers.

10. Higher education institutions are far more likely to offer social work qualifications if they have strong relationships with Local Authorities in the surrounding regional area which ensure that practice learning placements can be found. The experience of these placements should also be at the heart of whether a university chooses to offer this type of qualification, though it is unclear if this is an influence or not. Modifications need to be made to the way in which universities offer and arrange placements to Local Authorities, as at present this is something which severely limits long-term planning, which perpetuates an environment when last minute arrangements have to be made regularly, the result of which seriously jeopardises the holistic placement experience.

11. The CWDC provide workshops and toolkits to support effective workforce planning, though these methods are based on the assumption that an interest in social work is out there. There is little evidence at present to suggest that the CWDC, DCSF and DIUS will jointly support a national campaign to raise the profile of social work as a profession, and this is something that is paramount to the success of future social workers opting into the vocation. Evidence demonstrates how a well thought out and widely advertised campaign can improve the status of a profession, as teaching has benefited in recent years from this kind of national investment and stimulus.

12. The quality of post-qualifying training can be assured by Local Authorities maintaining strong links with both internal staff and external providers, and ensuring that robust evaluation methods are in place to link outcomes from post-qualifying training to the business needs of the Local Authority. One recommendation would be to have post-qualification routes running parallel to one another but in different specialist areas eg one for World Class Practitioner, another for World Class Leader of a service. As social work managers are often drawn from experienced social work practitioners, it makes sense to have the distinction between the two career paths as early on as possible, and provide the appropriate and equally accredited training for either option. In regard to point 7 of this report, it could be part of a social workers commitment to achieving post-qualification status to agree to demonstrate their own competency by becoming a practice teacher. This could be tied into a University's assessment criteria, and would therefore ensure that social workers are continuing to develop post-qualifying whilst also feeding this back into the future of the profession, at a local level. A national directive on this would avoid agreements having to be informally on an ad-hoc basis between Local Authorities and FE providers.

13. Newly qualified social workers will continue to develop if they have a clear and achievable career pathway available to them and they know how and when movement along this pathway can be made. The two greatest problems Local Authorities face is finding the resource to fund further, accredited post-qualification study for existing social workers, and then ensuring that these skills are retained within the Authority. It is not uncommon for Social Workers to develop through either initial qualification or even post qualification, and then take these skills to other Authorities where the recruitment issues are not as severe or the remuneration is more enhanced. Budgetary pressures being what they are, this is something that is very difficult to remedy by remuneration alone, and as long as newly qualified social workers leave Rotherham for other Local Authorities, the situation of social worker shortage becomes a self-perpetuating issue.

14. Employers support the development of social workers as effectively as possible, though again this is something that is placed at greater risk with the advent of the One Children's Workforce and the push towards integration. With the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families declaring that social workers should be educated to Master level once in post, it is difficult for employers to commit to fund this type of training in a fair, equitable and progressive way without either sacrificing development of other areas of the children's workforce, or by having a drip-drip programme for developing social workers which equates to taking the best part of a century to get all staff through this level of qualification. This also has to be balanced with the needs of front-line services, and any and all development of social workers—if accredited—should have a large amount of work based assessment included to ensure that workloads are not overloaded exponentially.

15. Rotherham has a clear commitment to the importance of supervision for all front line workers in C&YPS, and have put in place a joint [along with the PCT] Supervision Policy as part of the role out of Children's Trust requirements. The specific supervision of social workers is seen as a key task, but its integrity and reliability is challenged in times of extreme pressure, both from a public perception and resource point of view.

*April 2009*

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### **Memorandum submitted by the University and College Union**

#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The University and College Union would like the Committee to consider the strategic provision of social work courses to ensure that adequate provision is available in all regions.

Without strategic provision of courses, there will continue to be problems in filling social work vacancies in many regions across the UK.

## INTRODUCTION

- The University and College Union is the largest trade union and professional association for academics, trainers, lecturers, researchers and academic-related staff working in further and higher education throughout the UK.
- UCU has a number of members who are actively involved in the teaching, training and development of social workers and social care professionals. Our members have hands on experience of the challenges faced by the social care profession and are at the forefront of ensuring that the UK has a well-equipped, well trained and professional social care workforce in the future.
- UCU has concerns about the strategic provision of social work and related courses within the higher education sector, as demonstrated by the closure of the University of Reading School of Health and Social Care earlier in 2009—the area is now without adequate training provision.

## WRITTEN EVIDENCE

1. Strategic provision of training for social workers and social care professionals is of great importance to the University and College Union.

2. At the moment there seems to be no overarching strategy in the provision of social care courses, indeed there have been departmental closures in areas where social workers are sorely needed (see case study).

3. The UCU would like to see a strategic plan—which will entail funding considerations both in teaching and research—to ensure the provision of social work and social care courses across the UK. Course provision should be rationally planned to ensure access to courses for all of those who would consider entering the social work profession and to ensure all regions have access to highly trained social workers and care professionals.

4. A number of issues stem from the point of actually having enough people in the social care workforce to provide the much needed service; these issues encompass the basic necessity of filling vacancies, to the “Every Child Matters” aims of ensuring continuity of care for children within the care system. UCU believe that there has never been a better time to assess the system and make changes to help the needs of some of the most vulnerable people in society.

5. There must be an assessment of the availability of social care courses to ensure:

- (a) The supply of adequate numbers of social workers (a) nationally (b) across different regions.
- (b) That people who wish to enter into the social care profession can find a course local to them should they need to.
- (c) The availability of part-time study.
- (d) The availability of courses for professional development.
- (e) That course fees and student debt do not erect a barrier to those wishing to enter into social work.

6. Progress on those points specified above can only enhance the provision of social services nation-wide and will benefit social services across the spectrum, from ensuring vacancies in understaffed departments are filled, to meeting the “Every Child Matters” aims such as continuity of care for those in the social service system.

7. There are two main factors that UCU considers vital in addressing the training and education of the social care workforce, and in meeting the assessment criteria already stated:

- (a) University decision-making in regard to course provision eg course establishment, course cuts, and departmental closures. A cut at one university could currently leave a region without the supply of social workers if needs to fill vacancies (see Case Study.)
- (b) Funding of higher education social care departments in (a) research and (b) teaching. Funding decisions and mechanisms, like the Research Assessment Exercise, have major impacts on the decisions universities make. Recent experience has shown that even if a department is offering high quality teaching, if the RAE results are not favourable, then the department may not be saved from closure.

8. As already stated, many issues around social care stem from the basic ability to train social workers. These issues will range from general availability of social workers to ensuring continuity of care for people within the social service system.

9. It is because of the vast importance of ensuing provision is available to train social work professionals that the University and College Union would like the committee to consider the strategic provision of social work courses.

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## CASE STUDY

10. The University of Reading recently took the decision to close its School of Health and Social Care.
11. The staff within the department and the University in general were opposed to the closure, as was the Reading University Students' Union. The proposed closure was also opposed by a number of local groups including Reading Borough Council and representatives from West Berkshire Council. The British Association of Social Workers stated at the time that the closure could lead to a huge problem in filling social work vacancies in the area. It was widely recognised that the University of Reading School of Health and Social Care provided a service for the wider community and contributed to the continued supply of social work professionals in the wider Berkshire area. The Department was profitable and well established.
12. The decision was taken by the University Council with very little consultation; indeed by the time consultation was sought it seemed that the decision had already been reached.
13. Throughout the campaign to save the School of Health and Social Care, the UCU encountered a number of students and potential students, who felt very let down by the proposals and perplexed as to why such a decision was being taken.
14. Among those who joined the campaign were local single mums. They would not be able to move to another area in order to study as their jobs and family life meant that Reading was the only option for them. Mature students who were considering social work as an option for reskilling were denied the chance to take up such a course and undergraduate students in the department were worried that they would not be able to advance their studies further because of the closure. Local employers—the six Berkshire unitary authorities plus Hampshire and Surrey—sponsored employees to undertake qualifying and post-qualifying training at Reading; this will now cease. This is all entirely antithetical to the government's widening participation agenda and has deprived the Reading area of what would have been highly skilled and trained local people who really care about the area.
15. Against the wishes of the local community, the University Council voted to close the department, seemingly going along with the wishes of the Vice-Chancellor. There was no further accountability, no further discussion—the decision was made arbitrarily and many members of the local community are still struggling to understand why.
16. UCU has severe reservations about a system that ignores the wider local need for such vital public servants as social workers in the very week that Lord Laming's report was published.

*April 2009*

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## Memorandum submitted by Children England

### INTRODUCTION

1. Children England welcomes the decision of the Children, Schools and Families Select Committee to undertake an inquiry into the training of children and families' social workers. It is vital to the social work profession and for children, young people and families more widely to have a thorough, impartial examination of the current state of social work training. We strongly support the Committee's undertaking in examining issues pertaining to the training of social workers to assess the Government's current approaches to training and supporting new social workers.
2. As the leading membership organisation for the children, young people and families voluntary sector, Children England is in a unique position to represent charities that work with children, young people and families. Our members include the largest children's charities in the country through to small local groups. Our mission is to create a fairer world for children, young people and families by championing the voluntary organisations which work on their behalf. The role of the voluntary and community sector in the field of social work is vital not only in directly providing and supporting social workers, but in ensuring that children and families are safe, supported and enabled to thrive.
3. This short submission does not attempt to cover each aspect of Children England's concern in relation into the training of children and families social workers. Rather it sets out some of the key themes that we believe must be addressed, and we would urge the Committee to consider these issues as part of their inquiry into the training of children and families social workers.
4. Children England would be very happy to assist with any further questions the Committee may have with the inquiry. We would also be willing to help the Committee to engage with the children, young people and families voluntary sector.

## CONTEXT AND DRIVERS

5. There are a number of drivers which are impacting on the training of children and families social workers at this point in time. Key issues are:

- Needing to drive forward improvements in the quality of professional practice.
- Attracting and retaining the brightest and best people to work in social work.
- Strengthening the delivery system which supports and challenges social workers.

6. The Government and its partners, including the third sector, needs to develop its thinking and its work programmes to help address the current issues within social work. These include recruitment, retention and issues around morale and status, as well as practice.

7. There is a need to help build confidence and skills for the children and families' social workers doing their job, as well as supporting experienced social workers, and to encourage more to remain in front line roles.

## ENTRY ROUTES TO THE PROFESSION

8. Social work with families and children is one of the most challenging and rewarding careers to enter into. It is also a career with great variety that demands aptness of response, understanding and strong communication skills. As such, the field of social work needs to attract and retain people with many different backgrounds—from the new graduate to mature and experienced people moving from different fields.

9. Flexibility thus has to be a crucial issue in entry into social work—not only to attract a wide range of people with a range of skills and experience, but to ensure that in this current climate of increasing vacancies the maximum amount of people see social work as a viable and flexible option as a long-term career. This however, should not undermine the need for highly skilled, well qualified applicants nor add greater confusion to the myriad of qualifications currently associated with social work.

10. What is required are a series of well-defined entry routes into the profession. This should prevent some potential applicants from being excluded whilst ensuring consistency across the country as to how one can enter the profession.

11. Qualifications are important in terms of ensuring standards in the profession, but these courses need to be delivered in such a way that allows the maximum number of committed individuals to access them.

12. Making routes into the profession flexible, yet ensuring consistent practice across the country needs to be mirrored with greater promotion by the relevant bodies. It is not enough to improve the clarity of entry routes into the profession for those already interested; social work as a career and the ways into it need greater promotion from the outset.

13. Entry routes need to be flexible but without compromising the status of the profession to encourage mature entrants, re-entrants and people considering a career change. For example, degree level qualifications are very expensive. A framework needs to encourage both recruitment and retention, with sustainable funding.

## STRUCTURE OF TRAINING

14. Degree level qualifications do not necessarily deliver the required skill-mix needed. Although degree entry provides in effect a baseline of academic ability, unless the degree course challenges the student both academically and personally the momentum of learning can be lost. It is also important to note that social work degrees provide the first step in entering and developing within the profession.

15. Ongoing career development is highly important. The quality of supervision, support, leadership and management that a social worker has after their initial training and throughout their careers underpins the development of their skills. The degree acts as a foundation to build their career upon. The focus throughout a social worker's career should shift from practice to more emphasis on research with time and experience. Allowing the development of leaders so those entering the profession can aspire is also important.

## CONTENT OF INITIAL TRAINING

16. The content of the initial training through the social work degree has to be generic—it has to cover the crucial legalistic, policy and theoretical frameworks covering everything from elder abuse to child protection. However, the degree should also provide an opportunity for students to develop the vital personal and professional qualities required to become a successful social worker. This could be developed by enabling students to meet with families and young people who have been in contact with social services in the past. This should help to develop the personal skills required of a potential social worker—honoring negotiating skills, becoming aware of inherent power relationships, actively listening and acting promptly and responsibly. This could be facilitated through voluntary sector bodies who are engaged with hard-to-reach families. Although a large part of this can be developed through the placement process it may be of use for social work students to speak with and learn from more experienced social workers and families who have been engaged with social services as separate from the placement process. This would also allow the students greater opportunities to learn and make mistakes within a safe environment.

17. An aspect of training which is missing from social work bachelor degrees is an explicit focus on poverty. Poverty is one of the most common features of families whose children come to the attention of social workers. It is not the only factor involved but families on low income are far more likely to be required to have contact with social care services. The implication is that social work courses need to equip future social workers more fully—with the motivation, knowledge and skills to deal with the poverty of the families with whom they work.

18. Social workers, once in the field, have to balance the realities of their work with the complex systems and policy frameworks within which their employer organisations exist. The continued and important emphasis on child-centred frontline work and the drive for joined-up working across agencies to support this needs to be conveyed strongly through initial training.

#### POST-QUALIFYING TRAINING AND CAREER PATHS

19. It has been difficult to recruit social workers with relevant experience. It used to be a widespread expectation that someone with post-qualifying experience would be expected to fill vacant positions. This is no longer the case and what is now happening is that staff are being recruited to post without the specialist experience. This de-professionalises the profession and reduces the quality of service being delivered.

20. It is important to take account of the specialist services offered both regionally and nationally. Clear pathways need to exist to recruit specialist staff for these areas allowing transferability across each specialism.

#### QUALITY

21. The feedback from employers is that incorrect placements are being provided and an alternative is to provide a regulated route similar to health in order to measure and evaluate. Ideally, there is scope to promote integration placements across a range of organisations, to enable staff to develop a real and better understanding.

22. The quality of training needs to be measured to ensure it is reaching standards, but at the same time needs flexibility to meet particular regional needs. Training needs to be consistent throughout the country. Training should be quality assured by one agency.

23. Any national frameworks or models that are to be developed should allow for regional variation and disgression, particularly around pay and reward. As a proxy to this a national framework should also include pay structures related to post as currently reflected in teaching. This would help specifically in developing and retaining staff. There are challenges of negotiating access to training and funding.

24. The flipside to developing staff qualifications is that qualifications may mean more pay—who will find the increase? There needs to be the ability to reward staff properly for the levels of expertise acquired. We cannot have good services for children on the cheap, with insecure funding.

#### SUPPLY OF INITIAL TRAINING

25. There needs to be integrated workforce planning and voluntary sector service quality and choice. The understanding of the demographics of the social work population is inadequate and there is no supply model of the social work workforce unlike teachers and nurses. This means that at this moment in time it is difficult to ensure adequate training capacity and workforce planning.

26. A statement of collaboration could be signed by key partners/agencies to ensure integrated working within social work and that best practice is shared. There also needs to be simple and equitable access to funding for training.

#### POST-QUALIFYING TRAINING AND CAREER PATHS

27. The profession would need to have mainstream funding to create a sustainable environment and continuing professionalisation of the role, and status recognition within and outside of the third sector. This will ensure that accessibility is for all organisations no matter how small. The stability that mainstream funding would provide would allow organisations to succession plan efficiently and effectively.

*April 2009*

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#### **Memorandum submitted by Staffordshire County Council**

In providing evidence to the Committee we have used the six headings originally provided.

- Staffordshire County Council feel that broadly speaking the social work degree can be improved upon but does not require radical intervention.
- Newly qualified social workers and those in the early stages of professional development need additional support along the lines of the CWDC programmes.
- QA of HEI provision needs to be sharpened and more involved with employer partners.



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- There needs to be a strong reinforcing of employer/HEI partnerships.
  - These are the views of members of the Employee Development team whose role is to manage Practice education, Newly Qualified Social Work programme and Post-qualifying programmes in social work, in partnership with six Universities in the West Midlands.

## 1. ENTRY ROUTES TO THE PROFESSION

Current entry routes allow for both undergraduate and post-graduate entry and are sufficiently flexible to allow for mature students and those making career changes who require access to learn courses.

## 2. STRUCTURE OF TRAINING

The existing three year Bachelor's/two years Master's degrees have provided the right amount of training and are pitched at the right level to have improved the quality of beginning social work practitioners. The increase of Practice learning by 100% to 200 days was instrumental in this. The development of the Newly Qualified Social Worker programme by the Childrens Workforce Development Council has also encouraged employers to implement protected caseloads and additional training to provide additional skills and to foster the gaining of experience in a protected environment.

## 3. CONTENT OF INITIAL TRAINING

The generic social work initial degree is felt to be generally fit for purpose but there is undoubtedly a limit to the amount of specialised training that can be given in an initial degree. The NQSW project and the proposed Early Professional Development project plus the existing Post-qualifying framework do go some way to addressing the need for ongoing CPD. The content of the existing training does not always reflect the tasks required as this is a constantly changing arena. The NQSW year and EPD/PQ can, however be modified to accommodate these requirements at a local level.

## 4. QUALITY

Paper-based reviews are not the most effective means of evaluating or quality assuring qualifications and Ofsted style impromptu visitations would be much more likely to provide an accurate snapshot of the performance of HEIs. A return to the more traditional review system involving partners in the review would give a greater involvement of employers in the design, development and delivery of qualification programmes at all levels.

Practice placements can be and are quality assured through the partnership arrangements between HEIs and employers and this needs to be reinforced through regulation by GSCC.

The switch to degree level entry to the profession has been a mixed blessing in that it has resulted in the recruitment of some very able academic employees who have enhanced the profession by their ability to use evidence-based research to underpin their practice.

An alternative view suggests that recruits with limited life and previous work experience means some newly qualified staff are only partially equipped to deal with the complex challenges of face-to face direct work with service users. For some there is a gap in their professional confidence and credibility particularly in the multi-professional arena where their lack of experience can place them at some disadvantage.

## 5. SUPPLY OF INITIAL TRAINING

From the employers perspective it would seem that the drivers are to make the profession graduate only entry and that initial training is fully funded.

## 6. POST-QUALIFYING TRAINING AND CAREER PATHS

The quality, suitability and take-up of PQ training can be assured by the ring-fencing of training budgets for this purpose. This will allow employers to feel able to regularly recruit to PQ programmes knowing the budget is secure for this purpose. Employers also need to be more strongly represented in participation in Partnership forums with HEIs as was the case prior to the most recent reform of the PQ framework.

NQSWs need to feel that they are protected from the full force of a heavy and complex caseload and that in their first years of employment they can continue to build up their experience whilst being able to utilise the reflective skills and theories/research learned in the HEIs and on placements.

From this employers perspective we fully support our social work workforce by providing a mixed economy of education, training and other learning opportunities from induction through to Leadership and management.

As the second largest employer in the region we provide on the job training for front line supervisors which is enhanced by in-house and externally provided education and training.

May 2009

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### Memorandum submitted by Bournemouth University

We are grateful for the opportunity to respond to the Select Committee's call for evidence into the education and training of children and families social workers (many of our comments are transferable across the range of social work activities, recognising the central importance of generic first stage education). We particularly welcome the renewed vigour and interest in enhancing social work education, and concomitantly social work practice, a complex and challenging area of social life. Our responses follow:

#### ENTRY ROUTES TO THE PROFESSION

*Are entry routes to social work sufficiently flexible to encourage mature entrants, re-entrants and people considering a career change?*

We believe our entry routes have a degree of flexibility that allows mature entrants to apply, eg specific access to higher education programmes delivered by our local partner FE colleges ensures applicants for the social work programme are given an interview if they meet the (DH and GSCC) specified academic requirements for the programme.

Whilst bursaries assist with the costs of undertaking social work programmes, the introduction of variable fees create barriers for those students with care-giving and familial responsibilities. Should fees be raised in future they are highly likely to create a significant barrier to mature entry and to people considering a career change. There is evidence that NHS bursaries for nursing draw potential students from Social Work to Nursing.

The importance of maintaining a wide entry gate is important for the profession and we would seek to offer a master's route alongside our undergraduate route which would also promote greater access for mature students who already have a degree. However, should they be penalised for taking an equivalent level qualification this would be counterproductive.

#### STRUCTURE OF TRAINING

*Is a three-year bachelor's degree/two-year master's degree the right format and level for initial social work training?*

*Following initial training, how should newly-qualified social workers be equipped with the further skills and experience they need?*

The current format of initial education and training provides a useful starting point for entry to the profession. But it is an entry level qualification and not one that produces someone capable of acting at the highest level of the profession—this takes years of training and experience and it is dangerous to think otherwise. We feel it is beneficial to have a structured, compulsory pathway for continuous professional development incorporating the NQSW status to be overseen by the GSCC and linked to professional registration at a higher level of competence followed by further education and training to take social workers subsequently to a yet higher level—a master's level post-qualifying award that would allow for social workers to specialise once in practice.

Research that we have undertaken here at Bournemouth suggests that the current format prepares people well for initial practice but that social workers are often faced with complex and increased demands that are not appropriate to take on without further training (see Bates *et al*, forthcoming).<sup>2</sup>

#### CONTENT OF INITIAL TRAINING

*Is the generic social work degree fit for the purpose of training children and families social workers? Is there sufficient scope for specialisation?*

*Does the content of training reflect the tasks social workers will be asked to undertake when in employment?*

*Is the balance of knowledge, skills, values and experience correct?*

We consider the initial degree qualification to be an introduction to a career in social work. We feel it is beneficial to be a generic qualification and specialisation should follow at post qualifying level.

The publication of the Lord Laming's recent report has provided the framework to successfully argue for changes in the curriculum of our degree such that the content focusing on child protection and adult safeguarding has been significantly increased. However, it would be to the detriment of the education currently should this demand specialism rather than focus within the degree. The emphasis on increased practice learning days within the degree was welcomed by the social work sector and, indeed, by many in higher education at the time. However, this has led to a highly concentrated curriculum during university learning time with us wanting to teach social work students more and to developing/seeking placements from a variety of areas. Whilst we pride ourselves at Bournemouth, and indeed have been commended by the GSCC for developing our placement range, we feel that the demands are not conducive to ensuring that all social work students gain access to the highest quality statutory placements which are at a premium. Less placement days in a core agency may be worth more than increased days in a different agency. What we do

<sup>2</sup> Bates, N, Immins, T, Parker, J, Keen, S, Rutter, L, Brown, K and Zsigo, S (forthcoming) "Baptism of Fire": The first year in the life of a newly qualified social worker, *Social Work Education*.

not have, of course, is the research evidence to indicate whether or not increased placement days has a beneficial impact on social work education and the implication of recent expressed disquiet by the GSCC suggests it may not. Research is imperative here.

## QUALITY

*How effectively does the General Social Care Council regulate the quality of training?*

*How can the quality, suitability and supply of practice placements be assured? (Please see last answer as well as following)*

*Has the switch to degree-level qualification improved the calibre of recruits and the effectiveness of newly-qualified social workers?*

The quality, suitability and supply of practice placements require us to work closely with our Local Authority partners. A renewed emphasis on partnership is warranted to ensure that we work closely together to make this work, although this must be undertaken in a way that preserves the benefits of HEI autonomy in respect of knowledge creation and research for this is where unexpected and beneficial change occurs. The ongoing CPD-PQ framework needs to include the student placement as part of the learning culture within the team; this would include the need to quality assure student placements. The quality of SW students need to be assured ie knowledge, skills and values and this goes back to the interview process and developing criteria that select the best of applicants (a recent concern expressed that social work students may have the lowest entry criteria certainly does not feel appropriate or ring true when considering those nursing programmes accepting applicants to higher education with GCSE qualification but without A levels, and it seems that we have a tension between flexible entry—through Access to HE courses, and a need to raise entry points, ours have risen to 260 UCAS points and a review of comparator institutions were asking for 240 within the last two years. This is not a low entry gate!). A concern that has developed relates to changes in the calibre of all students entering university education and the preparation received in compulsory education.

Applicants need to have basic knowledge, skills and values. Students not ready for practice should not attend placement. We need to be clearer about fitness for practice and this is where the regulator can help; leaving this to universities may create differential approaches. However, what also needs to be addressed is the question of HEFCE penalties for student attrition. Universities will of course attempt to ensure that public money spent on the education of students realises a fruitful conclusion, ie students complete the course successfully. It is imperative that we are not penalised if we determine that a student is unfit and must be prevented from completing the course by removal. We need to maintain standards of practice educator's. We must support their ongoing CPD and encourage the take up of specific courses that were so successful under the old PQ framework—the Practice Teacher Award. Universities could become a central part of the community of professional learning and a centre of relevant research. A further aspect that would help the development of quality local authority and statutory placements is the reinstatement of the performance indicator for provision of placements.

## POST-QUALIFYING TRAINING AND CAREER PATHS

*How can the quality, suitability and take-up of post-qualifying training be assured?*

*What factors influence the continuing development of newly-qualified social workers and their future career decisions?*

*How well do employers support the development of social workers?*

*How well are social workers trained to deliver front-line supervision?*

The PQ should be set within a clear compulsory standardised framework, supported by the GSCC and employers. The framework should be simplified and rationalised. Ring fenced funding is crucial to the up-take of PQ training by practitioners and the practitioner should be fully supported with protected case-loads and appropriate support for study. The PQ training needs to be embedded with the accepted culture of the organisation, starting with the NQSW year, consolidation and specialist awards and leading to higher Academic awards reflecting a framework common within other countries. This is important in an increasingly globalised world where the transfer of qualifications is necessary and where understanding is important. This take son an increased imperative given the changes to the definition of social work being undertaken by the International federation of Social Workers and due to be launched in Hong King 2010.

*Professor Jonathan Parker*

On behalf of the Centre for Social Work & Social Policy, Bournemouth University

May 2009

## Memorandum submitted by John Barraclough, Senior Lecturer in Social Work

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This submission will comment upon:

- Social work training.
- Recruitment of students for training.
- Practice placements.
- Post-qualifying training in practice teaching and assessment.

### 2. BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF THE WRITER

I was involved in the implementation of the practice learning requirements for the Diploma in Social Work at Middlesex University between 1989 and 1992. I was responsible for the post-qualifying Practice Teaching Award Programme for London Metropolitan University from 1994 to 2002, and have been a Senior Lecturer in Social Work at London Metropolitan University since 2002. I was responsible for devising and implementing the practice learning requirements for the BSc and MSc in social work programmes in 2002. I am responsible for practice learning on the social work degree programmes. A major part of this responsibility is the preparation of students for their periods of assessed practice (placements), and I teach Child Development and Theoretical Perspectives in Social Work. I have published articles in *The Journal of Practice Teaching* and in *Community Care* magazine, and have undertaken research into the assessment of practice learning. I have been a qualified social worker for 28 years. I spent 10 years in generic fieldwork practice since qualifying.

### 3. EVALUATION OF QUALIFYING PROGRAMMES

The General Social Care Council has taken a “hands-off” approach to the monitoring and evaluation of social work degree programmes. The quality assurance process for programmes consists of a paper exercise every five years. This is in contrast to the process under the previous qualifications, which involved regular inspections of the programmes. These inspections involved visits to universities. Discussions were held with teaching staff, partner agencies and students. It was a more rigorous process; it enabled problems to be identified and forced universities to address problem areas.

#### *Organisation and Delivery of Training Programmes*

3.1 It is widely accepted within the social work profession that generic training is essential if social workers are to have a sufficiently broad and balanced view of the range of problems faced by vulnerable people, of the range of professional responsibilities across all specialist services, and of available resources to various client groups. It is also essential for social workers to have a balanced view of society in order to make appropriately informed decisions, particularly in relation to the assessment and management of personal risk. Generic programmes enable students to study academic modules which relate to all client groups, and to experience assessed practice with adults and with children and families. (*See Barraclough, J. Community Care, May, 2000*)

3.2 This compliments the specialist nature of social work, as students who have studied a generic programme are more able informed choices as to the area of specialism they wish to pursue once qualified. Specialist programmes would involve students making uninformed choices about the area of practice they wish to pursue. This would be likely to lead to a larger numbers of social work students dropping out of education, as they will not have had the opportunity to properly think through their choice of specialism, and many, therefore, would inevitably make what they perceive to be the wrong choice. Also, forcing students to make a premature choice of such significance would not be conducive to fostering a sense of commitment to the service chosen.

#### *Preparation for Practice Learning*

3.3 The structure of the current three-year undergraduate degree requires programmes to deem students “safe for practice” before they start their first placement. We achieve this by having students in college for one academic year before they go out to placement, and by requiring students to pass a module designed specifically to test their readiness and safety for practice. Within the module students are introduced to professional practice in a variety of ways. Students work with practitioners and service users in college, and visit a social work agency to shadow a qualified social worker. The teaching is experimental, which enables students to understand their strengths and weaknesses, and to work through their fears and anxieties about practice. The teaching is designed to test students’ communication skills, their ability to deal with conflict, to reflect on their actions and on how to make the best use of supervision. The other element to this module is that it allows teachers to assess students’ behaviour and attitudes. These are aspects of professional practice that are not easily assessed through the competency model of assessment currently applied to practice learning. We can address issues of student behaviour which may have a negative impact on their practice. This includes issues of timekeeping, the ability to cooperate and work with others, attitudes to service users etc. This can be described as “soft” evidence, rather than the “hard” evidence of being able to meet competencies, in other words it is not only about what they do, but about how they do it.

3.4 Graduates are only admitted on to the two-year MSc programme if they have previous social care or social work experience. These students are deemed safe for practice by virtue of their applications, and through the provision of references. This process is less thorough than the process for undergraduates as described above, and the nature of a two-year programme means that students undertake their first placements after just 12 weeks in college. This means that we take risks with MSc students when they go into their assessed placements, and I suggest that all students, regardless of status, be required to properly prepare for placement in college before commencing placement. This may involve an extension to the two-year graduate programme.

#### *Location of Social Work Education and Training*

3.5 Universities operate on a business model and there is a constant tension between financial considerations and considerations about the quality of recruitment processes, teaching and assessment. It may be beneficial to consider if social work education should be provided outside of the university sector.

3.6 London Metropolitan University is currently seeking to make 25% of staff redundant in an attempt to reduce running costs. Although the social work programme has been assured that it will not suffer from direct cuts in staffing, we face, along with all other University departments, an increase in staff student ratios from 1 to 22, to 1 to 28. Such an increase would have extremely negative affects on the quality of the teaching provided at London Metropolitan. I and colleagues believe that existing staff/student ratios are already too high to ensure quality, and we therefore believe that an increase in the ratio would lead to inadequate admissions processes, to ineffective teaching and to unreliable student assessments. In addition, we face indirect threats to the quality of the social work programmes through the cutting back on media and IT services, and from the loss of library facilities.

3.7 It would appear therefore that an examination of how universities deliver social work education is necessary in order to ensure that universities are delivering education that is of a high standard, and fit for purpose. I would suggest that the current way universities are funded jeopardises the quality of professional training, and consideration should be given to providing protection for professional courses from the vacillations of the economic realities in higher education.

3.8 There is a related issue regarding regulations within universities that provide students with protection against unfair assessment. Such regulations are complex, and students have a high level of protection against decisions that negatively affect them. This often seems inappropriate for social work students, and because of the requirement on the University to provide proof of inappropriate student behaviour, we are frequently unable to appropriately address issues of student behaviour when it raises questions about the student's suitability for social work because of the level of proof required. This results in students being given the benefit of the doubt, which may be appropriate in non-professional degrees, but in social work appears inappropriate because of the nature of professional qualifications.

#### 4. SELECTION OF STUDENTS FOR TRAINING

The selection of students for social work training is also compromised by the resource issues referred to above. Social work degree courses are massively over-subscribed. On the face of it this appears to be a positive thing, but it also means that university admissions processes are overwhelmed by the task of selection. This means that students are admitted who, in retrospect, are considered to be unsuitable. When the unsuitability is on academic grounds it is relatively straightforward to terminate their studies. As described above, it is far more complex to do this in relation to student behaviour, or in relation to the quality of their practice in placement. (*See Barraclough, J & Schumann, C "Research into the Role of the Practice Assessor" The Journal of Practice Teaching, Vol 3, Number Two, 2000*)

4.1 It is therefore very difficult to terminate the studies of students where there are concerns about their suitability. The module I refer to in section 3.3 above provides a thorough assessment of the suitability of each student undertaking the module. If this module was part of an extended admissions process, or a pre-course requirement, universities would be more certain that the student is appropriate for, and capable of completing the course, and of being an asset to the profession.

4.2 It would be beneficial if universities had more rigorous and extended admissions processes, which may involve students in passing an extended piece of assessment.

#### 5. PRACTICE PLACEMENTS

The practical aspect of social work training has always been in an anomalous situation with regard to other professions. Statutory social work agencies are not required to, and therefore do not have a culture of providing training to students on qualifying courses. This is in stark contrast to the teaching and nursing professions, where student teachers and nurses are integrated into the regular activity of teachers and nurses. As long as there is no compulsion on statutory social work agencies to provide practice placements, universities will be in the invidious position of continually having to persuade, cajole and occasionally beg agencies to provide student placements. This means that universities cannot effectively plan practice

learning, as students often do not know where they will be placed up until the point of obtaining a placement. This is extremely unprofessional and detracts from the quality of the experience for students. Each year a proportion of students cannot be placed at the right time, and their studies are then delayed. The increased emphasis on practice learning in the new degree programmes was welcomed, but without the commitment or ability of statutory agencies to provide placements, the new requirements have not been as effective as they should have been.

5.1 At London Metropolitan we insist that all students must have one adults and one children & families placement. We are committed to this as we feel that it increases the quality of the training considerably. By implementing this structure we make things increasingly difficult for ourselves, and we come under constant pressure from students who are not placed on time to compromise our requirements and place students in less than ideal settings.

5.2 I note with some concern therefore Ed Balls' statement on 7 May regarding to allocation of 200 more university places for social work students. In itself this can only be applauded, but given the already acute shortage of placements in London local authorities, it means that London authorities, which are suffering some of the highest vacancies rates in the UK, will not be able to properly take advantage of this scheme, and, if the additional student places on courses involve London universities, the scheme could aggravate an already serious problem.

5.3 For the last three years I have written to all 32 London authorities asking about placement opportunities in general, and, in particular, trying to get them interested offering placements to our final year students, who often go on to work for the agency in which they do their final placement. Such a scheme would help universities meet their placement requirements, and help local authorities to fill vacant posts with newly qualified workers who would have had an extended learning and assessment experience in that agency, and, who could therefore take up a position having been assessed in the work they will go on to do in the position of qualified worker. Despite the obvious benefits of such a scheme, in three years I have received positive replies from only two London authorities.

5.4 We will not be able to increase the supply of high quality qualified social workers unless there are requirements on all local authorities to commit themselves to professional training through the provision of practice placements as a regular aspect of their activities.

## 6. POST-QUALIFYING TRAINING IN PRACTICE TEACHING

Along with the introduction of the Diploma in Social Work in 1992 came the Practice Teaching Award. It was envisaged that this award would lead to all qualified social workers having a post-qualifying award in practice teaching. It was hoped that this would then lead to the embedding of practice learning within social work agencies. Unfortunately this has not happened for reasons that are too complex to be examined here. The introduction of the PQ framework for social work superseded the Practice Teaching Award, and, in eyes of many, this constituted a downgrading of practice teaching.

6.1 The philosophy of every qualified social worker having a qualification, and an active role in the practice teaching of students has been abandoned. Under the new PQ framework qualified workers have to choose between several post-qualifying qualifying options, practice teaching being one of them. This will result in only a small section of the workforce being qualified and actively involved in the teaching and assessing of student practice. This seriously undermines the government's intentions under the social work degree of placing a higher emphasis on practice learning.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Require the GSCC to inspect qualifying programmes at more frequent intervals, to visit programmes and canvas opinion from a range of interested groups.
- Maintain generic social work degree programmes.
- Require all students, regardless of status, to undertake college teaching and assessment that tests their readiness for practice before commencing the first placement.
- Consider if universities are the best place for the provision of social work education, or introducing protective measures that would enable university social work programmes to provide a stable high quality social work education.
- Consideration be given to enabling universities to have more rigorous and extended admissions processes.

## Memorandum submitted by the Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE)

### SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- Children's rights must be an integral part of training for social workers.
- Appropriate participatory techniques must be used to elicit children's views in care review meetings and this must be addressed in training.
- Children's views must be taken into account when reviewing social worker training.
- Decisions regarding placement moves must be made in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).
- Decisions regarding contact with siblings must be consistent with children's rights.
- Social workers must have adequate knowledge of the support available for children leaving care.

### INTRODUCTION

1. The Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE) is a coalition of more than 380 voluntary and statutory organisations seeking the full implementation of the UNCRC in England. Our vision is of a society where the human rights of all children are recognised and realised.

2. CRAE welcomes the timely decision to review the training of social workers following recommendations from Lord Laming's review of the child protection system<sup>3</sup> and the Select Committee's own research into looked after children.<sup>4</sup> Given the recent bad press surrounding the social work profession, it is important to state at the outset that a recent nationwide investigation conducted by CRAE uncovered many examples of social workers going beyond the call of duty to ensure children and young people had access to opportunities to develop their skills and talents.<sup>5</sup> However, this same investigation uncovered significant areas for improvement which additional or revised training for social workers could help to address. This submission focuses on those areas.

### CHILDREN'S RIGHTS MUST BE AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE TRAINING OF SOCIAL WORKERS

3. CRAE commends the emphasis Lord Laming and the Select Committee have placed on putting the best interests of the child at the centre of all decisions regarding a child's welfare and protection in accordance with Section 1 of the Children Act 1989 and article 3 of the UNCRC. Making decisions which serve the best interests of the child and uphold the principle of child protection is fundamental to understanding and respecting children's basic human rights, and it is important that training for social workers is developed in this context. Following its examination of the UK Government in September 2008, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern about the general lack of knowledge and understanding about the UNCRC among professionals in the UK, identifying social workers as one group in particular need of "adequate and systematic training".

4. The UN Committee recommended that:

the State party further strengthen its efforts, to ensure that all provisions of the Convention are widely known and understood by adults . . . It also recommends the reinforcement of adequate and systematic training of all professional groups working for and with children, in particular law enforcement officials, immigration officials, media, teachers, health personnel, social workers and personnel of childcare institutions.<sup>6</sup>

5. There are several reasons why training for social workers needs to be built around an explicit children's rights approach.

5(a) Human rights are widely accepted to be "universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated".<sup>7</sup> This means, for example, that article 20, which gives children who are temporarily or permanently separated from their family the right to special protection and assistance provided by the state, cannot be considered in isolation from other articles of the UNCRC; there are other rights which are directly relevant to a child's entitlement to alternative care. Of particular importance are the UNCRC's four general principles: non-discrimination (article 2); the best interests of the child as a primary consideration (article 3); the right to life, survival and development (article 6); and the child's right to express their views in all matters affecting them and to have those views given due weight (article 12). In addition, article 9 (giving children the right to stay in regular contact with both parents so long as this is the best thing for the child) and article 19 (guaranteeing protection from harm) are also directly relevant to a comprehensive understanding of the rights of children in the care system. A better understanding of these rights and how they interlink would improve the development, commissioning and delivery of local services, as well as the outcomes achieved by children and young people in the care system.

<sup>3</sup> Lord Laming (2009), *The protection of children in England: A progress report*.

<sup>4</sup> Children, Schools and Families Select Committee (2009), *Looked After Children: Volume I—Report and formal minutes; and Volume II—Oral and written evidence*.

<sup>5</sup> CRAE (2008), *What do they know? Investigating the human rights concerns of children and young people in living in England*.

<sup>6</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2008). *Concluding observations: United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (CRC/C/GBR/CO/4)*, paragraph 67g.

<sup>7</sup> United Nations. 2003. *Vienna Declaration and Programme for Action*. A/CONF.157/23, paragraph 5.

5(b) Social workers often have difficult judgments to make between competing priorities such as “best value” versus safeguarding children’s “best interests”. A thorough knowledge of the UNCRC would enable social workers to make the best informed decisions about keeping children safe. This would include understanding not only the rights children have but also how those rights should be balanced against the rights of parents.

5(c) Adopting a children’s rights approach to social work would bring the UK in line with internationally recognised children’s rights standards. It would also provide a comprehensive framework for ensuring children receive basic human rights, and enable social workers to demonstrate to Ofsted how they are improving the safety and well-being of children in the local area.

6. Recent research conducted by CRAE has shown that many key personnel in the children’s workforce are unaware of internationally recognised standards for children’s rights. In a survey sent to all directors of children’s services in England to establish levels of local awareness and implementation of the UNCRC, we found that:

- Inadequate knowledge of the UNCRC was identified as the second major barrier (after resources) to the fulfilment of children’s rights.
- 19% of local authorities did not have a designated person in charge of implementing the UNCRC in the organisation.
- 77% of local authorities did not explicitly reference the UNCRC in their Children and Young People’s Plan.
- None of the 140 local authorities who completed the survey refer to the UNCRC in the job description of the director of children’s services.
- Out of those local authorities who had received training on the UNCRC and who had incorporated the UNCRC into their daily work, only 14% felt they had an “excellent” understanding of children’s rights.<sup>8</sup>

7. Although the aforementioned study focuses only on the UNCRC, it is arguable that if Government truly wants to make the UK the best place in the world for children to grow up, social workers must be familiar with their broader statutory responsibilities, principally under the Children Act 1989, the Children Act 2004 and Children and Young Persons Act 2008, and with their safeguarding responsibilities under the latest iteration of *Working Together*. The UNCRC would give social workers a framework to inform decisions relating to these statutory duties and for this reason we strongly urge that a child rights approach be adopted when making any revisions to current training for children and families social workers.

#### APPROPRIATE PARTICIPATORY TECHNIQUES MUST BE USED TO ELICIT CHILDREN’S VIEWS IN CARE REVIEW MEETINGS AND THIS MUST BE ADDRESSED IN TRAINING

8. CRAE’s nationwide investigation suggested that there is wide variation across the country in the extent to which children have a say in their care review meeting, despite the duty laid down in the Children Act 1989 (amended in the Children Act 2004) for social workers to ascertain a child’s wishes and feelings and give them due consideration. Not listening to the views of children led to criticism from children that social workers were failing to tailor care plans to their specific needs.<sup>9</sup>

9. Section 53 of the Children Act 2004 places new duties on social workers to give due consideration to children’s wishes and feelings when undertaking a child protection enquiry or a children in need assessment. Two years after it came into force, the Government was asked in Parliament what guidance it had issued to local authorities, and how it intended to monitor the implementation of the new duty. The minister gave a very inadequate response.<sup>10</sup> At the end of 2007, CRAE made a Freedom of Information request to all directors of children’s services in England to determine how they had implemented this new provision. We found nearly 10% of respondents had been personally unaware of the new provision until receiving the CRAE survey (13 of 139 respondents). Only a third of local authorities that responded said action had been taken to raise awareness of Section 53 among social workers, while 24 (18%) said they were not aware of any action, and a further 19 (15%) replied they had taken no action.

10. When discussing having a say, children and young people raised concerns about social workers not dealing with administrative duties (such as enabling children to travel to visit family members, and ensuring money allowances for clothes). The failure to consult children and young people when decisions were being made about their care and to explain the outcomes of decisions fully had the effect of making some feel belittled by the care system and silenced by their lack of opportunity to take part in real decisions affecting their lives.

... they say that they’re listening to you, and then they just don’t because they say they’re going to do something for you and then they never do it, so you can’t trust them.

<sup>8</sup> CRAE (2009), *Beyond Article 12: The local implementation on the UNCRC in England*.

<sup>9</sup> Unless otherwise referenced, the following quotes from children are taken from CRAE (2008), *What do they know? Investigating the human rights concerns of children and young people in England*.

<sup>10</sup> House of Lords written answer, 19 March 2007: *Hansard* Column WA164.



11. Research shows that not being able to contribute to decision-making can be a particular problem for children with special educational needs. Government figures have shown that more than a quarter (28%) of children in care have special educational needs compared with only 3% of all children.<sup>11</sup> It is therefore fundamentally important that methods used by social workers to elicit the views of children in care are inclusive, age-appropriate and participatory. This is in keeping with the child's right to have a say in all decisions which affect their lives as outlined in Article 12 of the UNCRC.

#### CHILDREN'S VIEWS MUST BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT WHEN REVIEWING SOCIAL WORKER TRAINING

12. CRAE would strongly encourage the Children, Schools and Families Committee to actively seek the views of children in care as part of this inquiry—the findings from CRAE's nationwide investigation and the work of the Children's Rights Director give strong testimony to the fact that many children in care have informed and useful views about the training that should be given to social workers.

13. CRAE understands that the Children's Development Workforce Council has been commissioned to involve children, young people and their families in the development and rollout of leadership training to all directors of children's services. We hope that the Children, Schools and Families Committee will recommend a similar approach for social worker training, particularly given the unique insights service users can provide in identifying areas of further training.

#### DECISIONS REGARDING PLACEMENT MOVES MUST BE MADE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE UNCRC

14. CRAE is concerned at the high number of children who continue to be moved frequently between placements; at 31 March 2008 11.4% of children in England had been in three or more placements during the preceding 12 months.<sup>12</sup> A National Voice has cited placement moves and a lack of support from carers as the two biggest impediments to educational achievement. Frequent placement moves have also led to criticism from children and young people that there are "*too many people interfering*" in their lives:

I think nowadays kids in care have their heads messed with just by everyone, everyone and anyone.

15. In light of these findings, CRAE would recommend that the UNCRC is used as the framework for all decisions relating to children requiring a delicate balance of competing priorities, such as those relating to a placement move.

#### DECISIONS REGARDING CONTACT WITH SIBLINGS MUST BE CONSISTENT WITH CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

16. Legislation requires that children are placed with their siblings "so far as is reasonably practicable" or consistent with the child's welfare. However, research by the NSPCC examining children's experiences of care following the Children Act 1989 found that four in every 10 children said they did not have enough contact with their siblings.<sup>13</sup> A National Voice found that 83% of children in care who do not live with their birth siblings said they would like to see more of their siblings. One in six children in care that took part in CRAE's focus group interviews had not been asked their views about staying in contact with siblings. These children suggested that alternative methods should be made available to enable children to stay in touch, and that sibling contact should be actively encouraged. It is therefore crucial that the training of social workers address the issue of sibling contact and, where appropriate, encourages alternative forms of communication.

#### SOCIAL WORKERS MUST HAVE ADEQUATE KNOWLEDGE OF THE SUPPORT AVAILABLE FOR CHILDREN IN LEAVING CARE

18. One of the major issues emerging from CRAE's investigation which has direct implications for the training of social workers concerns the support available to young people to assist them with the transition from care to independent living. This includes providing information about the benefits and support young people are entitled to on leaving care. Although most young people we spoke to seemed well informed about opportunities for education, jobs and accommodation, the majority wanted to ensure that effective support would be put in place to help them with this transition.

19. One young person told us:

I think that you leave care normally when you're 16. You go on 16-plus and them getting you a flat and stuff like that. I know some kids might not think this sounds such a good idea and in some ways I don't either but I think you still need help when you move out with Social Services because I know a lot of my friends in care that have been 16 moved into a flat and been really happy, yes, I'm out of care, I'm on my own now, but then they mess up again because they're on their own and then they start doing drugs because they're on their own. I'm not saying they need to stay in care longer or anything. They just need more support becoming independent and going into a flat on their own. Do you know what I mean?

<sup>11</sup> DfES (2007), *Care Matters: Time for change*.

<sup>12</sup> DCSF (2008), *Children looked after in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending 31 March 2008*.

<sup>13</sup> DfES (2007), *Data on penalty notices, fast track to attendance, parenting orders and parenting contracts for period 2 September 2006 to 31 December 2006*.

20. Research carried out with care leavers living in three regions of the UK by Rainer (now Catch 22) found that almost one in six (16%) young people were not in suitable supported accommodation.<sup>14</sup> Similar results were uncovered by A National Voice, who in surveying more than 600 care leavers found that one in ten had no place of their own and were “sofa surfing” because of a lack of communication between housing and social services.<sup>15</sup> This lack of joined-up working also emerged from CRAE’s research, where children and young people claimed that some social workers gave contradictory information because they were unfamiliar with the client’s case file or system processes, or because they lacked knowledge of appropriate and local referral services.

21. One young person told us:

... one time one social worker saying, oh, yes, we’re going to sort you out with a flat, blah blah, we’ll get you on the system, come down and see me. So, I went down. Oh, he’s not in today but I’ll see you and they were saying something totally different. Oh, we can’t get you on, we’ll have to do this. They don’t talk to each other. Then, when I saw my social worker, when he came back in and spoke to me, he said totally the opposite again. He didn’t even know that someone else had spoken to me when he came in. They just need to communicate more and explain what’s happening.

22. It is particularly important that social workers are able to appropriately support children in need of counselling and therapeutic support. Nearly half of children in care have a clinically recognisable mental health disorder, and six out of 19 have been subject to abuse or neglect, yet the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) 2005 mapping found that only 16% of children in care were receiving mental health services.<sup>16</sup> In light of these findings CRAE would recommend that the training for social workers specifically addresses knowledge of the range of mental health services available to children and young people, and ensuring that decisions regarding referral to these services are made in conjunction with the young person.

#### FUTURE STEPS

23. CRAE has considerable expertise in children’s rights and would be extremely willing to engage in further dialogue on any of the issues noted in this submission. In terms of related work the Committee may find it useful to be aware of, CRAE is currently considering the value of developing a children’s rights audit tool for use by local authorities to establish their level of compliance with the UNCRC; we are also organising a seminar between leading children’s rights experts to explore what a rights-based child protection system might look like. In addition to this, we have been exploring with the National College of School Leadership the possibility of including training on children’s rights in its programme for directors of children’s services.

May 2009

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### Memorandum submitted by Janet Galley

#### SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

- (a) Any consideration of the suitability of training needs to start with the desired outcomes.
- (b) These must include a change in the way national government and society as a whole views social workers and their job, and not just a change in the way the profession itself is developed.
- (c) Entry routes should be flexible but admission criteria rigorous.
- (d) The degree level of training is probably about right.
- (e) Support for newly qualified social workers should follow the model for newly qualified teachers.
- (f) The content of the generic degree course is fundamentally flawed and does not equip children and families social workers for the job they are required to do.
- (g) Students should specialise after year one, and follow a comprehensive training course covering the skills, knowledge and experience needed to become a children and families social worker.
- (h) The GSCC could consider following the model adopted by Ofsted for the regulation of teacher training courses to regulate social work training courses.
- (i) There are a number of ways in which the quality, suitability and supply of practice placements could be improved.

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<sup>14</sup> Rainer (April 2007) *Home Alone. Housing and support for young people leaving care.*

<sup>15</sup> A National Voice (2005) *No place like home. Housing for care leavers report.*

<sup>16</sup> House of Commons written answer, 27 February 2007: *Hansard* Column 1251W.

- (j) Continuing professional development is hampered by a number of factors, both specific to the workplace, such as high workloads, poor working conditions, pay, and more generally to the way in which society as a whole views social workers and their work, such as media vilification, poor recognition for what they do.
- (k) Good supervision and support is essential and needs to be built in to any system of ongoing training and development.

## INTRODUCTION

1. Any consideration of the suitability of training needs to start with the desired outcomes. Children and families social work is a complex, intellectually challenging, stressful, sometimes dangerous job requiring the highest level of analytical and assessment skills. It requires individuals with the intellectual ability, maturity, insight, common sense, confidence and life experiences to assess and analyse complex family situations; to evaluate risk; to present findings coherently and competently to a range of other audiences, including courts, and to children and families themselves. It requires the ability to be non-judgemental and deal sympathetically and respectfully with damaged, needy and often aggressive individuals whilst focusing relentlessly on the core task—ensuring the safety and wellbeing of, and improving the outcomes for the most vulnerable children in society.

2. In order to attract the highest calibre of candidates to the profession there needs to be a fundamental shift in the way national politicians and policy makers respond. This should include investing the kind of resources and attention given to the other professions of teaching, healthcare and police. Raising standards in these professions without similar attention to social work simply makes the job of the other professionals harder, and fails to improve outcomes for the most vulnerable children, the focus of many of the Government's policies.

3. In my opinion the training of children and families social workers neither recruits candidates with the necessary attributes, nor equips them to do the job they are required to do.

## ENTRY ROUTES TO THE PROFESSION

4. The profession needs to recruit individuals from a wide range of backgrounds and cultures. Entry routes therefore should be as flexible as possible but criteria for admission should be rigorous, including basic numeracy and literacy skills, and ability to demonstrate the personal qualities described above at 1.

## STRUCTURE OF TRAINING

5. The format and level of training is probably all right, but it is the *content* of the training which needs to be revised.

6. Newly Qualified social workers should be given the same support, guidance and protection as Newly Qualified teachers, with a rigorous probationary period and clear expectations about the support, guidance and supervision they should receive from their employer. They should be required to successfully complete a range of tasks during this period. These could include, with appropriate support, guidance and shadowing, the following:

- Duty and referral;
- Initial assessment;
- Core assessment;
- Section 47 enquiry;
- Report to child protection conference;
- Report for court;
- Working with a looked after child, and
- Placement decision making.

7. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list, and some of the tasks would depend on the setting, but all children and families social workers are likely at some point to be asked to do some, if not all, of these tasks. For example, a social worker in a Sure Start centre may be asked for a report for a child protection conference, and a report for court.

## CONTENT OF INITIAL TRAINING

8. This is the core of my concern. I do not believe the generic social work degree is fit for purpose, nor does it equip social workers for the tasks they will be asked to undertake when employed. Unlike Medicine, there is no system for “training on the job” under the tutelage of a consultant. Social workers are exposed to the full range of tasks from day one. It may be possible to provide some protection in the first year as described above, but they must possess the skills, knowledge and confidence to make good assessments and act independently from the start.

9. I understand that one of the main arguments for the retention of the generic social work degree is that all social workers must be grounded in generic social work values and principles, and must be able to work across both adults and children's services in order to understand how one impacts on the other.

10. Whilst this is a necessary requirement, I believe there is an imbalance between the time allocated to these generic skills and the time devoted to specialist skills. The bulk of the course should be devoted to specialist skills. This does not mean that there will be no attention to overall principles and values, but rather that they will be enshrined in the teaching of specialist skills.

11. In addition, the reality is that the current generic training does not lead to the desired outcomes of greater understanding and awareness. Rather, it leads to the worst of all worlds whereby social workers neither have the in depth understanding of their area of work nor the ability to work effectively across the interface.

12. Despite their generic training, adult social workers often do not understand the impact of adult circumstances on children (see the findings of numerous serious case reviews which show that adult mental health, drug and alcohol misuse, and domestic violence are critical risk factors in child protection, and yet are rarely understood and assessed as such by the social workers for the adults, and communication between adult and children workers is often poor—"Learning Lessons, Taking Action" Ofsted's evaluation of serious case reviews April 2007 to March 2008) and children and families social workers do not understand the context within which their adult social work colleagues operate.

13. The reality is that there is now little commonality, apart from the basic principles and values, in the work of the adult social worker and the children and families social worker. The legislative, policy, practice and organisational frameworks are completely different, and the opportunities for working in depth across the interface minimal. Other ways than through the basic training course must be found to ensure good communication across this interface.

14. In fact it could be argued that it is equally important that children and families social workers understand the role of teachers, named nurses and doctors, and police officers working in child protection as it is to understand the role of the social worker for adults.

15. It is my contention that the most important task of the basic training course is to equip the workers with the skills to do their job, and that in order to do this they must specialise as soon as possible, I would say after the first year.

16. The content of the training thereafter should include (this is not meant to be a comprehensive or exhaustive list, but to give a sense of what needs to be covered):

17. Historical perspective:

- How we have got to where we are in terms of changing attitudes and expectations of children, including the developing focus on the rights of the child; hearing the child; and understanding their emotional and psychological needs.

18. Legislative Framework:

- The history of legislative developments and why changes were made (previous enquiries; research findings, etc).
- Current legislative framework and application in practice.

19. Research and its impact on policy and practice:

- Key findings and developments.
- Child development and impact of trauma etc.
- Child abuse ("battered baby" syndrome onwards).
- Importance of attachment and the way in which it can be identified and assessed, and its critical importance in assessing risk.
- Impact of separation and loss.
- Child's "timeframe".
- Concept of "good enough" parenting.
- Issues of race, culture etc on child rearing.

20. Development of policy and practice:

- Current overall framework—Every Child Matters.
- "Planning for permanence".
- Early intervention and family support.
- Best interests of the child.

- Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the child.
- “Partnership with parents” as a means to an end (better outcomes for the child) and not as an end in itself.
- Child abuse and neglect and the concept of “safeguarding”.
- Outcome focused plans and working within child’s timescales.
- Key policy documents (eg. Working Together to Safeguard Children’ DCSF 2006).

21. Working in a multi-agency context:

- Attributes of good multi-agency working.
- Role and function of other colleagues.
- Confidence in own professional expertise.
- Role of local safeguarding children boards and similar bodies, and findings from serious case reviews.

22. Communicating and listening to children:

- Relating to damaged, distressed, needy children and giving them a voice.
- Life story work.
- Children as witnesses.

23. Role of courts and youth justice system:

- “Balance of probabilities” cf “Beyond reasonable doubt”.
- Concept of “significant harm”.
- “Best interests of the child”.
- Welfare checklist and presumption of “no order”.
- Role of CAFCASS/Guardian ad Litem service.

24. All this needs to be taught in a coherent and comprehensive way, with opportunities for reflection, debate and challenge. There should be a range of practice placements, with a requirement that all students have at least one placement in a local authority children’s social care fieldwork service. Other placements could include:

- A family support service.
- A residential care placement.
- A family placement (fostering and adoption) service.
- A school.
- A GP practice/named nurse.
- Police child protection unit.
- CAFCASS.
- Probation/youth justice.
- Adult mental health service.
- Drug and alcohol service.

#### QUALITY OF TRAINING

25. I am not competent to judge whether the GSCC effectively regulates the quality of training, but whatever the regulatory framework the content has to be right first, and then would it be possible to adopt the Ofsted model for regulating teacher training?

26. The quality, suitability and supply of practice placements could be improved by:

- Establishing performance targets for employers to meet in relation to the number and quality of placements on offer;
- Providing financial incentives to both employer and practice supervisor;
- Providing good support from the relevant academic institution to both the student and the practice supervisor;
- Access to specific training and development opportunities for practice supervisors;
- Ring fencing the time available for the practice supervisor, and
- Establishing external assessment processes, either as part of the Ofsted inspection processes, or via the GSCC, which impact on the overall judgement of the quality of the service.

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## POST-QUALIFYING TRAINING AND CAREER PATHS

27. The factors which influence the continuing development of children and families social workers are in my experience (not in any order of priority):

- Stress levels and workload pressures;
- Lack of good support and supervision;
- Poor working conditions—office accommodation, IT systems, etc;
- Poor pay and other rewards;
- Little recognition and value for the work they do;
- Being “damned if you do and damned if you don’t” by the media;
- Senior managers not understanding or taking into consideration the work they do (many senior managers do not have a social work background);
- Working in an organisational culture which does not understand or support social work values;
- Over-bureaucratized and complex procedural systems which detract from face to face work and the opportunity to use skills and expertise, and
- Target driven culture which measures timescales and outputs (necessary but not sufficient) but does not measure the quality of the work social workers do.

28. Good supervision and support is essential and often requires the same skills as good social work practice—a time for reflection and discussion about challenges and difficulties, whilst at the same time establishing clear frameworks and expectations about the quality and delivery of work. There should be an expectation about the quality and frequency of supervision for all social workers and a requirement that any supervisor should complete a supervision course and demonstrate their ability to be an effective supervisor.

29. The social work model of supervision is a good one and could be usefully adopted by other professions. The absence of good and challenging supervision is often a factor in the findings of serious case reviews.

## CONCLUSIONS

30. Many of the basic standards and working practices that were commonplace when I started work as a young social worker 40 years ago have been lost. There needs to be clear expectations and requirements for social workers to deliver these basic standards, and they must be held to account when they do not do so. At the same time they must be equipped with the appropriate level and type of training, support and supervision to enable them to do their job effectively and confidently.

May 2009

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## Memorandum submitted by Barry Luckock, Senior Lecturer in Social Work and Social Policy, Director of the MA in Social Work, University of Sussex

### 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This submission draws the attention of the Committee to research findings on the teaching, learning and assessment of communication skills with children and young people on the social work qualifying degree programme and considers the implications for the reform of initial education and training in the profession. Using this evidence of poor progress in curriculum development in respect of one core component of the qualifying programme the submission concludes with recommendations for recasting the relationship between the generic and the specialist elements of social work training. Current proposals designed to reform social work education that start with an assumption about the need to separate specialist roles from generic aspirations are rejected in favour of an integrated and personalised approach to the transition period of students to full Registration and effective practice in role.

2. I am a qualified teacher and social worker with extensive experience in social work practice with children and families and in social work education and research. I am currently the Director of the MA in Social Work programme at the University of Sussex, a long-standing and well-regarded postgraduate qualifying course. My research and publications address a wide range of subjects in children’s social work policy and practice, and most recently include an edited text (with a Sussex colleague Michelle Lefevre) on direct work with children in care (see Luckock, B and Lefevre, M eds. (2008) *Direct Work. Social work with children and young people in care*, London: BAAF). The research on which this submission is based was undertaken by a team based at the University of Sussex which included a senior social work practitioner and colleagues from an independent service and advocacy agency as well as social work academics. The team additionally consulted directly with an advisory group of children and young people. The research was commissioned and funded by the Social Care Institute of Excellence. The views expressed in the published reports and papers are those of the authors alone.

### 3. RESEARCH FINDINGS

3.1 The Committee might want to consult either the main research report, which is a technical document, or one or both of the shorter articles produced for a wider audience as follows:

#### *Main report*

Luckock, B, Lefevre, M, Orr, D, Jones, M, Marchant, R. and Tanner, K. (2006) SCIE Knowledge review 12: Teaching, learning and assessing communication skills with children and young people in social work education, London: Social Care Institute for Excellence  
<http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/knowledgereviews/kr12.asp>

#### *Articles*

Luckock, B, Lefevre, M and Tanner, K (2007) 'Teaching and learning communication with children and young people: developing the qualifying social work curriculum in a changing policy context', *Child and Family Social Work*, 12, 2, pp 192–201.

Lefevre, M, Tanner, K and Luckock, B (2008) 'Developing Social Work Students' Communication Skills with Children and Young People: a model for the qualifying level curriculum, in *Child and Family Social Work*, 13, pp 166–176.

3.2 The research was undertaken in 2005 and comprised a review of research on the topic and a survey of programmes. Information was available on 43 of the 91 programmes offered at 31 Universities approved at that time as providers of initial social work education and training. Both undergraduate and postgraduate course were included and the distinction made no difference to the findings.

3.3 The headline finding is straightforward: "*in England, at least, students can join the Register on graduation from the new social work award without necessarily having any experience of or being assessed in direct practice and communication with children*" (Luckock *et al* 2007, p 192–193). This conclusion is made more unsettling still by the fact that the very same findings were reported nearly 20 years earlier<sup>17</sup> when similar concerns to those now expressed about the preparedness of newly qualified social workers for practice with children were being made.

3.4 In brief, the research found few examples of modules in which communication skills with children were consistently taught and fewer still in which such learning was explicitly tested. In communication skills modules the focus was primarily on adults and in child care practice modules the focus was on indirect aspects of practice rather than the direct work role. Observation skills, which had been a core component on the earlier DipSW programme, were much less frequently taught. *No programme consulted could guarantee that students would be exposed to direct practice with a child, still less that they would be assessed prior to qualification.* Attention was drawn to the fact that the National Occupational Standards for Social Work, which provide the benchmark for practice assessment, made no reference to "children" at any point. Instead it was assumed (incorrectly) that the generic assessment process would apply equally to direct work with children where students were on placement in children's services and that many students would experience such a placement.

3.5 The explanations for these findings were a mix of local contingencies and general structural and cultural problems associated with the "new" social work degree. The tension caused for programme providers having to manage changed curriculum content requirements and extended practice learning demands with limited resources were not insignificant factors in explaining the extremely hesitant development of teaching and assessment in the field of communication with children. However, it is the underlying difficulties of the restored model of "generic" initial training that had the most significance for our purposes here, and it is those that are addressed in this short submission.

3.6 It should be noted that, while the research took place at a relatively early stage of new programme development, the core structural reasons for the lack of any guarantee that students would be adequately prepared for direct social work practice with children and young people still apply. In essence these were found to be the lack of any conceptual clarity and professional consensus about the nature of the communication task itself and how it should be taught and learned. This was partly the result of continuing academic and policy debates about the status of children and the hence to approach to direct work with them (ie whether they should be defined by reference to their needs or their rights, or perhaps both). No more is said on this here. Mainly, though, the failure of courses to provide a guaranteed preparation for students in direct work with children appeared to result from continued confusion in the sector about the relationship between what is generic and what is specialist in social work and social work education and training. It is the means of solving this problem that are addressed in the present submission.

<sup>17</sup> Ash, E. (1987) *Protecting Children: Teaching Child Care to C.Q.S.W and C.S.S. Students*. Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work, London.

#### 4. RECOMMENDATION

Whilst the case is set out in full in Luckock *et al* (2007) the argument can be simply made: *the current attempt to deal with the tricky relationship between generic and specialist aspects of learning by splitting them off from each other in order to teach and assess them at differing stages of professional development or even in separate programmes is misplaced. The aim instead should be to incorporate within a retained unitary model of social work training the learning and practice of underpinning knowledge, values, methods and skills in specialist roles from the very start and do so in a more personalised and developmental way. Professional development should be seen as a process of moving from basic to advanced specialist skills within a generic programme, rather than being understood as a staged move from generic (during qualification) to specialist skills (post-qualification).*

4.1 The case for an enhancement of specialism in social work education *from the very outset of training* is supported by the research findings reported here. However, the case for some recent methods of achieving this end is not. First, the Laming Report (2009) appeared to advise the retention of the unitary degree with the introduction of specialism after a generic first year. Second, others<sup>18</sup> have argued for a complete split, in effect subordinating the generic to the specialist. Neither of these strategies is advised on the basis of the work of the University of Sussex research team. In particular, it is argued that any attempt to split social work training by agency role and setting alone would risk the further diminution in the status of the social work profession as a whole. This would be calamitous for recruitment because it would institutionalise a narrowly functionalist occupational identity in each case and further reduce the attraction of “social work” in comparison with holistic professions such as teaching, law, medicine and the like.

4.2 Instead a third position is indicated by the research findings and by logic. It is that the generic and the specialist must indeed be re-aligned but that this can be achieved at the same time as maintaining a unitary or holistic professional training and identity. The way to do this is, first, by making a distinction between social work roles, tasks and practice contexts on the one hand and social work knowledge, values, methods and skills on the other. A unitary profession that is increasingly differentiated by role, task and setting requires a training continuum that enables students to understand and learn common underpinning aspects of the academic and practice curriculum *through the eyes of the distinctive roles now inhabited by social workers*. The current system fails to do this. Instead it proceeds as if there was such a thing as “generic social work” for which students can be prepared on their initial training programmes, prior to taking on specialist roles in due course and attending “specialist” post-qualifying courses to support additional learning. In fact, in the face of accumulating evidence that initial training on this model leaves far too many newly qualified social workers (NQSW) ill-equipped for the role and irritated by their experience. The aim instead should be to *teach and assess core knowledge, values and skills in role from the very outset*. The current approach to establishing and developing professional competence and expertise seeks to add the specialist onto the generic. The Laming approach is more of the same with specialism simply introduced after one rather than the current two (postgraduate route) or three (undergraduate degree) years.

Teaching what is core to social work as a unitary profession through what is distinctive to contrasting social work roles in contemporary agency settings implies *four main changes* to current arrangements:

4.3 First, there should be an end to the confusion in current arrangements that muddle the *focus of practice* (for example, direct work with children in care) with the *level of knowledge and skill* in that practice (for example, moving from effective listening to confident use of a therapeutic technique). This happens because generic has been associated unhelpfully with basic competence, and seen as the preserve of initial training, and specialist with expertise, and therefore safely to be left to the post-qualifying period. In reality, *the generic and the specialist are combined in the social work role and task and practice at all levels of skill* as social workers progress from being competent to being expert. An effective initial training programme is one that exposes a student to direct work with children in care, for example, on the assumption that in this specialist role with its distinctive use of generic communication skills they will demonstrate basic competence as a platform for subsequent skill and expertise. Instead at present in the existing curriculum any form of communication with children tends to be seen as optional especially in relation to practice learning and assessment as the National Occupational Standards for Social Work suggest and the research findings demonstrated. And an effective post-qualifying programme will continue to require social workers in distinctive roles to be exposed to practice developments in other fields in their profession in exactly the same way as they are increasingly expected to do within their respective integrated workforces, whether in “children’s services”, “mental health” or “adult social care”.

4.4 Second, initial training must now ensure and not just assert that students prior to Registration are exposed to a *representative range of social work roles in practice* across specialist settings and that teaching and assessment requires them to account for and analyse these experiences. In this way, for example, it will be possible to guarantee that all social workers have at least started to develop the (generic) skill of direct work with children as well as adults. This might be understood as a process of horizontal integration of learning across separate domains of practice.

<sup>18</sup> DCSF Consultation on the Children and Young People’s 2020 Workforce Strategy, Response by the Association of Directors of Children’s Services, March 2009.



4.5 Third, this process should be personalised and *an individual learning and professional development pathway* negotiated for each student. The case for personalisation more generally has been made elsewhere and is not repeated here. It is enough to say that students themselves are now more often clear in their minds about where they are heading in their professional careers as jobs become more distinctive and diverse and increasingly insistent about discussing with tutors and practice educators how they can use the course and the placement to achieve their objectives.

4.6 Fourth, the understanding of the learning and professional development pathway should change. The separation of initial training from previous experience and future Registered practice and post-qualifying induction needs to be reconsidered. Any decision to delay full Registration pending the successful completion of a probationary year runs the risk of further re-inforcing an intrinsic divide between an academic and theoretical preparation *for* practice and learning and professional development in practice. The risk could be avoided if initial training courses are enabled, through improved and properly funded collaborative arrangements with agencies, to help new recruits to the profession *connect their initial training back to their previous life and work experience and forward into their first post-Registration (NQSW) professional role* as well as simply concentrating on current coursework. This might be understood as a process of vertical integration of learning and practice across the early stage of a social work career.

4.7 Finally, it is submitted with emphasis, the acceptance of the argument that there should be a revision of the generic model exemplified in the current social work qualifying and post-qualifying curricula must not lead to any further truncation of the initial period of preparation for professional practice. Indeed, the case *for the extension as well as the formal linkage of the qualifying award and induction and early career development periods* is now very strong. Few other professions would expect a novice with three or four years experience to take lead responsibility for the kind of complex roles and tasks now required of social workers.

May 2009

### Memorandum submitted by the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (YJB)

#### INTRODUCTION

1. The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (YJB) welcomes the inquiry and the opportunity to submit written evidence. We would be pleased to provide any further information that may be of assistance.

#### ROLE OF THE YJB

2. The role of the YJB is to oversee the youth justice system in England and Wales. It works to prevent offending and reoffending by children and young people under the age of 18, and to ensure that custody for them is safe, secure, and addresses the causes of their offending behaviour. The statutory responsibilities of the YJB include:

- advising Ministers on the operation of, and standards for, the youth justice system;
- monitoring the performance of the youth justice system;
- purchasing places for, and placing, children and young people remanded or sentenced to custody;
- identifying and promoting effective practice;
- making grants to local authorities and other bodies to support the development of effective practice, and
- commissioning research and publishing information.

While the YJB is responsible for overseeing the performance of youth justice services including multi-agency Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) and secure estate providers it does not directly manage any of the services.

3. This paper seeks to provide the Committee with information about a range of specialist training available to social workers who work in the youth justice field. It provides some general comments about the relationship between youth justice services and the wider children's service workforce, and outlines examples of existing training models available to youth justice practitioners, highlighting cross over with social workers where appropriate. The information provided here forms a brief overview only and we would be pleased to provide the Committee with any further details of the range of training available to the youth justice workforce that may be of assistance to the inquiry.

#### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICES, SOCIAL WORKERS AND WIDER CHILDREN'S SERVICES—GENERAL COMMENTS

4. There are clear and interdependent links between youth justice services and wider children and families' services, including social workers. The great majority of YOTs are located within children's service departments and all work exclusively with children and young people. Social workers play an important role in the multi-disciplinary YOT workforce. Whilst police and probation officers bring good experience of the criminal justice system to YOTs, social workers can bring well established understanding of young people's

development, issues around transitions in young people's lives and safeguarding expertise. The training and experience social workers bring to YOTs frequently provides valuable insight into more complex cases and, as such, social workers often come into contact and manage some of the most high risk and vulnerable young people known to the YOT.

5. Social workers also play a key part in the YOT's supervision of children and young people who are looked after and are therefore also receiving services from local authority children's services departments. The link back to the local authority is vital and social workers are well placed to engage with a range of local resources to support young people at risk of offending.

6. Youth justice services are an essential component of the services available when measures to safeguard a child's welfare are taken. Safeguarding the needs of children and young people in the youth justice system is essential and the YJB is keen to ensure that young people have access to mainstream services at every stage of the youth justice system.

#### TRAINING AVAILABLE TO THE YOUTH JUSTICE WORKFORCE, INCLUDING SOCIAL WORKERS

7. Workforce development is one of the most effective ways of improving the performance of youth justice services and, as such, the YJB has implemented a workforce development strategy for frontline staff in the youth justice system. Our Workforce Development Strategy 2008–11, which sets out the latest phase of our strategy, is designed to take account of Welsh Assembly Government-led workforce developments in Wales and is aligned with the Department for Children Schools and Families' recent Children's Workforce Strategy in England. Given the relationship between youth justice services and wider children's services, our workforce development strategy has significant cross-over with children service professionals including social workers.

8. The YJB has in place a range of professional qualifications open to all youth justice staff both in the secure estate and YOTs, including YOT-based social workers. The Youth Justice National Qualification Framework (YJNQF), introduced in 2003, gives staff who work in YOTs the opportunity to undertake specialist training within the youth justice field. At the heart of the YJNQF is the Youth Justice Foundation Degree, one module of which is the Professional Certificate in Effective Practice. Between 2003 and 2006, 80% of the youth justice workforce gained this qualification, including a significant number of social workers who did so as a means of demonstrating their competence in Youth Justice.

9. The current social work undergraduate degree contains limited input on youth justice and unless a social worker undertakes a placement in a YOT as part of their social work degree, their specific knowledge of youth justice issues can sometimes be incomplete upon completion of the course. The YJNQF provides a comprehensive structure for social workers already holding a social work qualification to add specific knowledge and understanding of the youth justice field to their highly relevant skills in working with children and young people.

10. To prepare practitioners for the changes which will be introduced when the Youth Rehabilitation Order is implemented in November 2009, the YJB is currently facilitating an accredited training course, available through the Open University, to provide practitioners with the knowledge and skills required to implement the forthcoming changes. Social workers are encouraged to undertake this course alongside other practitioners from YOTs and the secure estate.

11. Social workers, like all other YOT staff, have access to the Youth Justice Interactive Learning Space (YJILS), an online learning resource developed by the YJB in partnership with the Open University. YJILS allows YOT managers and staff to build upon their knowledge of evidence-based effective practice through a set of 10 professional development resources. The YJB is continuing to develop YJILS, which will also contain common core material and other essential areas including public protection, safeguarding and working with children and young people in a secure environment.

12. The YJB would support a more flexible entry route and approach to training for social workers and is currently working with the Open University to explore the possibility of a joint social work/youth justice degree.

#### *Social worker posts in the under-18 secure estate*

13. The YJB believes it is vital for staff working in the under-18 secure estate to receive training to effectively safeguarding children and young people. The Children's Act 2004 places responsibility for safeguarding and promoting welfare on the providers of custody for children and young people among others and the YJB therefore has a key role to play in developing and promoting effective safeguarding practice, ensuring secure establishments are supported to deliver these measures and monitoring their performance.

14. Following a 2003 joint review of child protection and safeguarding practices across young offender institutions (YOIs) with HM Prison Service, the YJB undertook a programme of work to improve safeguarding practices in the under-18 secure estate. A key initiative was the introduction of local authority social worker posts in YOIs housing under-18s to meet the welfare needs of young people in custody. These

dedicated social workers undertake a range of functions, including services in relation to looked-after children and relevant care leavers, safeguarding measures and services where there is concern that a child is suffering harm, is seriously injured or where a death in custody occurs.

15. These social workers fulfil an extremely important function and the YJB therefore welcomed the recent announcement from the Association of Directors of Children's Services that, following discussions with government and stakeholder colleagues, an agreement had been reached to continue funding social worker posts in YOIs.

#### RECENT DEVELOPMENTS INCLUDING LORD LAMING'S PROGRESS REPORT

16. The YJB broadly welcomes Lord Laming's recent report *The Protection of Children in England: A Progress Report*, which addresses a number of issues of relevance to the youth justice system and provides a useful opportunity to further embed youth justice services within the child protection agenda. The focus on multi-agency working is welcome and the YJB is keen to ensure that measures to improve child protection practices are made available not only to staff in YOTs but also to those working in the under-18 secure estate. In particular the YJB would support the recommendation for senior leaders and managers across frontline services to receive regular training on safeguarding measures and effective leadership to include senior managers in the youth justice system including YOT managers.

17. The Laming report includes a number of recommendations for the Social Work Task Force around the development of a national social worker supply strategy, clear progression routes for children's social workers and national guidelines on caseloads. The YJB is contributing to the deliberations of the Social Work Task Force and it is hoped the Task Force's report, expected in October 2009, will provide a useful opportunity to promote further synergy between social worker qualifications and the YJNQF, and articulate precise requirements on social workers in YOTs. Staff within YOTs form a key part of the children's workforce and the YJB is keen to ensure that measures to improve practitioner skills around child protection and safeguarding are accessible to youth justice practitioners. The YJB will therefore seek to work with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to ensure that youth justice staff have access to the multi-agency training required of Children's Trusts in order to develop practitioners and managers confidence in relation to safeguarding.

18. A number of discussions have taken place between the YJB, DCSF, General Social Care Council, Children's Workforce Development Council and Skills for Justice about the needs of the youth justice workforce. The YJB is contributing to the DCSF consultation on the young peoples workforce reform programme including discussions about Youth Professional Status and the Skills development framework.

#### ASSESSMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

19. The Laming report also makes a number of references to the importance of assessing children and young people's needs and the development of guidance on referral and assessment systems for children affected by domestic violence, adult mental health problems and alcohol misuse.

20. Youth justice practitioners currently have access to a range of specialist youth justice assessment tools which support the identification of needs and risks, understanding of behaviour patterns and the planning of effective interventions.

21. The YJB has developed Asset, the common structured framework used by YOTs in England and Wales for assessment of all young people involved in the criminal justice system. Asset is a standard assessment of factors contributing to a young person's offending and the information gathered can be used to inform court reports, allowing appropriate intervention programmes to be drawn up.

22. On behalf of the YJB, the Centre for Criminology, University of Oxford, developed the Onset referral and assessment framework, designed to promote the YJB's prevention strategy by helping to identify risk factors to be reduced and protective factors to be enhanced. It also provides information which might be helpful in selecting appropriate interventions for those identified as needing early intervention. The YJB's National Standards for Youth Justice include guidelines for assessment and we have published our Key Elements of Effective Practice—Assessment, Planning, Interventions and Supervision guidance document to support practitioners use the assessment tools effectively.

23. The interface between these specialist youth justice assessment tools and the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), designed to assess the needs of children and young people at the early intervention stage, is crucial to child protection and safeguarding measures. The YJB published guidance in 2006 intended to help practitioners use CAF effectively while continuing to use the Onset and Asset assessment method for young people involved in, or at risk of being involved in, offending behaviour. The YJB will seek to further clarify the relationship between CAF and specialist youth justice assessment tools with DCSF. In addition, we are currently undertaking work to scope the potential for developing an assessment strategy for the youth justice system. Among other issues, the need for youth justice services to communicate the outcomes of assessments to partner agencies will be considered as part of this work.

## **Memorandum submitted by Christine J Whiting, RSW, Independent Social Worker & Practice Teacher**

### **INTRODUCTION**

1. I would like to offer my comments on some of the possible areas that are due to be considered in the above inquiry.

2. I write in my capacity as a registered social worker and Independent Practice Teacher of six years experience. During this time I have practice taught in excess of 50 students, from four different academic institutions from the diploma, through to the bachelor's and master's degree. I practice teach in Suffolk, Essex, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire.

3. I also work as in Independent Post-Qualifying Mentor both on the former Post Qualifying Framework for candidates studying PQs 2–6; and for those on the GSCC approved Practice Teacher Award programme. I also run Practice Teacher Development Workshops for a local authority to provide on-going development to their practice teachers.

4. My comments below are offered based on my experience and are not representative of any one particular academic institution.

### **THE ENTRY ROUTE TO THE PROFESSION**

5. The committee intends to look at the entry routes to social work and asks the question as to whether there is sufficient flexibility to encourage mature entrance etc. From experience, I have found that there is little flexibility to encourage this as even the Open University programme requires employer sponsorship, all other routes require the typical academic entry requirements eg A Levels to a Bachelor's Degree or first degree to progress onto a Master's programme.

6. What I have observed over the last six years of practice teaching is there has become less emphasis on the students obtaining suitable experience before embarking on the social work degree programme. This is age irrelevant. I am aware of mature students who have spent twenty years as home makers embarking on social work degree programme having never used a computer or having to regularly use a diary let alone having practical experience in social work related fields. I have also had younger students who have simply followed their career path straight from A Levels to a degree without any break in the middle to obtain any life experience let alone relevant social work experience.

7. This to me is major flaw in the entry to the profession. I am of the opinion that there should be a mandatory minimum period of practical experience that should be undertaken before the student can be considered or interviewed for entry to the programme. This experience should also be quantified to terms of practical time eg X number of hours of service should be obtained before entry into the profession. Based on my experience I feel that relevant sectors should also be defined for students considering entry to the profession. There seems to be, based on student's anxieties of starting placement, a significant lack of clarity and expectation about task and function of social workers within the community. Many have an expectation that they can only undertake social work within the statutory system but then become frustrated, as recently documented in Community Care, by the overwhelming degree of computer based activities. However, the students also become anxious and frustrated when placed outside the statutory system under the impression that they are not obtaining "social work" experience. This could be addressed by recruitment campaigns demonstrating the depth and breadth of social work and the full range of the service users who can benefit from qualified experienced professionals.

8. I am aware that there has been a decrease in applications to the social work programme and that the above suggestions may be perceived to exacerbate this. However, surely the development of the social work profession relies on the quality and not the quantity of the professionals taking and achieving this degree. Providing such practical experience as a requirement of the early stages will also help to manage unrealistic expectations about the role of social work; and in the longer term would help prevent burn out as practitioners qualify with a more realistic expectation of their future role.

### **STRUCTURE OF TRAINING**

9. Since the introduction of the three year Bachelor's Degree/two year Master's degree there has been an overall sense of a rise in the professional status of qualified social workers. This appears to be directly linked to the new academic requirements creating a professional as opposed to the previously skilled workers who obtained diplomas and CQSWs. However, with this have come a number of challenges that have been portrayed within the media that has also knocked the status of the profession. This is not to be discussed here but is something that needs to be taken into account too.

10. Since I have been practice teaching social work students both on the earlier diploma and now the Bachelor's and Master's Degree programme I feel that there is the potential for this level of initial training to be correct to equip social work students at the start of their career. However, from direct experience I have noticed particularly in younger qualifying social workers they still need a significant degree of ongoing support beyond the end of their initial qualification. Fortunately this has been addressed locally through the

pilot Newly Qualified Social Worker programmes that have been operating in the geographical area within which I practice teach. These pilots however have been directly linked to children and families which is the focus of this particular enquiry; but I have none-the-less had concerns for those students who do not wish to pursue a career in children and families but to work within adult services. To date this area of social work has not had benefit of additional Newly Qualified Social Worker programmes. To place this into context it may be worth noting that from the last cohort of students that I practiced taught to March 2009 50% of these students chose to apply for unqualified posts such as family support workers upon qualifying as they felt that they needed more practical experience before working as a qualified social worker. These students were academically and professionally competent but this was their own feelings on their abilities.

11. In my opinion I feel that the Newly Qualified Social Worker programme although in its infancy at this time will provide newly qualified social workers with the opportunity to build and develop their skills further with the protection of a qualified experienced mentor working alongside them for a minimum of 12 months. It is important to ensure that newly qualified social workers have protected case loads and receive regular supportive supervision—not simply case management to ascertain work levels but to enable the students to be clear and learn the systems within which their practice operates. Furthermore they will benefit from independent professional development. Independent profession mentoring would provide unbiased support and would ensure that the newly qualified social workers continued to explore and apply their use of theory and research to build upon their knowledge outside the academic arena. By providing independent professional development supervision temptation to dip in to case management would be overcome.

#### CONTENT OF INITIAL TRAINING

12. In my opinion the social work degree should remain a generic programme and as such is fit for the purpose of training social workers to basic level to work in all areas. This is important due to a significant degree of burn out that the profession currently experiences. By forcing students to specialise at such an early stage, particularly without experience prior to entry to the programme, could potentially see them pigeon-holed too early and the profession will experience higher degree drop out as professionals decide that they no longer wish to work within the specialised area.

13. With a generic qualification behind them they will be able to transfer more readily between the service user groups but then can go on and undertake the specialist training required. Effectively using “building blocks” of specialist trainings to extend and develop their knowledge to the appropriate levels.

14. The new post qualifying framework provides the potential for these building blocks. Specialists and higher specialist awards have already been in place for some considerable time with the Children’s Award from the former Post Qualifying Award framework. My experience is of supporting students both within adult and children services. Generally, in the region, social workers within children services have access to these post qualifying programmes on a regular basis and from my experience more so than their adult services colleagues.

15. As already stated in paragraph 7 I am concerned that the students have at present an unrealistic expectation of the task of social work that they will be asked to undertake in employment. This needs to be addressed by the range of placements and also through increasing awareness of the full scope of social work within independent and voluntary sectors, as well as the statutory services.

16. I have already highlighted above in paragraph 6 that I am concerned that the students do not have sufficient experience before embarking on their chosen degree programme. As a consequence it makes it difficult at this stage to acknowledge whether the balance of knowledge, skills and value is correct. From experience I have found that students tend to become either book learners as they absorb as much knowledge about working with people as possible but this often gets in the way of them developing their skills. Conversely I have those students that are happy to apply their skills but are reluctant to develop their knowledge base.

17. As a qualified practice teacher with the Practice Teacher Award I am equipped and trained to be able to support students to bring about this balance. However, as a trainer for local authorities that provide five day in-house practice teacher training programmes I have found that over the last four years that these professionals do not necessarily have the same level of skill and knowledge that is available through the Practice Teacher Award Programme. I am led to question how six months worth of training compares that to a five day in-house programme.

#### QUALITY

18. In view of my comments above, I have as a qualified practice teacher been led to question how the General Social Care Council do regulate the quality of training. As an offsite practice teacher I have been required to undertake practice teaching for more and more students in recent years as there has been a shortage of practice teachers. Most recently I have been involved in a pilot scheme running a student unit to overcome some of these difficulties. The outcome of this pilot has in itself been useful and informative but has not addressed the issue of the shortage of practice teachers.

19. As an independent practice teacher I earn less than £3.00 per hour and often have to wait until the end of a contract (sometimes up to nine months) before I receive financial remuneration. I am aware from discussions with other independent practice teachers that this is an issue that has often resulted in them

withdrawing from providing their services. On top of this I am being forced as a practice teacher to now travel upwards of 70 miles to be able to undertake practice teaching which is not reimbursed and yet the fee has remained the same since the diploma levels were introduced. I feel that this is a significant area that the General Social Care Council needs to investigate to contribute to the overall quality of the training. Without experienced qualified practice teachers the students are not going to be able to link their academic and practice learning to a suitable standard and for the future wellbeing of service users.

I do not feel that I am in a position to provide comment on the other areas that the committee may be exploring but hope that my above comments will provide sufficient food for thought.

May 2009

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### **Memorandum submitted by the Institute of Education, University of London**

The Institute of Education does not at present offer training for Children and Families Social Workers, although an MA in Social Pedagogy is planned for 2009–10. The Institute has been a provider of teacher training for many years and our submission offers information on models of teacher training and how we see these being of relevance for the Committee's deliberations on the issues and challenges facing social work training.

#### **TRAINING OF SOCIAL WORKERS AND TEACHERS**

Social work training is in a position similar to that of teacher training about 20 years ago. At this time the initial training of teachers was not sufficiently based upon the competencies required by teachers in the classroom and there was insufficient articulation of the theoretical bases of practice, which in recent years has been developed through practice-based learning.

Teaching is a graduate profession with a variety of entry routes, including BEd, BA or BSc with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), and the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). PGCE courses cater for graduates who wish to teach in primary or secondary schools or in post-compulsory education.

Other routes into teaching include Employment-Based teacher training, the Graduate Teacher Programme and Teach First. These schemes allow graduates to work towards QTS while employed in schools as unqualified teachers.

#### **CURRICULUM ISSUES**

There have been criticisms that social work training is thin on analytic skills; on helping develop reflective practice; on the ability to apply research; and on decision-making skills. There are also criticisms that there is insufficient attention given to understanding the potential of effective interventions, and that many social workers are poor at communicating effectively with children and at working with practitioners from other professional backgrounds. The social work curriculum should include knowledge of the psychological, physical and social issues that underpin challenging behaviour and the skills to build relationships and hear the voices of children and families in difficult circumstances.

Professional training requires a combination of complex skills, knowledge and understanding, together with the tools for continued learning and professional development. The curriculum for Initial Teacher Education (ITE) addresses the core professional standards relating to attributes, knowledge and understanding, and teaching skills, as set out by the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA). By developing a set of standards, the TDA has been able to identify those that are required for QTS and those that are expected at more advanced levels. Excellent teachers are expected to research and evaluate innovative curriculum practice and draw on research and other external sources of evidence to inform their own practice and that of their colleagues. The standards focus strongly on the curriculum and its delivery, which tends to leave limited time, especially in a one-year PGCE, for other aspects of teachers' development.

#### **RECRUITMENT AND CAREER PROGRESSION**

The TDA has run a very successful recruitment campaign over several years and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have synchronised their efforts with this campaign. In addition, salaries have been improved for teachers, including starting salaries. As a result, teaching has become a more attractive profession. New routes into teaching such as Teach First, which is open to graduates with the highest degrees, are also attracting high level applicants.

Newly qualified social workers are, on the whole, poorly supported and supervision is often inadequate. There is limited opportunity for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and for post-graduate qualifications for experienced social workers. This stands in contrast to the induction and CPD offered to teachers. In contrast, Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs), after their initial training, have a one-year period of induction. This is designed to provide a personalised programme of guidance and support, so that NQTs are supplied with the tools they need to be successful teachers. Each NQT has an induction tutor who is responsible for assessing their work against the core professional standards and determining whether they

have met the requirements for successfully completing the induction period. During this period NQTs receive a 10% reduction in their teaching timetable to allow time to develop teaching skills away from the classroom.

Beyond the induction year teachers have a wealth of opportunities for CPD or Postgraduate Professional Development (PPD). Programmes of study range from Masters and Doctoral degrees, offered on a full-time or part-time basis, to specialist diplomas, modular degrees and outreach courses. Recently, PGCE programmes have been remodelled so that some of the constituent modules are now offered at Masters level, which means that graduates of these courses have credits that can be counted towards a full Masters degree. A new Masters in Teaching and Learning (MTL) is a government-funded, classroom-based qualification developed to help teachers extend their teaching skills and abilities, which will be offered to NQTs in 2009–10.

Flexibility is a key ingredient of the offer as it allows teachers to further develop their curriculum subject expertise, or to develop knowledge in a foundation subject such as psychology of education or special and inclusive education. Delivery of these programmes is through traditional format in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), teachers' centres or schools, and through distance, on-line and mixed mode courses. This flexibility enables teachers to select those that are most relevant and convenient for them. There is limited government funding or local authority funding for these programmes.

## QUALITY

There is much criticism of the quality of practice placements for trainee social workers, and a reluctance on the part of both voluntary and statutory agencies to give the support that is required—often because of high caseload and work levels amongst host agencies.

Practice placements form an important part of the initial training of teachers and trainees value high quality placements. For the past 15 years HEIs have worked in partnership with schools to deliver ITE, and it is through the partnership schools that students are provided with placements during their training. Schools are reimbursed for their contribution which ensures that students on teaching practice have a school mentor to provide support and advice in addition to that provided by a course tutor from the HEI. It has proved challenging to strengthen the quality assurance of placements and there is still work to be done to ensure that all students have high quality support while on their placements. Although the partnership model has vastly improved the quality of provision at the lower end, this may have produced a model that is somewhat homogenised and risk-averse.

There is a view that the General Social Care Council is not tight enough on regulation and the inspection of HEIs. This stands in contrast to the tight quality control in the teaching profession, where nationalisation of the curriculum and standard expectations are accompanied by rigorous inspection by Ofsted of ITE and TDA-funded PPD programmes in HEIs. The Quality Assurance Agency is responsible for assuring the quality of other relevant Masters and Diploma programmes in HEIs.

## SOCIAL PEDAGOGIC APPROACHES

Social work training in Denmark and other European countries is based on a different model of the role of the social worker. The social-pedagogic approach to working with children and young people in social care could usefully inform the strategic direction of this area of work in the future. Pat Petrie and colleagues from the Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, have produced a useful document on social pedagogy *Pedagogy—a holistic, personal approach to work with children and young people, across services*, in response to an earlier children's workforce consultation. This discusses social pedagogy and makes practical proposals for how this approach could begin to be developed in an English context. Please follow the link to [http://eprints.ioe.ac.uk/58/1/Pedagogy\\_briefing\\_paper.pdf](http://eprints.ioe.ac.uk/58/1/Pedagogy_briefing_paper.pdf) to obtain a copy of the document.

This document highlights that in England we tend to use the term “pedagogy” in the context of the classroom and formal education. Our European neighbours often apply it to a much broader set of services, covering, for example, childcare and early years, youth work, family support services, secure units for young offenders, residential care and play work. The European meaning of pedagogy thus encompasses both care and education.

The Institute of Education has established a Centre for Social Pedagogy, lead by Pat Petrie, which coordinates and evaluates social pedagogic approaches in England. Members of the Centre are collaborating with colleagues in Denmark over the development of an MA in Social Pedagogy which will take its first cohort of students in 2010.

May 2009

## Memorandum submitted by Professor John Carpenter, University of Bristol

### SUMMARY

- It will be helpful to review social work education in comparison to other professions, especially medicine.
- Specialisation on degree courses is already taking place.
- A fast track for social science graduates is not justified by evidence.
- Relevant research on the outcomes of interagency training for social workers and on the Newly Qualified Social Worker Pilot Programme will soon be available.

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND

1. I have been Professor of Social Work at Bristol University since 2005, having previously held the inaugural Chair at Durham University (1997–2005). As well as being a Registered Social Worker with the GSCC, I am also a Chartered Psychologist and an Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society. I have a particular research interest in the outcomes of education and training for social workers and also for other professionals involved in safeguarding children.

2. I welcome the Committee's interest in learning from models adopted by other professions. The comparisons with medicine and psychology should be particularly instructive. Like social work, these professions expect that practitioners have a high level of specialist skills and knowledge for work with children and families. Like social work, this is based on a firm generic, foundation level of education: eg medical students have to learn the basics of all branches of medicine. Only later do they specialise. Following substantial further training and closely supervised experience they qualify to practice as a GP or paediatrician.

3. Social work education differs from medical education in many respects. Aspects that doctors would find especially surprising about social work include:

- 3.1 the fact that the practice learning may take place in settings which do not employ qualified social workers and that their work is supervised by members of another profession;
- 3.2 the expectation that following the award of a basic level of qualification, practitioners assume full responsibility for children and families who have multiple and complex problems including poverty, mental illness, addiction to drugs and alcohol and violence;
- 3.3 the lack of clear, compulsory and properly funded post registration specialist education and training leading to career posts;
- 3.4 the fact that senior members of the profession are not expected or required to teach new entrants;
- 3.5 the lack of recognition accorded to those social work practitioners who do teach. There is no longer a qualification in practice education in social work. Many of those who do "take a student on placement" do so only two or three times and so do not build experience, and
- 3.6 the fact that many university teachers of social work have so little engagement with practice, or research on practice.

I regard all these as deficiencies in our current arrangements.

### SPECIALISATION

4. Because of the nature of practice learning on the degree course, most social work students already begin to specialise by the time they take their final ("Level 3") placement. If they plan to find a job in children and families social work, they will do their very best to obtain a placement in such a setting. If the university-based teaching permits them to choose from a range of options, they will naturally choose those concerning children and families instead of health and social work. They will write an analytical case study about their practice in the child and family social work agency. If they have to do an undergraduate or Master's dissertation they will select a pertinent topic. On the MSc in Social Work at Bristol, we are happy for the students to specialise in this way. But we do require them to take core courses in adult mental illness, not just because the GSCC requires it, but because we know that children's social workers will regularly encounter adult mental illness. Conversely, we require those students certain to go into adult social care to take courses in child and adolescent mental health. In addition we have a series of final year workshops in which students who already see themselves as specialising consider how to work together across the adult social care/children and families service divide. In other words, a degree of specialisation is already happening. I am firmly opposed to a separate degree.



## ENTRY ROUTES

5. I was very pleased that social work became a graduate profession and relieved that the postgraduate route was maintained. I have only taught postgraduates at Durham and Bristol. These programmes undoubtedly recruit very able students and most, but not all, produce very good or excellent work. Applicants are clear that they relish the opportunity to study for a Master's degree and the great majority achieve one. The remainder are able to leave with a postgraduate diploma which is recognised by the GSCC for registration.

6. I carried out detailed research at Durham which showed that the topic of first degree (social science vs. arts and sciences) did not make any statistically significant difference to the students' final outcomes or marks. I do not see a case for "fast tracking" social science graduates. They all have much to learn, the intellectual demands are high and the two year timetable is very tight indeed—more so now that there are 200 days of practice learning.

7. Following the publicity about the new degree, applications to postgraduate courses increased and Bristol at least has been more choosy, increasing our entry requirements. However, the numbers of students aged over 30 has reduced and few of them are men. Our admissions tutor explains that, although she still receives many enquiries from people over 30 wanting to make a career change, most are put off for financial reasons. The CWDC graduate scheme is a help but most programmes are already full by the time it is announced; so while the funding has helped to support excellent students who had a place already, it has not so far been very effective in bringing in new people.

8. Training in child protection. Earlier this year I completed a substantial study of the organisation, outcomes and costs of interagency training for safeguarding children which was funded by DCSF and DH. Such training is of course very important for child and family social workers. The evidence for good outcomes is strong, but the system is vulnerable. The research report has been peer reviewed, but not yet revised in the light of those reviews. I hope that it will be possible to disseminate the findings very soon.

## NEWLY QUALIFIED SOCIAL WORKERS

9. I am part of a team evaluating the NQSW Pilot Programme for CWDC. I and colleagues have recently completed a baseline survey of over 450 NQSWs (response rate 80%), collecting data on their perceived self-confidence, role clarity, job satisfaction and stress. I consider the results encouraging. The baseline report has been reviewed and again I hope that it will be possible to disseminate findings very soon.

*May 2009*

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## Memorandum submitted by the Association for Improvements in the Maternity Services

### 1. WHAT IS AIMS?

The Association for Improvements in the Maternity Services (AIMS) is a national pressure group with an experienced entirely voluntary committee, which has existed for nearly 50 years. We run a UK helpline which keeps us very much in touch with the latest problems parents have in using health services and our experienced lay committee can call on advice from a number of sympathetic professionals.

About 10 years ago we began to receive distressing requests for help from mothers who were threatened with, or had actually experienced, removal of babies into care, and thence were often adopted—for reasons which seemed to us to be inadequate. This escalated with the Government's target to increase adoptions, accompanied by financial rewards for local authorities. (The original aim of the Prime Minister's Working Party had been to increase Permanence and Adoption for children in long-term care but this became translated into a crude target simply to increase "adoption numbers" in annual inspections of local authorities, with predictable results. Babies, the most desirable adoptees, rather than children in long term care, became the target). As the number of pleas for help increased, we found ourselves involved in supporting parents while trying to find out what was happening, and why.

It was this experience which led to our learning about the quality of social work, and parents' experiences of it.

As advocates and supporters, we were able to see court documents and social service papers. We also have been present in the homes of some clients during social service visits, and have attended review meetings and case conferences with clients, and have given evidence in some family court cases. It has been a very fast learning curve, and a sobering experience.

We do not, of course, claim that our experience represents a typical picture, since it covers mostly families who have problems. Nor do we claim that social workers we saw and heard about represent the majority of their profession. However, our caseload represented a large enough group for our analysis to show that the

same problems were recurring. And the picture we have seen has been replicated in other consumer groups solely representing families involved with child protection activity. Some of our findings are also supported in a number of academic studies.

Our comments, as will be obvious apply, mostly to social workers in children's services rather than adult services.

## 2. TRAINING AND QUALITY OF SOCIAL WORKERS

We are used to working with midwives, nurses, and doctors and some of us sit, or have sat on professional bodies and their committees, eg the GMC and NMC. We are also involved in training professionals—for the Royal College of Midwives, Royal College of Obstetricians, etc and I wrote a column for the British Journal of Midwifery for 10 years where I received a considerable amount of feedback from midwives both in correspondence and as a speaker at meetings.

Almost immediately we were struck by the difference between the intellectual and professional standard we were used to in midwives and specialist nurses, and what we saw in social workers. Midwives on the whole kept up with the professional literature, were informed on the latest issue, were interested in the consumer view of the latest practice. Over the years we have noticed how their standards of knowledge have improved. Their awareness of, and ability to debate and discuss broader ethical issues has also improved—as we have noted on midwifery refresher courses.

Naturally with social workers we expected a different approach and style, but we did expect a reasonable degree of professionalism which we did not find. As would be our usual practice, once we became involved, we began to read relevant documents, text books, articles in professional journals in an effort to understand what might be happening, and why. We found ourselves quoting to social workers research which was highly relevant to cases they were dealing with, which we would have expected them to be familiar with, and found they had no knowledge of it. (eg a mother might be criticised for behaviour or opinions which research showed to be common, and not necessarily harmful. Without knowledge of epidemiology, social workers failed to place incidents or comments within a relevant context, so their reports on families were distorted. We saw a number of examples of this).

This applied not just to fairly recent research but to basic work. If, for example, one mentioned Bowlby's standard work on Attachment and Loss, it became clear that they did not truly understand what should be foundation literature in their work. They did use the word and the concept (eg removing a baby before it became too "attached" to the mother, or not returning a child to the family because it was too "attached" elsewhere).

In many other cases we saw children treated in many ways which damaged attachment, often unnecessarily, and without mention of, or apparent understanding, of the possible severity of the price the child was likely to pay in later life. It sometimes seems as if the concept was something to be switched on and off in their reports, as it suited the case they wished to make.

We found this habit of glibly quoting "labels" (particularly medical diagnoses) without apparent understanding of their meaning and limitations and implications was common. Sometimes, of course, the diagnosis would later be proved wrong.

There seemed to be gaps in training particularly in relation to conditions like autistic spectrum and behavioural disorders which can present in very different ways and diagnosis may be delayed. Such problems have become increasingly common but many parents reported that their child's condition was seen as the result of their inadequacies and acting as their child's advocate had been an uphill battle when they would have welcomed help.

We would expect a social worker employed in a community mental health team dealing with women with postnatal depression at least to familiarise herself with NICE guidelines, before writing a critical report that the mother was "not-cooperating" with treatment which clearly did not meet recommended standards.

The most worrying aspect was that accompanying this ignorance was a level of confidence—indeed arrogance—which seemed to inhibit open-ness to further learning. Perhaps this is a defence against the uncertainties they are continually dealing with. However sometimes we were reminded of the comment in the Report of the Victoria Climbié Inquiry (para 1.60) "It was the belief of two senior staff managers from Haringey that some staff had difficulty in reading practice guidelines because of problems with literacy."

It seemed to us that there could be problems at more than one level:

- (a) The standard of recruits (both qualified and unqualified) who had been accepted in some local authorities, and training institutions.
- (b) The basic training they had received, which did not seem to equip them for specialist work in child and family care.
- (c) The lack of continuous education in research relevant to their core professional work (as opposed to keeping up with documents on new guidelines, regulations, etc).
- (d) Finally the prevailing culture of the department is bound to affect both trainees and qualified workers. Our impression was that many departments did not have a learning culture—which was evidenced in their stonewalling response to serious complaints.

We should also mention that not all those working as “social workers” were found to be such when we checked their registration, as we often do with health care professionals. And some seemed to have had lengthy employment, but were not even enrolled in training courses.

It was not that good professional literature did not exist. We found much interesting, helpful, and thoughtful research from academics in social work and other fields, but no regular exchange seemed to exist between them and those on the front line, and the gap was much wider compared with other professions we have been used to working with.

Social workers might also benefit from the culture in midwifery of using “reflective practice”—going back over a difficult or problematic case, thinking of what might have been done differently, discussing it with colleagues or a senior, and sharing thoughts. Perhaps this could be included in future training.

The current narrowness seems to lead to a kind of inwardness, within which debate, criticism, or fresh light from outside, or from families themselves, is most unwelcome, and meets a hostile and defensive response. It was in fact the barriers we noticed against learning from families which we deplored even more than the lack of bridges to academic knowledge. On occasions social workers seemed to act like Victorian parents: adult parents were there to be told, and to comply, not equal adults who should be respected and whose knowledge of their own children and their own circumstances was unique and valuable.

### 3. CULTURAL INADEQUACY

Although they were often dealing with a multi-ethnic population, it soon became obvious from the comments of our clients that whilst social workers often used phrases to indicate that they had taken into account cultural differences, true understanding was often lacking. Sometimes social workers from ethnic minorities themselves were used for clients of what was seen (often superficially) as similar background but our clients’ comments on them could be even more critical, since they were seen—and apparently behaved—as what our clients called “Oreo cookies” used as weapons to enforce the prevailing “white” view.<sup>19</sup>

This cultural ignorance applied not just to ethnic differences but to social class and cultural differences within white communities. We had complaints of discrimination for example:

from Christian families (eg a crucifix on the wall of the parents’ bedroom was undesirable) and regular churchgoing regarded with suspicion;

from educated middle class families whose bookish knowledge was seen as threatening;

from a well-educated West Indian whose qualifications were automatically disbelieved;

from an Asian woman whose concern about her child’s nutrition was subverted into the need for Halal meat;

from a mixed-race woman whose complaints were translated into racial antagonism towards whites which she did not feel and never showed in work with us, or her life history; and

from people born in this country, who resented simplistic and crude assumptions about their views and habits, which happened to be very different from those of their immigrant parents . . .

And, of course all families are different. We could go on with other examples.

We got the impression that some social workers were content with simplistic, superficial knowledge which they used to apply a blanket answer which implied they “knew” and “understood”. There would be a hostile response to any suggestions from families that they did not. Our own knowledge was inadequate, but as soon as we explained we did not know and would like to learn, families were invariably helpful and eager to share information.

There have been extreme pressures on social workers, thrown in at the deep end with inadequate intellectual resources and lack of mentoring and support, with strong pressures from the top to “seek, find, and act” on any suspicion of abuse. There is fear of tragedies blazoned over the press. All these factors could have contributed to a “batten down the hatches” culture which is a hostile environment for new learning, self-questioning, and a more academic-based approach.

We would also like to mention another problem. We have come across a number of social workers from overseas—from Europe, the Commonwealth and elsewhere. Obviously with the shortage of social workers here, recruitment abroad will continue. We are well aware of problems with communication and different styles in health care with practitioners from overseas. Social workers are not working from a basis of reasonably well proven scientific knowledge (there are very few randomised trials). They operate in grey areas involving family relationships, local communities, and shifting cultures. We do not know what induction courses overseas workers receive, or how they understand and cope with such problems in a different culture.. This area needs to be explored. It is not enough simply to act as if a basic qualification is all, and that problems do not exist and do not need to be openly discussed. Medicine, nursing and midwifery would have been the better for bringing these problems to the surface, without fear of the standard riposte of “racism”—which would not in any case apply to many white incomers. We should also be looking at

<sup>19</sup> Oreo cookie. An American sweet sandwich biscuit which is chocolate coloured with a white cream filling. It has become a term which is widely used in the USA to criticise fellow black people who are seen as “dark on the outside and white on the inside”. Recently a black politician was pelted with Oreo cookies at a public meeting.

difficulties from the points of view of overseas recruits themselves, including new insights which they bring. The necessity to simply get more workers should not be allowed to prevent such enquiries, as it only builds up problems for the future.

We have seen some of these problems at first hand. It should be remembered from the Victoria Climbié Inquiry that at the time her case was handled by Brent “all the duty social workers had received their training abroad” as well as being on temporary contracts.

#### 4. DETERIORATION IN STANDARDS

It may be useful to quote some personal background here. As a young wife in the early '60s I worked for a time in Oxfordshire County Council's Children's Department, which was run by the redoubtable Barbara Kahan (later a CBE, adviser to the Home Office, and co-author of the Pin Down Report). My job was to deal with incoming reports from Childcare Officers—mostly mature women who had spent many years in the community. I could read a file and see a cinematic picture of a family over time—their lifestyle, their habits, what they ate, their relationships, the changes that had taken place. These child care officers knew about children, families, and they had studied children and child psychology. They knew which rural communities had an incest problem. After I had left, in 1968 came the Seebohm Report (*Report of the Committee on Local Authority and Allied Personal Social Services* 1968 HMSO) which recommended workers for the whole family. Specialist social workers were to become “generic” family workers. A two-year generic social work training followed, and most workers were carrying generic caseloads—what Barbara Kahan later criticised as “a kind of social work general practice—only without the specialist services available to GPs as in medicine.” The specialist training courses which had existed in child care were closed. However the two year period for training was not increased. That was, in my view, when standards began to decline. As Lord Seebohm later pointed out, it was not what he had intended. The precious experience and knowledge base of these experienced and excellent practitioners was thrown away and inquiries into tragic child deaths began to grow.

When seeing social work files accessed by our clients in the last 10 years I have been shocked by the contrast with my earlier experience—even allowing for declining standards of literacy. The lack of general observation, of basic information, of understanding, the lack of having established the kind of relationship where they could learn and understand, the rush to judgment. No-one seemed to find it shocking, as I did, that a psychologist in one of our cases who—to her credit—actually did an assessment for the court in the family home, rather than her office, recorded her surprise at finding that the parent concerned kept a variety of pets (the mother was, in fact, a trusted carer for a charity). Why had this not even been recorded in the file supplied by social workers who had visited many times, since care and understanding of animals was very much part of the atmosphere of the home? In the case of another client, who was clearly physically disabled, as we saw the first time we met her, why was there virtually no reference to her disability, its cause or how it affected her life or ability as a mother? (In that particular case we suspect drawing attention to the client's legitimate needs, which should have been met, was inconvenient).

Mr Eric Pickles MP, eventually obtained a court order to see a constituent's file. During the second reading of the Children and Adoption Bill (March 2006) he said he found it “thick, repetitive and confusing. I was shocked at the sloppiness of record keeping, the shoddiness of the process and the basic injustice. In that file there was misinformation, embellishment and inappropriate assigning of motives.”

We found that in families where the social worker seemed keen to prove children were at risk even before any proper assessment was done, there seemed to be a reluctance to record information to their credit. I spent a total of 10 days with one single parent family—including the school run, mealtimes, putting the children to bed, observations of breast-feeding, discipline of an older child being stroppy. As an experienced community worker, I could not fault this mother, who was impressive.—calm, warm, consistent, resourceful, practical, well-organized, and managing well on a tiny income. The social worker did not report one positive fact about her—and that was the picture presented to the court, which was accepted, despite my evidence.

It seems, therefore that training, followed by supervision is needed to check on quality of information collected and its factual accuracy. Whilst training may improve observational and recording skills, it cannot in itself improve integrity—and this we shall return to later.

We are particularly concerned about the skills needed to assess parenting and families. These are in fact complex, and we are greatly concerned that it is assumed by the courts that social workers will have the necessary skills. From our observations of their reports, and many comments from families, they do not, and we think there should be a particular investigation of this point alone.

#### 5. INTELLECTUAL STANDARDS

In a study of 45 inquiries into child abuse tragedies (“Common errors of reasoning in child protection work” *Child Abuse and Neglect* 23(8) 745–758, 1999) Dr Eileen Munro found that social workers based assessment of risk on a “narrow range of evidence . . . biased towards evidence that was vivid, concrete, arousing emotion and either the first or last information received. The evidence was also often faulty due, in the main, to biased or dishonest reporting or errors in communication. A critical attitude to evidence

was found to correlate with whether or not the new information supported the existing view of the family. A major problem was that professionals were slow to revise their judgements despite a mounting body of evidence against them.”

What is particularly interesting about this is that the errors described in these tragic cases where children died when there should have been protective intervention, are exactly the same as errors we continually find in cases where families have been wrongly accused of child abuse, and may unjustifiably lose children as a result. Criticisms of social workers who take children unreasonably are not about different types of failure. The same inadequate training and inadequate reasoning lead to both.

Dr Munro concluded that “errors in professional reasoning in child protection work are not random but predictable on the basis of research on how people intuitively simplify reasoning processes in making complex judgments. These errors can be reduced if people are aware of them and strive consciously to avoid them. Aids to reasoning need to be developed that recognize the central role of intuitive reasoning but offer methods for checking intuitive judgements more rigorously and systematically.” This conclusion, if followed, means there is need for a different kind of training to be added.

Although we agree with Dr Munro on the cause, and we also agree wholeheartedly on the need for more training in reasoning and making critical judgments, we believe it is going to be very difficult to effect change through training alone. The direction in which social work has been driven has to be re-examined on a much bigger scale, and the effect of the departments in which it is practised and their mini-cultures has to be considered. A more rigorous intellectual level of training may help social workers to stand back and assess facts more logically; it does not guarantee that they will do it.

For the time being it might be useful if an experiment could be tried on a sample of cases by providing a “pro-family” worker to collect and record positive aspects of the parents, the home, maybe grandparents, etc, and a “pro-child” worker allocated to collecting and recording risk factors. Then the information could be brought together and discussed with a supervisor. We think this worth trying, since we see so many cases where social workers seem incapable of collecting both types of data, or remaining open-minded until they have a reasonably full understanding of a family and its circumstances.

Work by Dr. Munro, and by others, has shown that when disasters have occurred the problem is not necessarily that information available to other agencies was not shared (as emphasised by Lord Laming in the Inquiry on Victoria Climbié). Even with all the relevant data, *social workers lacked the ability to put crucial pieces of information together and see the whole picture*. This, once again, requires improved intellectual and analytical skills.

But academic training, however good, must be accompanied and followed by support and apprenticeship. From our contacts with midwives, we know that top practitioners have both an excellent clinical knowledge base and experience which they use, but they also employ intuition, gut feelings, and “nous”—which may come from observation of small signs not consciously noted at the time but which can save patients’ lives or greatly help supportive relationships. When newly qualified practitioners are able to work with them, they tell us how much they are able to learn, and how they gain confidence to become true professionals themselves. Trusts now employ consultant midwives, who often advise on specific problems. However, we believe that the valuable super-practitioners in all fields, including social work should be able to gain higher salary and status whilst remaining at the coal face serving as teachers and mentors, rather than moving into management.

## 6. COMMUNICATION

In this we include our thoughts not just on social workers’ communication with individual families, but on the face their departments present to the outside world.

Many of our families reported feeling bruised, and some were seriously traumatised, by their encounters—however brief—with social workers, emerging with, lowered self esteem, decreased confidence as parents, and diminished trust in all professionals. Our own direct observation of some encounters showed that even with a supporter and observer present, the behaviour described by parents was replicated. We did note in one case, however, a fortuitous change to new a social worker who showed a very different approach—friendly, non-judgmental and pleasant, while being very practical. It may be coincidental that unlike many of the others, she had children of her own. This encounter was a pleasure to observe, and left the parent in a very different frame of mind. (A number of families have asked for a change of social worker but it was never achieved.)

This relationship is important because the ability to work with social workers is often part of the picture presented to the court which will assess whether parents are allowed to keep their children. Any defects in the relationship are invariably attributed to the parents. We find this extraordinary, since relationships are affected by all the parties involved. The behaviour reported to us by parents, and which we ourselves observed on occasions, was such that we would certainly not have trusted or wished to cooperate with them as parents ourselves.

This finding is also backed up by research. In a study of social workers’ responses to vignettes, it was noted that “overall social workers tended to use a very confrontational communication style. This was so consistently observed that it is likely to be a systemic issue . . . Insufficient attention has been given to the

micro-skills involved in safeguarding children and this is an urgent priority for future work.” (D Forrester *et al*, “How do child and family social workers talk to parents about child welfare issues? *Child Abuse Review* 2008 17 (1) 23–5 2008). It should be obvious, as we have seen, how such a style can antagonise parents from the beginning and make it more difficult for them to cooperate. Not only training, but observation and monitoring is necessary to see that such a style does not develop and become ingrained.

I was greatly concerned when I accompanied different clients to meetings in three different areas to find that in every case they were presented with a new document outlining the current assessment of their case as they entered the room. It was a document which everyone else had seen and read—often days before—but the meeting immediately progressed while the client was supposed to read it. Each client assured me that this was their normal experience. Of course I immediately required an adjournment while the parents read the document.

This was a glaring example of an institutional practice which prevented the parent from communicating, and indicated contempt and lack of respect. It was apparently so normal in each area, that it was unseen, and every person present was surprised when I objected. Communication with parents, as Professor Priscilla Alderson has shown in her excellent studies of children’s consent to health care, is affected by the style of the building, access to facilities, and many other factors. I was greatly surprised that Chairpersons and senior social workers were insensitive to, and oblivious of, such matters. Such issues could, and should, be addressed in training, but if there is not in-built respect for fellow human beings within the institutions which employ them, it will be so many fine words, without the desired effect on future practice.

One of the most useful checks and balances on the success of training, and the quality of service provided, is access to records and documents for families and others involved—and access at an early stage. This means that accuracy and honesty of records can be quickly corrected, challenged, or refuted if necessary. Time is of the essence, since child protection proceedings can move very quickly, and also records are now widely distributed to other agencies. Inaccuracies and allegations can leave a widespread long-lasting toxic trail, as many of our families have found to their cost. We have never yet had a case where the local authority complied fully and in a timely fashion with the requirements of the Data Protection Act, and a recent story in *The Times* showed many others have had similar experiences. Even basic information which should be easily available under the Freedom of Information Act, like social work protocols, has been withheld for up to two years from one client. (Eventually it showed that protocols had not been followed—but too late for her case).

It is pointless to improve social workers’ communication skills and ability to observe and record families if they are then going to work in surroundings which reward and support concealment and dishonesty, and do not comply with the law.

Another issue which surprised us, was social workers’ lack of skills in both communicating with, and observing, children. We noted many criticisms from parents, from older children themselves, and witnessed apparent lack of skill in observing pre-verbal children—which we reported to your committee in our evidence on Looked-after Children. This is of great concern since they are supposed to collect and listen to the child’s point of view. Social workers are also required to do assessments of parents—a task requiring complex skills which we saw no evidence that they possessed. We can only suggest that in order to improve these skills, many of these interactions should be videoed, with clients’ consent, and social workers’ assessments discussed and reported on by experts in the presence of the practitioner. This is something we have seen used very successfully in GP training, and as lay people have been involved in the discussion panel ourselves.

Finally, parents themselves should be involved in training, at all levels.

*Jean Robinson*

*May 2009*

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### **Memorandum submitted by the National Deaf Children’s Society**

#### **1. SUMMARY**

1.1 Deaf children and their families do not have access to appropriate social care support due to the lack of training, knowledge and experience in social workers and a shortfall in professionals with a specialism in working with deaf children. All social workers need training on how to meet the needs of deaf children and their families. There are government standards for social workers working with deaf children and urgent steps must be taken at a local and national level to ensure that they are met.

#### **2. INTRODUCTION**

2.1 The National Deaf Children’s Society (NDCS) is the national charity dedicated to creating a world without barriers for deaf children and young people. We represent the interests and campaign for the rights of all deaf children and young people from birth until they reach independence. There are over 35,000 deaf children in the UK and three more are born every day.

2.2 NDCS welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the Inquiry into the Training of Children and Family Social Workers. Throughout this submission, we highlight the need to prioritise the social care needs of deaf children. The following sections outline the reasons for a specific focus on appropriate training for all social workers in the assessment of deaf children and their families in order to meet these needs.

2.3 Deafness fundamentally interferes with the usual processes of language acquisition and personal and social development. Effects are varied depending on the individual child, their family circumstances and the nature of the deafness. However, it is well evidenced<sup>20</sup> that deaf children are more likely to experience mental health problems and are more vulnerable to abuse than hearing children.<sup>21</sup>

### 3. KEY CONCERNS

3.1 NDCS is concerned that there is limited knowledge and experience among professionals in working and communicating with deaf children. For example, if a social worker is unable to communicate with the deaf child and involve them in the assessment, it will be difficult to assess whether the child's social and emotional needs are being met. Furthermore, an untrained inexperienced social worker may not fully appreciate the extent of neglect and emotional abuse of a deaf child whose non-communicativeness may be attributed to their deafness. Without the correct knowledge and experience social workers will not have the ability to conduct assessments for deaf children, including the Common Assessment Framework and the Assessment Framework for core assessments.

3.2 NDCS believes that social care issues surrounding children with disabilities have been neglected. This is evidenced by three reports:

- (a) The government report *Mental health and deafness: Towards Equity and Access* (2005) recognised the particular vulnerability of deaf children to abuse and recommended that Area Child Protection Committees (now Local Safeguarding Children's Boards or LSCBs) review their child protection arrangements for deaf children. NDCS is concerned that few have done so.
- (b) The NHS Quality Audit of the Newborn Hearing Screening Programme 2006–08<sup>22</sup> has highlighted the lack of social care involvement in the multi-agency work to support deaf children.
- (c) Research commissioned by NDCS from the University of Manchester<sup>23</sup> which looked at the impact of the reorganisation of children's services on social care for deaf children, found that in many cases the social care needs of deaf children have fallen off the radar of key social care decision makers. The report states, "The lack of appropriate deaf children and family knowledge and skills was expressed as a recurring issue by all Sites".

3.3 The University of Manchester research also reported that this lack of appropriate skills and knowledge commonly led to two errors:

"Firstly the deafness was 'seen' as the presenting problem and explanation for other issues and secondly, significant difficulties that might need social work intervention were 'not seen' because people were too focused on the child's deafness as the main problem. These errors were recognised as potentially occurring both amongst other professional groups working with deaf children and families and amongst social workers who did not have deaf related skills/experience."

3.4 The research also showed that despite being a key developmental risk factor, deafness itself rarely triggers a social care intervention in response to a referral unless there is evidence of immediate critical harm. Fundamental preventative work associated with safeguarding is not routinely carried out. Neither disabled children's teams nor child protection teams are equipped with the knowledge, skills or experience to appropriately respond to referrals concerning deaf children. This is symptomatic of a lack of specialists available to support deaf children and their families once the need for a social care intervention has been identified. This includes specialist social workers for deaf children, interpreters, communication support workers and intermediaries.

3.5 In a number of local authorities support for deaf children and their families is provided by specialist sensory support teams located in adult social services. Members of those teams may not have up to date training in child development and child protection.

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH\\_4103995](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4103995)

<sup>21</sup> ADSS, BDA, LGA, NCB, NDCS & RNID (2002): *Deaf Children: Positive Practice Standards in Social Services* and NSPCC (2003): *It Doesn't Happen to Disabled Children* both cite reliable studies from the USA which indicate that deaf and disabled children are two to three times more likely to suffer physical, sexual or emotional abuse, or to experience neglect (eg Sullivan P M, Brookhouser P, Scanlan J (2000) Maltreatment of deaf and hard of hearing children in: P Hindley, N Kitson (Eds) *Mental Health and Deafness* (pp 149–184), London: Whurr).

<sup>22</sup> [http://hearing.screening.nhs.uk/QA\\_Reports](http://hearing.screening.nhs.uk/QA_Reports)

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.ndcs.org.uk/document.rm?id=3501>

#### 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 The Government should assess whether there are sufficient numbers of specialist social care staff trained to work with deaf children; and take appropriate action to address any recruitment shortfall.

4.2 There should be appropriate training for all social workers in the assessment of deaf children and their families and meeting their social care needs. Communication is a key issue on all levels. If every social work training course included awareness of issues in communicating with deaf and disabled children it would heighten awareness that when working with deaf children there are additional factors which must be taken into account, for example, extra time must be allocated for direct work.

4.3 The Children's Workforce Development Council has drawn National Occupational Standards for social workers working with children with a sensory impairment<sup>24</sup> a key principle of these standards is:

"It is vital that those working in the field of hearing impairment, Deaf issues and the cultural communication needs of children, young people and adults have the necessary and appropriate skills to communicate effectively with people who may use a range of communication tools/ techniques or methods. This standard relates to those working with people who are Deaf or hard of hearing and all communication must be appropriate to their needs. It is also important that workers recognise the need for specialist communication skills and the risk of miscommunication."

These standards also set out performance criteria to meet the various elements within them. All local authorities should ensure that social workers working with deaf children have suitable training courses and professional development opportunities to meet these criteria.

4.4 Where support for deaf children and their families is provided by specialist sensory support teams within adult social services, training should be provided to ensure the social workers have up to date knowledge on child protection and working with children.

May 2009

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#### **Memorandum submitted by Professor June Thoburn CBE, LittD, RSW Emeritus Professor of Social Work, University of East Anglia**

The observations in this memorandum are drawn from: seven years as Vice Chair of GSCC and membership of its Education and Training Committee [but the views expressed are my own and not necessarily those of GSCC], as well as nearly 30 years as a University teacher of social workers at qualifying (Masters and undergraduate), post-qualifying and doctoral (PhD and DSW) levels; and 15 years as a front-line child and family social worker and team leader.

#### SUMMARY STATEMENT

In essence, a newly qualified social worker should not be expected to be fully accountable for complex cases involving the possibility of significant harm or impairment to children or adults until around five or six years after they embarked on their training. This is not to say that they should not undertake aspects of this type of work (which is fundamental to social work practice) from the second year of their qualifying training onwards, but such work should be undertaken as part of a team and supervised by experienced social workers maintaining the main accountability for the service provided and decisions made.

*Are entry routes to social work sufficiently flexible to encourage mature entrants, re-entrants and people considering a career change?*

1. My answer to this question is yes. In fact, more than any other of the "people professions", the social work profession has encouraged mature entrants in these categories, and this applies more in the UK than in most other countries. It could be argued that as a result of this policy, some of the "brightest and the best" potential entrants have been lost to the profession as recruitment at 18-19 was for many years positively discouraged. The move around 2000 to the honours degree in social work as the minimum qualification for entry to the profession was accompanied by a shift in policy to encourage able school leavers with good A levels to start on their training as social workers. This was accompanied, in some local authorities, by creative policies to allow these young people to gain some experience to ensure that they had some awareness of the realities of the profession before starting their degree.

2. Another route into the profession that could be further developed, for school leavers as well as mature entrants, is a foundation degree in working with children and families which, with practice placements could lead into year 2 of the degree for those who demonstrate ability to succeed at honours degree level and have demonstrated the qualities needed of a professional social worker.

3. Having said which, it is essential that the profession welcomes change of career graduates and non-graduates with the ability to achieve at honours degree level. The MA route for graduates should continue. When the BA in social work was being developed, evidence was provided that this route had proved

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/nos/sensory-services>



successful over many years, and that having an MA entry route alongside a BA Hons entry route should be continued. The fact that, in their basic training, they can study at M level has proved an incentive for high quality graduates to enter the profession. Although some argue that it is confusing to have qualification at M and B level, I profoundly disagree.

4. There is evidence that HEIs have for many years successfully trained graduates in a slightly shorter period to the required standard of competence, with academic achievement assessed at M level. In effect, because the amount of vacation time is considerable shortened, the actual period of study is only slightly less than for BA Hons students.

5. However, I do not believe that it is possible to compress the knowledge component of the qualifying social work curriculum any more than at present, even for those with “relevant” degrees. (Past experience when there were 12 month qualifying programmes for “relevant degree” graduates taught us that there was too much room for interpretation about what was “relevant”. Degrees in sociology, psychology, social policy and law, and professional qualifications in nursing or teaching, for example, all left students with much ground still to cover, and the need for time to re-appraise earlier learning in the light of the realities of social work practice.) There may be some scope for the practice placement element to be slightly reduced (for mature entrants with prior relevant experience to the degree and for post-graduates), but anything shorter than the equivalent of 18 months full time study, interwoven with assessed practice, even for those who enter with considerable practice experience and with a “relevant” degree, would, in my opinion, compromise standards at the point of qualification.

6. The Committee may be interested to have information on a UEA/East Anglian employers scheme which has been successful in attracting graduates with very good degrees but little experience. Candidates from any HEI and with a wide range of degrees are jointly interviewed by UEA and employers. The successful applicants are offered employment as social care workers for 12 months and a place on the MA in social work for the following year, subject to satisfactory references from the employer. In most cases the employer offers a small “retainer” to the student whilst they complete the two years of the MA, and most return to the same employer after qualifying. This is a more cost effective approach than fully seconding those (usually more mature people) already in post, and has the advantage of attracting into the profession and the region good graduates who might not otherwise think of coming to East Anglia. From the point of the University, it ensures that the student already has a good practice basis from which to absorb and make sense of the knowledge and practice curriculum.

#### STRUCTURE OF QUALIFYING AND POST-QUALIFYING TRAINING

7. The generic qualifying training at BA Hons and MA levels plus a coherent system of (compulsory) assessed post-qualifying education and continuing professional development should be given more time to “bed in”. Any fundamental organisational or structural changes at this time risks further damage to recruitment and retention and to the delivery of an at least “good enough” service to vulnerable people. See above comments on the place of the MA in social work initial training.

8. All qualifying social workers should have the status of “newly qualified social worker” (NQS) in their first year in practice. This should concentrate on consolidating learning and acquiring new skills under the supervision of an experienced social work practitioner—continuing a process started under the supervision of social work practice educators during the degree. The NQS should have a limited caseload, taking on some more complex cases but not having full case accountability—which will be shared with the supervisor. The end of degree transcript should be used to devise a first year programme for each student. It is not necessary to have much of a taught component during this year, other than necessary induction to the agency. It is an opportunity to consolidate learning acquired during qualification studies EXCEPT that newly qualified workers whose transcripts indicate that they have not had placements or followed courses in this area of practice may need to have a “catch up” basic learning programme devised for them. The worker during this period should be a Registered Social Worker but the employment contract should have a “probationary clause” with the contract being reviewed at the end of the NQS year.

#### CONTENT OF INITIAL TRAINING

9. Qualifying education should continue to be “generic” but, as now, allowing for specialisation as students proceed through the programme. Some (probably the majority, and likely to include those with pre-qualifying relevant experience) will wish to be moving towards a client group specialism in their third year but others (especially younger entrants with limited prior experience) will opt to remain generalists and start on specialist training when they take up their first post.

10. The “knowledge curriculum” and “practice curriculum”, designed around agreed operational standards, are broadly “fit for purpose”, although some revisions may be needed in light of changes since the standards were devised. Given the breadth of knowledge required, it is inevitable (and to an extent desirable) that there will be differences between schools of social work in the emphasis given to different aspects of the curriculum, but GSCC inspectors and external examiners have key roles in ensuring these variations are within acceptable limits.

11. The knowledge curriculum is already “compressed”. I would argue (though not all my colleagues would agree) that there is room to consider whether the time spent on practice placements (approximately half of the time of the degree) may allow too little time for the acquiring and critically appraising of the wide range of knowledge needed, right from the start of a social work career. There is certainly no scope to cut down the time spent in the HEI on the knowledge curriculum eg by “fast tracking” proposals for graduates. There may be some scope for reducing the length of placement time for those with pre-course relevant experience—but there should still be a minimum of nine months full time spent in assessed practice in an agency where social work is a major element of the service provided. This experience is necessary for skills development, but also brings relevance and a better understanding to the knowledge and values learning that takes place within the HEIs. That is—the practice and knowledge learning should not be viewed as separate components of the training but should be seen as mutually dependent and “inter-woven” if each is to be effective.

#### POST-QUALIFYING TRAINING AND CAREER PATHS

12. The majority of NQSWs should be able to complete within the first 18 months post-qualifying, the “consolidation module” allowing entry to a GSCC accredited post-qualifying specialist award. By the end of their third year after qualifying (four years for those working part time), all new entrants should have completed a GSCC accredited PQ Specialist award. Only then should social workers be considered fully accountable for having the lead professional/key worker role in the most complex cases involving safeguarding children or adults from serious maltreatment or other forms of avoidable significant harm or impairment. They will have gradually incorporated such work into their practice, by co-working or under the supervision of an experienced social worker.

13. Staff working at senior practitioner level should all have completed or be working towards a Higher Specialist award. A modular approach to assessed study combining the enhancing of practice knowledge and skills with study at graduate diploma or masters level provides the flexibility necessary for both social workers and employers. This formal assessed study has to be complemented by shorter “in-service” courses, often directed at a particular area of practice or a particular skill or method relevant to the worker’s practice. After the first five years or so post qualifying the balance shifts from mainly assessed learning to mainly short courses to top up knowledge or acquire new skills. Some “ring fencing” of resources (for agency-based mentors and HEI fees) is likely to be needed to achieve this. Universities UK and CWDC should consider how to ensure that sufficiently well qualified educators are available to staff these programmes.

14. For this to be successful, employers must ensure and reward a career path of senior practitioner/practice educator. To be effective first line managers/team leaders experienced social workers must continue to expand their child and family social work knowledge base alongside acquiring management knowledge and skills.

#### QUALITY

15. None of the above is to say that identified problems should not be urgently attended to by joint action by government departments, employers, HEI schools of social work and their external examiners and regulatory bodies. This applies to the knowledge as well as the practice component of qualifying and post-qualifying education and training.

16. There is urgent need for the placement experience of each student to be more tightly monitored by a system devised by the HEIs and GSCC. GSCC already collects student level data but the data collection instrument needs refining as some of the data entry protocols and definitions are unclear (eg the terms “statutory” and “setting” are inadequately defined and can be loosely interpreted). Specifically, no student should qualify who has not, for the majority of their time on placement (and specifically for their final placement), been taught as well as assessed by a qualified and experienced social worker who has undertaken training as a practice educator, and all students should have a second or third year placement in a local authority, health or criminal justice setting in which compulsory powers may be used by social workers. This is essential if the newly qualified social worker is to be confident in their social work role, and to develop experience in how to make best use of (and insist on having) competent social work supervision once entering practice.

17. GSCC education advisers have a vitally important role to play in quality assuring the qualifying and post-qualifying education provided by HEIs. In particular they should have stronger powers to ensure that funding provided by HEFCE or employers for social work students is actually spent on the education of social work students. The rules requiring sufficient and sufficiently qualified teachers of practice and academic components of the curriculum may need to be tightened or clarified, so that the quality of the HEI programmes can be more adequately monitored.

#### SUPPLY OF INITIAL TRAINING

18. If there is a tension between quantity and quality (as I believe there currently is in the UK) quality issues must prevail. A crucial factor for the Committee to consider is that the shortage of high quality social workers is mirrored by difficulty in recruiting high quality social work academics (at all levels from professor to junior lecturer). The Committee should consider (and perhaps seek evidence from Universities UK and

ESRC) what steps can be taken to assist those social work practitioners who wish to have a career as social work lecturers and researchers as well as those who wish to become advanced practitioners or managers. There has been insufficient consideration by DCSF, DH, GSCC, CWDC or employers' organisations on how best to "grow" the next generation of social work educators. Training opportunities can not be increased unless there are sufficient numbers of appropriately qualified social work lecturers (including, for the bulk of the curriculum, those with social work practice experience as well as the relevant teaching and research qualifications). I am not sure that the evidence is available on the academic and practice qualifications of those currently teaching qualifying and post-qualifying social workers in HEIs, but if it isn't this knowledge gap should be urgently attended to before any decision is made about expanding numbers. Priority should be given to the expansion of post-qualifying programmes, especially for practice educators, and advanced practitioners. Without this, an expansion in qualifying places may well result in a less than "good enough" learning experience for a proportion of those qualifying as social workers. I note the drive to attract those who have left the profession back into employment. Whilst some may not wish to be in front line practice, they may be appropriately skilled, knowledgeable and experienced to fill some of the gaps in the practice educator workforce.

May 2009

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#### **Memorandum submitted by Foster Care Associates**

The FCA group of companies (FCA) are very interested in the development and supervision of newly qualified social workers.

During the past two years the number of student social work placements offered by FCA has increased by over 300% (from 15 to over 60 per academic year). FCA offers a variety of placements including observation, first, but predominately Final Year placements. This year we have worked with over 30 Universities on both BA and MA courses. Feedback from both Universities and students have been very positive, and we will continue to offer high quality placements to as many Universities as we can.

Many students on placement are of a very high calibre. Students bring energy and enquiring minds and help to focus on our practices and consistently bring the challenge of first principles through their engagement and asking of questions. Students also bring with them new models and theories that can be tested in practice with potential to alternative views and work practices.

Following the success of the students within the organisation, FCA are developing a "Graduate Learning Programme". This will be open to newly qualified social workers employed by the group of companies. The programme begins in September 2009 and will offer 28 days training during the worker's first year (this is over and above training offered by their regions—typically 20 days for a "new starter") and will consist of the following:

- Corporate Induction.
- Safeguarding Children.
- Developing knowledge of fostering including legal framework.
- Supervision of carers including "managing crisis".
- Child development and attachment.
- Assessment.
- Educational needs of children.
- Sanctuary Seeking Children.
- Groupwork.
- Equality and Diversity.
- Parent and Child placements.
- Role of Family Placement social workers in relation to professional colleagues.
- Policy and Procedures (including recording practices).
- Direct work with children.
- Working with children with disabilities.

As well as the training programme, newly qualified social workers will be offered mentoring and support on both a regional and national level within the first year. They will also receive peer support from others on the programme.

During the Induction period, workers are given time to familiarise themselves with other staff, policy and procedures as well as expectations of their role. Time will be allocated to discuss and plan how the worker will gradually fulfil the requirements of their job description. All social workers receive high quality

supervision, which will occur every four weeks. This will be linked into a worker's three month interim and six month probationary review. Subsequently each social worker and their manager agree a "Personal Development Plan" which is reviewed every six months.

Ingrid Oldham, FCA's Learning and Development Officer (Practice Learning) is responsible for developing and coordinating the Graduate Learning Programme. Ingrid has vast experience of supervising and managing students and working directly with newly qualified social workers on the professional development. She has worked within a Local Authority for 19 years as well as "tutoring" at various Universities on both the BA and MA courses. During her time at the Local Authority, Ingrid developed and coordinated a programme for newly qualified social workers and ran the scheme for five years until moving to FCA. The programme produced some excellent practitioners who were equipped both with the knowledge and practical skills to address many of the ethical/practice issues raised in social work. The programme also reduced the turnover of newly qualified staff both while they were on the course, and through the following years, delivering approximately 90% retention rates. The programme was also used as a "stepping stone" for the wider Continued Professional Development, and linked into social workers undertaking their Post Qualification awards.

FCA are committed to the continuous development of social work professionals and are expanding learning opportunities in the field of social work at pre and post qualification level. We are also committed to developing social work managers who have the knowledge, skills and experience to develop, support, coach, mentor and educate the staff that they supervise. As a consequence the recipients of our service (foster carers and looked after children) have the best opportunity to have their needs appropriately addressed.

FCA would be happy to contribute further to the discussion around this issue should the Select Committee deem this appropriate.

May 2009

### **Memorandum submitted by Nottingham Trent University**

#### **SUMMARY**

Initially we would like to make the general point that we strongly disagree with much of the evidence submitted to the Social Work Task Force by the Children's Workforce Development Council, which we feel is inaccurate and makes spurious unsubstantiated claims about the current nature of social work education.

While there are undoubtedly some criticisms which can be made of social work education (as of anything) we feel that the overall attack launched on the quality of social work in general and of social work education in particular, is misplaced.

We consider that the framework is in place to improve and enhance social work education at both qualifying and post qualifying level, though some changes need to be made, especially around flexibility.

Employers need funding to allow social work practitioners time off and workload relief for the workforce to really benefit from enhanced level of qualification. More attention needs to be paid to the emotional side of social work, rather than procedural and technical aspects.

#### **ENTRY ROUTES TO THE PROFESSION**

*1. Are entry routes to social work sufficiently flexible to encourage mature entrants, re-entrants and people considering a career change?*

On the whole we would say yes, but there is some discrepancy between the academic standards of some applicants who come via non traditional routes—in a nutshell, the younger, post A level applicants tend to have higher academic qualifications but less life experience; older applicants tend to be alternatively qualified but are likely to have more relevant life and professional experience. For people envisaging a career change there is always the issue of finance, and it may be worth considering modelling some of the schemes currently in place to encourage mature entrants into teaching. There is also an issue as to whether many 18 year olds really have the maturity to embark on a career as a social worker; although a few do, these are the exception.

#### **STRUCTURE OF TRAINING**

*2. Is a three-year bachelor's degree/two-year master's degree the right format and level for initial social work training?*

Yes, there doesn't seem any point in changing this but there may need to be alternative training routes for experienced professionals changing careers. We also consider part time, sponsored qualifying training ("grow your own") has potential to be further developed.

3. *Following initial training, how should newly-qualified social workers be equipped with the further skills and experience they need?*

The NQSW pilot is a good initiative which we fully support and which should be rolled out to all local authorities. However, we are concerned about the attitude of some local authorities in terms of: as long as a case is allocated, it doesn't matter who to. This attitude pervades some teams and is extremely unhelpful in introducing social workers to the complexities of the role of a professionally qualified social worker. It also devalues the profession in not allowing for personal growth and skill development.

#### CONTENT OF INITIAL TRAINING

4. *Is the generic social work degree fit for the purpose of training children and families social workers? Is there sufficient scope for specialisation?*

Social work is a holistic discipline: to ensure safety and maximise life chances for the most vulnerable children, social workers are working with the most disadvantaged and damaged adults. They need to have knowledge and understanding of mental health, drug and alcohol misuse and domestic violence; prospective social workers interested in these issues from an adult perspective also need to understand how these difficulties affect children. There is a serious danger that in the laudable drive for integrated services around children, we will lose sight of the need for close working relationships between adult and children's services. This danger is likely to be increased if the degree is made a specialist qualification. The call for a specialist degree is a knee jerk reaction to current issues, and one which in the long run will not serve the interests of vulnerable children. We therefore support the idea that the third year of the degree should be linked to more specialist training, but would resist the idea of the whole degree being made specialist.

5. *Does the content of training reflect the tasks social workers will be asked to undertake when in employment?*

Some agencies feel that this is not the case. Universities need to (and do) work with agency partners to ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of employers, but sometimes employers have unreasonable expectations. Some students on level 3 placements (3rd year) are expected to take on almost full responsibility for working with very complex cases—this is before they are even qualified. The rationale is, this is the real world, get used to it. However, we wouldn't expect a trainee surgeon to be shown the operating theatre, given a knife and told to get on with it. That's what it feels like for some of these students. It may be the case that younger students find this attitude more difficult to cope with.

6. *Is the balance of knowledge, skills, values and experience correct?*

This is always under review, and is a difficult balance to strike. One of the challenges in teaching of any sort, but particularly in social work, is accommodating different learning styles and needs. By implication, some of the candidates who have the interpersonal skills needed to be a good social worker may not have the academic or scholarly background to achieve a "good" degree, but may still become a good social worker. On the other hand, social workers need skills of critical analysis and assessment, and must be able to express themselves adequately in writing. The danger is that increased prescription around how the degree should be taught may not play to the strengths of either the student or the lecturer. "The balance between project work, group work, individual supervision and lectures appropriate for the realities of the job that social workers will undertake" is an area that is under continual scrutiny by the teaching staff at this university, and we are surprised that anyone (I refer here to the CWDC submission to the Social Work Task Force) thinks this is not so. This is our job. We would be very happy to provide information to contribute to an "analysis of current activities" which the CWDC suggests.

#### QUALITY

7. *How effectively does the General Social Care Council regulate the quality of training?*

Satisfactory but there is increasing confusion between the role of the GSCC and the CWDC in the training of social workers.

8. *How can the quality, suitability and supply of practice placements be assured?*

This is a continuing issue but one way we are trying to address this is by working with our agency partners to link practice assessor training ("Enabling Learning" in the PQ framework) directly with placement provision. However, as already stated, agencies must be aware that placements are an integral part of training, not just another pair of hands.

9. *Has the switch to degree-level qualification improved the calibre of recruits and the effectiveness of newly-qualified social workers?*

Approaching this from the perspective of one who is concerned mainly with teaching at PQ level, I would say definitely yes.

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## SUPPLY OF INITIAL TRAINING

### 10. *What factors influence whether higher education institutions offer social work qualifying courses?*

Partly level of local demand for social workers and whether the course is financially viable.

### 11. *How effectively do the DCSF, DIUS, and the Children's Workforce Development Council ensure adequate training capacity and workforce planning?*

It isn't possible to answer this question from our perspective.

## POST-QUALIFYING TRAINING AND CAREER PATH

### 12. *How can the quality, suitability and take-up of post-qualifying training be assured?*

See below.

### 13. *What factors influence the continuing development of newly-qualified social workers and their future career decisions?*

See below.

### 14. *How well do employers support the development of social workers?*

See below.

- CWDC has stated that the current PQ framework is not fit for purpose for training social workers in child protection. The current PQ framework is designed as a professional development programme for all child care social workers, and as such it offers a CPD follow up to the degree course for social workers in all aspects of children's social work.
- We consider our PQ Specialist Award in Child Care Practice to be very successful, particularly in that part of it is delivered in the social work agencies, and designed jointly with them. HEIs have a responsibility to reach out to their social work agency partners to meet their needs for training social workers and join together as full partners. This is what we aspire to do and we feel it is a model which could be followed by other regional partnerships.

## Development of the PQ programme in the current context

- While the Specialist Award isn't in itself child protection training, we completely disagree that it is not fit for purpose.
- Lord Laming recommends that the Department "should introduce a fully funded, practice focused children's social work post graduate qualification"—we argue that the basis of this already exists in the current PQ programmes which have been developed relatively recently (within the last three years). However, we acknowledge that there is a lack of flexibility in the present regulatory framework which makes it difficult to fit different modules within the Specialist Award.
- We are working with our agency partners to develop two new modules as stand alone CPD training and which would also be part of progression to a Master's degree. These courses are "Leadership in the Context of Safeguarding Children" and "Promoting Good Outcomes for Looked After Children". This will also fit within the structure of the Specialist/Higher Specialist and Advanced Award. A more flexible PQ framework allowing a choice of different modules could meet the need for safeguarding/child protection training within the existing framework, and meet the need to develop a Masters level training progression.
- The ability of practitioners to undertake (and complete advanced) level training is greatly affected by the ability of their employers to support them with time off for study and workload relief. One of our current PQ candidates had her caseload increased to 40 children during the middle of the course, because of a management decision that all cases should be allocated. Many agencies are very good about supporting their practitioners but this commitment needs to come from all, and until the staffing situation improves in social work teams, this is unlikely to happen.

### 15. *How well are social workers trained to deliver front-line supervision?*

- The provision for this in existing social work training at any level is very weak, and our "Leadership" module will try to address this. There needs to be much more emphasis on the complex emotional elements of social work, and much less on the process and procedural aspects.

May 2009

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## Memorandum submitted by the Association of Colleges (AoC)

### INTRODUCTION

The Association of Colleges represents and promotes the interests of Further Education Colleges and their students.

Colleges provide a rich mix of academic and vocational education. As autonomous institutions they have the freedom to innovate and respond flexibly to the needs of individuals, business and communities.

The following key facts illustrate Colleges' contribution to education and training in England:

- Colleges have three million students.
- 737,000 of these students are aged 16 to 18 which compares to 471,000 in schools.
- Half of all entrants to higher education come from Colleges.
- Colleges teach over 60,000 students from outside the UK.
- Colleges provide half of all vocational qualifications.

Colleges are centres of excellence and quality—84% of employers training through a College are satisfied with the service provided and 97% of colleges inspected in 2007–08 were judged satisfactory or better by Ofsted for the quality of their provision.

For more information on Colleges please see [www.aoc.co.uk](http://www.aoc.co.uk)

### TRAINING OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SOCIAL WORKERS

AoC welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to this inquiry. Our submission includes, in Appendix 1, a specific response from New College Durham which provides a BA Hons. in Social Work and, in Appendix 2, the number of social work “learning aims” in Colleges.<sup>25</sup>

### ENTRY ROUTES TO THE PROFESSION

1. Colleges provide a major route for students to a degree in social work.

**Table 1**

#### UNIVERSITY ACCEPTANCES TO LEVEL 5 SOCIAL WORK FOR 2008 ENTRY

<i>Level 5 Social Work</i>	<i>Acceptances from FE College or HE Institute</i>	<i>Total acceptances</i>	<i>% from FE College or HE Institute</i>
Degree	3,926	7,395	53%
HND	17	148	11%
Foundation degree	352	1,005	35%
Other	403	1,626	25%
Total	4,698	10,174	46%

*Source: UCAS*

2. A number of Colleges also provide degree level social work courses themselves. See Table 2 below shows that there were 1,022 students in nine colleges studying:

- BA (Hons) in Professional Studies (Social Work).
- BA (Hons) in Social Work.
- BA in Social Work and Welfare Studies.
- BSc (Hons) in Social Work.

<sup>25</sup> Appendix 2 not printed.

**Table 2**

<i>College</i>	<i>BA (Hons) in Professional Studies (Social Work)</i>	<i>BA (Hons) in Social Work</i>	<i>BA in Social Work and Welfare Studies</i>	<i>BSc (Hons) in Social Work</i>	<i>Total</i>
Havering College of Further and Higher Education	0	286	0	0	286
Liverpool Community College	0	149	0	0	149
Ruskin College	0	127	0	0	127
Stockport College of Further and Higher Education	122	0	0	0	122
New College, Durham	0	114	0	0	114
North East Worcestershire College	0	87	0	0	87
Bradford College	0	83	0	0	83
Wiltshire College	0	0	0	46	46
Kendal College	0	0	8	0	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>846</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>1,022</b>

Source: LSC ILR (f05) 2007–08

3. The numbers doing a social work degree are included in over 2,000 social work “learning aims” delivered in Colleges. See Appendix 2.<sup>26</sup>

4. Access for young people to social work has potential to be further strengthened by the Level 2 Diplomas, in particular the Society, Health & Development Diploma (a phase one diploma that is currently being taught) and Public Services Diploma (a phase three diploma due to begin in 2010). In addition we feel there is a need for an apprenticeship pathway to be developed in this area.

5. We see as a potential source of social workers, those people already working in sector with Level 2 and level 3 qualifications. There is a need for flexible provision which takes into account differing personal circumstances.

6. The majority of people working in the sector at this level are not well paid and so cannot afford to stop working in order to continue their learning. They are also not eligible for student loans if they take courses on a part-time basis. AoC believes that access for mature entrants and re-entrants would be greatly improved if financial support was made available to part-time students to pay HE tuition fees, cover childcare arrangements and transport costs.

7. The work of the Children’s Workforce Development Council in early years provision, which supports practitioners financially to gain higher level qualifications, is a good model for professionalising the workforce.

8. Employers may also be reluctant to release staff to train. Supplements to employers to release staff to develop and support work placement particularly in small companies could encourage more flexibility.

9. Complete and impartial information, advice and guidance (IAG) about the social work profession within schools is essential for young people to ensure that they are fully aware of the career options open to them. Information in schools about social work can be incomplete and with a gender bias towards females.

10. The image of social work has been badly affected by negative publicity especially concerning child protection issues. In addition the profession is not seen as high status, due to low levels of pay.

11. A potential route into social work could be through apprenticeships, however schools are not obliged to provide information, advice and guidance on apprenticeships or vocational courses if they don’t perceive them to be within a student’s best interests.

12. AoC believes that the duty on schools to provide impartial IAG should be strengthened. Colleges firmly believe that all young people should have a statutory right to be informed about all their options post-16, not only those which their teachers view as being in the pupil’s interests. In this light we welcome DCSF’s current consultation on careers advice and guidance.

#### STRUCTURE OF TRAINING

13. AoC believes that learning on the job is the most effective way of developing skills and that in addition to the three-year bachelor’s degree/two-year master’s degree there should be a career pathway for people with Level 2 qualifications in social work.

14. This could include apprenticeship progression to a Foundation Degree and mapped progression pathways, including the use of bite-sized education and training, to allow for part-time study and for adult students to return after a period of child care, illness or if they become unemployed because of the recession.

<sup>26</sup> Not printed.



15. Foundation degrees have proved particularly effective in this regard. These can be not only useful preparations for full degrees, but can also allow graduates to specialise and hone their skills following a more general degree. In 2005–06 there were 1,485 entrants to “social work” foundation degrees.

16. Colleges train their teaching staff through in-service courses. This might be a useful model for social work training with trainee social workers employed, supported and mentored by the employer whilst undertaking their graduate level training through the local College.

17. Colleges have a very successful record of working with employers and designing provision that is tailored to their needs.

18. Currently HEFCE is unable to fund modules of higher education which is delivered in Colleges. This is most unfortunate as it is this type of provision which enables institutions to react quickly and decisively to meet the needs of people needing to reskill as a result of the recession.

19. Job placement schemes to allow professional practitioners to teach in FE colleges for short periods of time with a designated brief in this area would strengthen training and ensure that students gain up to date knowledge.

## APPENDIX 1

### RESPONSES TO SPECIFIC QUESTIONS FROM NEW COLLEGE DURHAM

1. New College Durham provides a BA Social Work to 105 students currently in partnership with the University of Sunderland.

2. The College has provided us with the specific answers to the Committee’s areas of interest.

*Are entry routes to social work sufficiently flexible to encourage mature entrants, re-entrants and people considering a career change?*

3. Entry routes to the Social Work Degree programme are via UCAS. There is a “points” requirement for those who wish to pursue their training aged 18 but this is relaxed for mature entrants who need to demonstrate some experience in the social care field either professional or personal. The majority of New College Durham’s social work students are mature and often from non-traditional backgrounds. In addition, there is a flexible part-time route available.

4. It would appear that the entry routes are flexible enough to encourage applicants as we have approximately four applicants for every place available. On application there is a short listing process and applicants are invited for interview which consists of a group discussion, a written piece of work based on the participation in the group and then the interview itself.

### STRUCTURE OF TRAINING

*Is a three-year bachelor’s degree/two-year master’s degree the right format and level for initial social work training?*

5. New College Durham only offers a three-year bachelor’s degree so our response relates to this only. The Social Work course team believe that it is the right format and level for “initial” social work training. The academic input and study provides the students with a sound basis on which to build their expertise as social workers. It provides the underpinning knowledge of theory, models and frameworks for practice which can be put into practice during the practice placements. (30 days at Level 1, 80 days at Level 2 and 90 days at Level 3).

6. There is a growing concern relating to the availability of practice assessors within placements. The Practice Teachers Award, seen as a benchmark standard for those who wished to be involved in practice learning and assessing, no longer exists. Even with the introduction of the new Post-Qualifying Framework there is not an equivalent. We are aware that Children’s Workforce Development Council and Skills for Care are shortly to produce, for consultation, outcome statements for a Practice Assessor Award.

7. Practice Teachers have often moved on due to promotion, retirement or change of career and no new Practice Teachers have qualified in the last three years. This inevitably restricts both the number of placements available and the quality of student assessment as existing Practice Teachers take on more students in an attempt to bridge the gap.

8. Organisations often do not have the resources to fund large numbers of staff to undertake study to become Practice Assessors. The provision of placements is no longer a Key Performance Indicator and other training can take priority over practice education. Staffing levels within teams is also an issue which can prevent teams from accepting students as team managers. A definition of statutory placements and the General Social Care Council’s (GSCC) proposed requirements about student participation in statutory placements is awaited. Dependant on these, the provision of appropriate placements may become more problematic.

*Following initial training, how should newly qualified social workers be equipped with further skills and experience they need?*

9. The GSCC requirements for the training of social workers, and the Quality Assurance Agency benchmark standards, reflect the generic nature of the degree programme. It is “initial” training. We do not and cannot train students to fulfil the particular requirements of whichever job they take after qualification. We can, however, give them the skills and levels of understanding required as qualified social workers. However, the variety of opportunities available to them eg “children in need” teams, “looked after” teams, leaving care, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, therapeutic teams, youth engagement services, fostering/adoption services, makes it unrealistic to even suggest that the Social Work degree should prepare them for individual roles. Despite this employers, via the CWDC consultation on Newly Qualified Social Workers, have expressed the view that students should take up employment ready to “hit the ground running”.

10. The Social Work team at New College Durham very much see the NQSW year as a time when students apply and consolidate their skills in their chosen setting. They still need help and support to do this and this should be through good quality supervision, time for reflection and carefully managed caseloads. Several of our agency partners have been involved in pilot schemes for NQSW and early indications show that in authorities where practice learning has been given priority the NQSW implementation has been successful. There maybe a need to maintain a connection with the NQSW’s qualifying university or college over this first year to ensure that they still receive academic support and good access to research to inform their practice. This would perhaps involve some mechanism where the university or college, and the employer, are collaboratively involved in the assessment of the NQSW’s abilities and potential just as employers are involved in the assessment of final year students.

#### CONTENT OF INITIAL TRAINING

*Is the generic social work degree fit for the purpose of training children and families social workers? Is there sufficient scope for specialisation?*

11. There isn’t sufficient scope for specialisation but it is our view neither should there be. Students need to focus on obtaining and enhancing their skills in a generic sense and it is our belief that the specialisation should take place post-qualification.

12. Many students do not know where their talents lie and arrive with fixed ideas about where they want to work following qualification. For example, one student at New College Durham maintained from her first day that she wanted to work in the field of mental health and expressed great dissatisfaction about having to do a placement with a children’s service. Her final year placement was in a mental health setting and she focused her research and dissertation on an aspect of mental health. She then decided that she preferred working with children and subsequently went on to apply for posts within children’s services. Two years on, she is still working in a Leaving Care team. Undoubtedly her interest in mental health issues will inform the work she is doing. If this young lady had to choose a specialism during the course of her degree not only would Children’s Services have lost a good social worker but they may have ended up with a worker with no insight into the issues affecting many parents. Adult Services would have also not been able to retain a social worker who was realising that her interests lay elsewhere. Students need to experience a range of placements to inform their education and career choices.

*Does the content of training reflect the tasks social workers will be asked to undertake when in employment? Is the balance of knowledge, skills, values and experience correct?*

13. As outlined above the range of tasks, in a range of different settings, will vary considerably. However, what is common to the majority of social work roles are the tasks of assessment, analysis, care planning, intervention and review. The content of the training currently focuses on the skills, understanding, methods and frameworks to undertake those tasks in any setting. The skills needed are the same whether applied in adult or children’s services. There is also a focus throughout the three year degree programme on the dilemmas, both ethical and moral, which social workers face on a daily basis.

14. What a social work programme cannot provide for students is knowledge about individual employer’s expectations, processes and procedures. Each agency may even follow national guidelines in different ways. In our view the balance of knowledge, skills, values and practical experience are correct for initial social work training.

#### QUALITY

*How effectively does the General Social Care Council regulate the quality of training?*

15. The GSCC must, of course, give approval for all social work programmes and they require an annual report. Continued monitoring is completed via the regional inspectors. The inspectors attend Programme Management Boards and are available for other meetings, if required. Every five years the social work programmes have to be re-validated. GSCC instigates this and is a party to the whole process. They are fully aware of the content of programmes, the background and input of the teaching staff and the content of individual modules. During the validation process, and as part of the Programme Management Boards, they

will hear the views of students from student representatives and service users and carers who are involved with our programme. Whilst the GSCC are involved in our programme it is not automatic that they are involved in the formal processes of validation, review and re-validation in other universities and colleges.

16. The regional inspector also attends other regional meetings such as SWENE (Social Work Education North East) so will also be aware of the input each university of colleges makes regionally and to specific projects and interests.

*How can the quality, suitability and supply of practice placements be assured?*

17. This is a topic which has been the focus of regional work in the North East over the last two years. There is a sub-group of the Regional Strategic Planning Group, the PQ/PL Forum. This began as a forum for sharing good practice and information about the development of both Post-Qualifying programmes and Practice Learning. However, with funding both from SfC and CWDC there have been a variety of projects carried out focusing on increasing the supply of practice placements (particularly in the voluntary and independent sector), establishing workforce data to inform planning and enhancing the student experience of placement with the LA organisations. These have resulted in some tangible products which have achieved their aims. For example the VIPLEX (Voluntary and Independent Placement Exchange)—project has developed approximately 50 new placements in the voluntary and independent sector through supporting organisations to accept placement via training and also the development of their own organisational procedures. We now have regional estimates of the number of placements we will require in the coming years. In addition, a Code of Practice about the supply and support of placements has been produced and accepted by the Regional Planning Group. This is being disseminated at Director level via ADASS and ADCS.

18. These have been major achievements for the North East region but the funding remains uncertain as national bodies focus on the supply of statutory placements. There does not appear to be any recognition that we still need to focus on the supply of placements from the voluntary and independent sectors if only to free up statutory placements for second and final year students.

*Has the switch to degree-level qualification improved the calibre of recruits and the effectiveness of newly-qualified social workers?*

19. With regard to the first part of this question consideration needs to be given to two groups of recruits, the mature students and those students applying to do a degree at 18 years of age. The recruitment of mature students has not been changed by the switch to the degree although there may be implications from the widening participation agenda. However, as a degree, applications are accepted from young people at 18 years of age. Many of these young people are excellent students but over the course of the three years a few students find through the practice placements that they are not mature enough to cope with the everyday stresses of social work and leave the programme.

#### SUPPLY OF INITIAL TRAINING

*What factors influence whether HEIs offer social work qualifying courses?*

20. New College Durham has a long history of providing social work qualifying programmes. Three members of the social work teaching team qualified at the College and, after many years experience of social work, have returned to deliver training. The College's social work course is held in high regard by local authorities and others and the mutual respect and collaborative working between not only the College and its partner agencies but also from the other regional universities and colleges, is a huge influence on the success of the programmes and the decision to provide them. Without our partner agencies, who supply the placements on which we rely, we could not run the programme. Without us the partner agencies would not have a supply of qualified social workers to employ.

*How effectively do the DCSF, DIUS and the CWDC ensure adequate training capacity and workforce planning?*

21. It is difficult to answer this from a College perspective but New College Durham has been impressed with the level of detail from CWDC when implementing the NQSW pilots. The College was involved in the early consultations about this and believes the training materials provided to support the pilots and staff training are of a high quality.

#### POST QUALIFYING TRAINING AND CAREER PATHS

*How can the quality, suitability and take-up of post-qualifying training be assured?*

22. From our perspective the new post-qualifying Framework has not yet embedded itself either in the HEIs or with employers. There was a period when HEIs were expected to develop programmes in response to employer requirements. However, employers were not articulating what they wanted from the programmes.

23. It has been very difficult to establish such a programme at New College Durham as the PQ Awards have to be validated by the University which validates our BA (Hons) Social Work degree. We could not achieve this with our previous validation university but as we move to validation with Leeds Metropolitan University this option is more open to us. The process however is complex and will take some time to establish fully in any HEI.

24. One of the issues is that the PQ awards (apart from the first Consolidation module in some organisations which is linked to progression) are not linked to career progression. In most professions as you achieve higher qualifications you are eligible for increased salaries or promotion to higher positions, this is not so in social work.

25. The student's practice on the BA Hons. is assessed against the National Occupational Standards. There are no discernible links currently between the progression from a BA student to NQSW through to the PQ awards.

26. Employers and the GSCC need to be explicit about what they want from universities and colleges and collaboration with employers would ensure that programmes would be suitable for the local workforce. Places for PQ programmes should be properly funded to include replacement staff costs. Linking awards to pay and career progression would encourage social workers to be proactive in taking up places offered.

*How well do employers support the development of social workers?*

27. This is difficult to answer as a College although we are aware that although the employers may not send staff on external courses they may well have their own internal training. We are not aware that there is any monitoring of the quality and validity of that training.

*How well are social workers trained to deliver front-line supervision?*

28. There is no specific training on the delivery of supervision in the BA programme. Students do receive some teaching about what supervision is, what they can expect from it and how they can use it. It will be the senior practitioners or team managers who deliver supervision and therefore the training will be internal or from recognised management programmes. Many of these programmes will focus on supervision but not with particular emphasis on social work supervision.

May 2009

### **Memorandum submitted by Barnardo's**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

1. Barnardo's works directly with more than 110,000 children, young people and their families in over 350 services across the UK. These services are located in some of the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods where child poverty and social exclusion are common features. We work with children affected by today's most urgent issues: poverty, homelessness, disability and abuse. Our projects work with children aged 0 to 18 (or 24 in the case of young care leavers).

2. Barnardo's employs over 100 qualified social workers to provide our services to children and young people. Some of these social workers work in positions which require a qualified social worker by law—most notably our fostering and adoption services. Elsewhere we employ social workers in a variety of different roles often working alongside other professionals such as youth workers. These work in many different settings such as leaving care services, services which support disabled children, those which support young carers and family centres.

3. This document provides a summary of some of the main issues regarding social worker training which Barnardo's believes still need to be addressed. We have not answered all of the questions put by the committee but instead have concentrated our response on those questions where we have expertise. If the committee would like us to expand upon the points made in this document then we would be willing to provide oral evidence.

#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Barnardo's would like to see:

- More part time courses offered by social work course providers and more sponsorships and secondments from local authorities to help ease the routes into social work for more mature graduates.
- Rolling out of the newly qualified social worker status across the country, so all new social workers benefit from a year with a reduced case load and more extensive supervision.
- Reform of the current system of postgraduate training for social workers, so that a nationally recognised framework of postgraduate qualifications is developed in this field.

- The development of the current social work degree structure to allow specialisation into child and family social work late in the initial degree programme.
- The development of more initiatives to involve services users and experienced social workers in the delivering of the teaching elements of the undergraduate programme.
- More support for practice teachers who are providing support for student social workers in the field, including encouraging organisations who take on students to recognise the role of the practice teachers through the appraisal system.
- The development of a new “advanced skills” social worker career path which would enable social workers to advance through the profession, without having to move into management roles and away from front line social work.

#### QUESTION 1

*Are entry routes to social work sufficiently flexible to encourage re-entrants and people considering a career change?*

4. Barnardo’s welcomed recent changes to the qualification structure for social workers with the introduction of the new honours and postgraduate degree programmes to replace diplomas. We believe this change is important to help improve the skills and knowledge of social work in the field, and should also help to improve the reputation of social worker as a “profession”, thus helping to attract a larger number of high quality individuals to the work.

5. We are, however, concerned that changes to the qualification structure should not discourage mature graduates from entering the profession. Life experiences such as the experience of raising a family can provide useful insights and many such candidates will be able to show great understanding of different families’ needs and problems—essential qualities in a good social worker. Such candidates, however, often have extra commitments, such as a mortgage, or childcare costs which can make it very difficult to take two or three years out of the workplace unpaid to re-train.

6. We therefore feel that it is important that the current qualification framework is not allowed to act as a disincentive to individuals seeking a new career in social work. Some changes which could be introduced to help ease the current disincentives on mature candidates to re-train include:

- Encouraging a greater number of institutions to offer the new degree programmes on a part-time basis.
- Encouraging more local authorities to think about offering sponsorship or secondment schemes where employees are paid to study the social work degree through the Open University following a period of employment with them.
- Introduce a well publicised nation wide system of “golden hellos” for social workers—similar to those available for teachers of minority subjects. Currently while many local authorities offer golden hellos to newly qualified social workers, the absence of a national scheme mean this is often not known about. If mature candidates were aware they will receive a one off lump sum payment on qualification which could help to clear debts incurred while training this would act as a further incentive to re-train.

#### QUESTION 2

##### *Structure of training*

*Is a three-year bachelor’s degree/two-year master’s degree the right format and level for initial social work training?*

*Following initial training, how should newly-qualified social workers be equipped with the further skills and experience they need?*

7. As stated above Barnardo’s supports the current qualification structure and believes it has the potential to deliver the high quality social workers to the field that children in this country need. However, the content of both the academic elements of the course, and the practice placements will be key in making the new format a success. We address issues concerning course quality in the next section.

8. It is also important that the completion of the degree is only seen as the beginning of the qualification process not the end of it. For years there has been insufficient regard to the needs of newly qualified social workers who have often been thrown into the deep end with a full case load very early into their first job. Barnardo’s therefore supports the introduction of a newly qualified social worker status, similar to the newly qualified teacher status. This system has recently been piloted in around 90 local authorities, and involves providing newly qualified social workers with an introductory year during which they benefit from a reduced caseload and additional supervision. We feel this scheme should now be rolled out nationally.

9. Following completion of the degree we also believe there is need to further develop the post-qualification framework. Historically there has been no nationally recognised framework for postgraduate study in this field. We agree with the findings of Lord Laming in his more recent report on child protection<sup>27</sup> that there needs to be reform in this area, and nationally recognised qualifications in child protection should be developed. We are, however, concerned that these should not necessarily be at a masters level, and that they will not result in a requirement for a postgraduate degree in addition to the undergraduate degree before a social worker is considered qualified.

### QUESTION 3

#### *Content of initial training*

*Is the generic social work degree fit for the purpose of training children and families social workers? Is there sufficient scope for specialisation?*

*Does the content of training reflect the tasks social workers will be asked to undertake when in employment?*

*Is the balance of knowledge, skills, values and experience correct?*

10. We believe it is important to keep the general social work degree fairly generic. There are a number of skills which we believe all social workers need to learn which are important no matter which area the individual wishes to go into. We also believe that there are many areas of family social work such as child protection which will involve extensive work with the parents, when understanding of issues more associated with adult social work such as adult mental health problems, are essential. We would also be concerned that asking student to specialise too soon within their training may discourage individuals from entering the profession, in our experience students often value the opportunity to find out about the range of different work which social workers do before making a decision on where to specialise.

11. However, there are of course a number of specialised skills that child and family social workers need to develop to be effective in their role, in particular in relation to families with complex needs. It is therefore important that trainee social workers are able to gain an understanding of these issues while still training and before they begin working with families directly. We believe thought needs to be given to the best way to do this, which may be through the specialisation later in the generic degree (probably around the third year). All students would therefore have had the opportunity to gain a common set of core skills and an understanding of the different career options in social work before deciding whether to specialise into “children” or “adult” services.

12. We believe it is still too early to fully assess whether the content of degree courses on offer are sufficient to equip students with the skills they will require as fully qualified social workers. We do, however, have concerns. Research quoted by Laming showed that two-thirds of newly qualified social workers felt that the degree prepared them just enough or not at all for their current role.<sup>28</sup> There is also continued evidence that some of the degree courses on offer are quite theoretical with a lack of focus upon the practical elements of the role. We would like to see degree courses which put a strong emphasis on the skills social workers will use in the field such as analysis and assessment skills. The degree should also equip students with important “soft skills” such as how to talk to children and young people.

13. Degree programme which have a more practice focus would be best achieved if more of those delivering the course had day-to-day experience of social work. This could be achieved by encouraging more secondments of social work teachers into practice, so they may keep their skills and knowledge up to date and more involvement of senior social workers in the delivery of degree programmes.

14. Another useful initiative is to consider more and better ways of involving services users in the delivery of social worker training. Barnardo’s has some experience in this field and has developed the Total Respect training in Barnardo’s LEaSE (London East and South East) Region. This is a training course which is delivered by young people themselves directly to students as part of their degree programme. The training tackles the issue of how to ensure the participation of children and young people, for example, in decisions about their care. This received a number of positive comments in a recent evaluation from social work students who welcomed the practical approach:

“It was an excellent training occasion. Reality based which was so good”,

“Real experiences from first hand knowledge helped me to build a more concrete understanding of young people’s experience”.

<sup>27</sup> The Lord Laming *The Protection of Children in England: A Progress Report* March 2009 available online at <http://publications.everychildmatters.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/HC-330.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> Children’s Workforce Development Council Research Team, *Newly Qualified Social Workers. A report on consultations with newly qualified social workers, employers and those in higher education* (unpublished preliminary findings) quoted in The Lord Laming *The Protection of Children in England: A Progress Report* March 2009 available online at <http://publications.everychildmatters.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/HC-330.pdf>

15. The current degree programme is also firmly reliant on good quality practice placements to fully train students in the field. The difficulty is that the number of practice placements available to students is limited, and the quality can be variable. One of the reasons for the differing quality in practice placements is that the quality of the placement is very dependent on the quality of the practice teacher. The role of practice teaching receives very little status amongst busy social work departments and individuals often receive little or no credit through the formal appraisal system for this important role. Ensuring that the work of such practitioners is fully recognised, and is seen as a key part of their job description rather than just an “add on”, would be helpful in ensuring that practitioners have the time to dedicate to the training of students in the field.

16. An additional problem with the current system of practice placements is that the limited number available means that students are often not offered a suitable range of placements. Barnardo's knows from its own experience of taking students that we do get applications from students whose previous placement was also in the voluntary sector—such students may be able to qualify as social workers and get an immediate job working in the statutory sector and yet have no experience of what this type of work involves. We feel that current degree course providers should be encouraged to place students in a range of different placements during their social work training, to give them the greatest range of experience possible.

#### QUESTION 6

##### *Post-qualifying training and career paths*

*How can the quality, suitability and take-up of post-qualifying training be assured?*

*What factors influence the continuing development of newly-qualified social workers and their future career decisions?*

*How well do employers support the development of social workers?*

*How well are social workers trained to deliver front-line supervision?*

17. As stated above, we believe that post-qualification training for child and family social workers should be reformed and a national framework for postgraduate training should be developed to provide consistency across the profession. It is important that qualifications developed under this framework are relevant with enough emphasis on practice. Employers are unlikely to buy into a system of postgraduate qualification which is seen to be more about ticking boxes than providing the skills which social workers need.

18. We also believe there is a strong case for developing different career paths for social workers. At present there is too much emphasis on social workers who wish to move up in the profession being required to move into management and to lose day to day contact with their client group. Such a career structure does not help to develop those who are less suited to a management role, and does not recognise the need for high level practitioners who can deliver on the increasingly complex agenda that social workers have to face. We therefore believe that to improve recruitment and retention an alternative career path should be developed to enable experienced staff to continue direct work with clients while recognising their achievements through their status and pay.

19. In considering how to develop a career structure in social work which enables more choice for highly skilled professionals between management and practice we believe that lessons could be learned from initiatives introduced in relation to other public sector professions. In particular the advanced skills teachers' initiative could provide important lessons. This new, well paid and higher status role has helped to provide a genuine alternative opportunity for progression to highly skilled teachers who wish to remain in the classroom, and in doing so has done a great deal to raise teaching standards.<sup>29</sup>

May 2009

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#### **Memorandum submitted by Antoinette Dawson**

I am currently a Front Line Manager, and manage a team of qualified social workers (nine) also one unqualified social worker and three admin/children's advisors; we assess children in need and their families. We investigate all allegations of abuse to children and we assess families when they request a service. We safeguard children; initiate care proceedings when necessary and we initiate Child Protection Case Conferences. We also age assess young asylum seekers. We receive approximately 3,000 referrals a year, however since Baby P came to the public's notice this has increased dramatically; I do not have the current figures.

I have been a fully qualified social worker for 20 years; I was a social worker for 14 years before becoming a manager. I have a CQSW; Practice Teacher Award; Counselling Skills Certificate; Advanced Award in Social Work and a Master of Arts in Social Work.

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<sup>29</sup> Ofsted *Advanced skills teacher* (2003) available on line at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/assets/3423.doc>

## 1. ENTRY ROUTES TO THE PROFESSION

It has been my observation that we have had less mature entrants in recent years; they are mainly graduates and students taking Masters. Mature students may find the level of entry academically too high in that they would need to undertake a pre-course period of study before undertaking social work. It is necessary for students to be academically fit to undertake the course and to go on to practice social work. In the authority I work for we currently sponsor one unqualified person employed by the authority a year in order that they can undertake the social work course. I have an excellent unqualified social worker in my team respected by all the qualified social workers in the team for her practice and commitment to the profession, she has “held the hand” of many newly qualified social workers when they first come to the office, and her practice is excellent.

Although there will be many unqualified social workers who would be able to complete the course and go onto be excellent social workers, there needs to be a comprehensive review of each unqualified social worker before sponsoring them onto a social work course. This can be achieved by “putting them on notice” once they apply within the work place, making sure they have a good all round experience and a full assessment at the end of this period. At the moment the manager submits a referral form for the board to consider. I think it would be better if the person applying was stretched into the role of social worker under supervision and monitored and then not only the historic information can be assessed but also their performance during the period of assessment.

## 2. STRUCTURE OF TRAINING

I do think the three year bachelor’s degree and the two year masters is the right format for entry into social work.

However, I think the way we recruit social workers into the profession needs to change. I have been thinking for some time that formal training at University is not sufficient to equip social workers for the stressful and difficult job we undertake. It would be my view that Employers need to recruit in partnership with the University at the entry point for social workers. Employers will then nominate how ever many students they can, and sponsor their placements, with a view to employing them at the end of their study, provided they have fulfilled the standard both set out by the University and Employer. This way it would integrate the student within the local authority at the earliest possible opportunity. The employer would have a commitment to making sure that each student had a good all round experience with social care before actually becoming a fully qualified social worker. Student social workers would need to state at the onset what type of social work they wanted to pursue, and the down side would be that their experience in other areas would be severely limited. Employers would be committed to increasing the amount of placement time available and would have a vested interest in their development. We currently provide bursary placements; this is recruitment in the last year of study whereby we offer a student a post and pay for their last years fee’s and the student agrees to stay with the local authority for two years, or pay the fee’s back. This is a really good scheme; we have had exceptional newly qualified social workers via this route. I don’t see any reason why this cannot be extended. The structure of how this might happen clearly needs more thought and the details of the partnership must clearly state the responsibilities and commitments for both employers and university, and the balance between academic work and placement also needs to be clearly stated. We also need to examine whether we need to train in excess of what an employer can sponsor as there is a drop out rate in social work training. This would be a complete change in culture of recruiting, and there are obstacles, but I think can be a way forward that would enhance the social work training and help newly qualified social workers come to the workplace with a fuller understanding of the profession and the work that is required.

We then need to look at the capacity for each team to be able to accommodate the student social workers. This is a real worry, as at the moment our ability to give newly qualified social workers the appropriate supervision and development experience is severely limited. Although we do limit their case load, and for the first six months they work alongside a more experienced colleague on child protection work, and we try wherever possible to continue doing this for as long as it is necessary. There is also an understanding that each Section 47 enquiry will be conducted by two people preferably with one experienced social worker and less experienced social worker. We try and give them experience of working on their own with less serious cases, so they can get the feel of the work. It is a serious concern to both myself and colleague managers that we do not feel we are giving our newly qualified social workers the quality of supervision they deserve. Government and local government need to seriously think about how to invest in this area, and build capacity in this area which so far in my experience has been neglected. It is no good coming out with guidelines and policies on supporting and supervising newly qualified social workers, if the manager has barely enough time to make sure the business end of the service is running correctly it is not that we don’t want too; I personally love supervising newly qualified social workers, it is extremely rewarding, but I simply don’t have the time to do it properly and serious child protection investigations nearly always overtake my good intentions. A continual downloading of more and more work onto front line managers will only result in managers leaving the profession; there is generally a lack of morale with Front Line managers feeling overwhelmed by the amount of work that they are now being asked to undertake. A front line manager earns at the top of the grade £36,000. This is a long way behind a head of a school for instance, and carries more responsibility in my view. Although it is not only pay that is having an effect on managers, working conditions is also having an effect on managers feeling that they need to leave.



### 3. QUALITY

The quality and suitability of placements could be addressed by my discussions above. However, a practice teacher/supervising social worker should receive appropriate remuneration; making sure there is appropriate back fill to cover for the teaching within the team would also help. Social Workers who do supervise must have the appropriate experience to fulfil this role, and a qualification. I also think that resources for back filling for social workers in this area needs to be “ring fenced” so that it does not go off in other directions. We need to have managers/teachers with each work place in order to organise learning throughout the whole of the workforce; this is my personal view, and maybe expensive, but it would enhance the social work practice, as workplace training/meetings could be organised; identify learning needs. I have personally tried to complete this role within my own workplace, but the demand of the business has meant that I have only had pockets of success. However what was apparent was the absolute need for this to take place; to encourage workers to continually develop; reflective practice to take place, and organising social workers thoughts on training.

It would be my observation that the quality has slightly improved due to the degree-level of qualification. However, we have benefited from Bursary workers in my team; I realise that my authority are “creaming off” the best of the social workers within that year. The managers who take part in this recruitment are experienced managers and excellent practitioners in their own right.

### 4. SUPPLY OF INITIAL TRAINING

It would be my observation that there is effective input from Children’s Workforce Development and they are active in making sure that newly qualified social workers have a good induction. They are also active in developing good working partnerships within the University in our area. What appears to be lacking in my view is their inability to stress the need for an increase in capacity of the environment that would support student social workers placements. It is of real concern for managers when we are told that we have to accommodate so many students and there is no discussion as to whether we have the capacity to undertake the training of students, we are just told to find practice teachers amongst our social workers and then tell them they must do it. I cannot stress enough the amount of work involved in making sure that a student social worker receives a good placement.

### 5. POST QUALIFYING TRAINING AND CAREER PATHS

It is difficult to know how to answer the question on take-up of post-qualifying training. We certainly have a good package in place for social workers, organised by our Workforce Development Team in conjunction with the University. There is reluctance within social work to complete the course due to the amount of work they have to complete in their own time. Although they receive study leave this is nowhere near enough. I would like to give more time to social workers to complete their study work, but my team is always stretched, and you have to balance out the needs of the service and the need for more time off the social workers. In my authority you gain an extra two increments once you have completed the Child Care Award; this is an improvement, as my own personal experience was entirely different, therefore I fully support more pay for post qualifying awards. The Level One Post Qualifying award is difficult to promote as social workers see that they will still have to use their own time, and are reluctant to do so; this is also linked to Level 3 status so they too will gain more money. However, it would be my view that the work is so stressful and there is a need for social workers to relax and enjoy their life away from social work, you can understand their reluctance to undertake this award. We need to build capacity so that this can take place; we could also build retention into the Post Qualifying Awards as well so both parties gain from entering into this arrangement. Once again front line managers play a significant role in supervising a social worker undertaking their PQ, which also goes unrecognised.

Our employers do say they support the development of social workers and especially newly qualified social workers. We have just been told that we now have a new document/book to complete and training for newly qualified social workers within their first year. I do not know of any manager who doesn’t support what is in that document. However, where is the support for the managers to do this? We are just told it is yet another task to complete as part of our work.

There is very little training to help you supervise staff once you become a manager, though I have been on a course organised by our Workforce Development unit; Tony Morrison has developed a very good course, this was an exceptional piece of work and fantastic for front line managers. However, when you have finished you come back all fired up to improve your supervision techniques only to be browbeaten by the amount of work you have to complete.

In my authority training is well organised and appropriate, however once back at the Area Office; there is no capacity to develop good practice due to the high level of work that front line managers have to complete. We are completely target driven by Government’s meaningless targets.

I can tell you how many assessments that were finished in 7–35 days, and you can assess my authority on that if you like; however, it will not denote quality, you are reliant on Front Line Managers to spot the Baby P's in and amongst everything else that we have to do. The new ICS Forms do not tell the story; it doesn't even cover risk we have to find places to put parenting and risky parenting into boxes not labelled as such. They don't read well. Is it more important that we fill the box that tells you how many times a child brushes their teeth? Or would you like to know whether the level of parenting is good enough and why it isn't good and list the risk factors and the protective factors. The Children Act 2004 is a good act, but the emphasis in my view has shifted significantly in favour of Children in Need; changing the name from Child Protection to Safeguarding is not just a technical name change it is significant. Throwing the net wider will not protect children with the current level of resources; I fully support the preventative work with families and promotion of good outcomes strategy outlined in the five outcomes, but it would be my view that you have "watered" down Child Protection. We need both, but we don't have the capacity to undertake both. Multi-agency working is also at the heart of CA 2004, but the responsibility is still for Children's Social Care to undertake. Trying to get other agencies to complete CAF's is problematic; other professionals do not want the responsibility and will keep making referrals to try and gain support for Children's Social Care completing an assessment, I strongly suspect this is a lack of confidence and a feeling that they are stretched. Many other agencies like the Police do not work within the same thresholds as Children's Social Care; they have different shift patterns; difficult to organise strategy discussions at the point of emergency. We often have to start the process and investigate leaving messages for the Police to follow; once again down the Police resources.

## 6. USE OF AGENCY WORKERS

I know this is not part of your brief, but I want to say how dangerous this practice has become within Local Authorities. I have social workers who are barely qualified applying to come into my team; they have not had a permanent post anywhere. When a LA is looking to replace a social worker who has left you always want the most experienced social worker you can recruit. We do not have the time to train newly qualified social workers who are working for an agency, as there is no structure to train them, and we need to invest in our employees. Then there are those social workers who have worked for agencies for a number of years and have never gone through the progression process.

It would be my view that no newly qualified social worker should be working for an agency until they have completed three years post qualifying with a LA under the direction of a manager and fulfilled all the requirements within that LA.

The majority of newly qualified social workers do this because they want or need extra money. I have had social workers in my team working for an agency and they are not only receiving significantly more money, they have far less experience and fewer skills. I have had social workers who have left once they have progressed to Level 3 and then we have had to re-employ them on a much higher rate; unless pay is sorted out this practice will continue.

They leave at a moments notice for more money, and leave a pressured team to sort out caseloads; this is extremely destructive to morale in social work in conjunction with all the other pressures that social workers have to endure.

*May 2009*

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## Memorandum submitted by Social Work Education North East (SWENE)

1. This submission is a joint one from SWENE, which is a regional forum of all the Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) programme qualifying and post qualifying social work programmes in the north east of England. The forum is well established and is made up of representatives from Durham University, New College, Northumbria University, the Open University, Sunderland University and Teesside University. It is therefore in excellent position to comment on all aspects of the social work training from an educational perspective. The following comments relate to specific issues for consideration.

### ENTRY ROUTES INTO THE PROFESSION

2. Under most academic regulations, there is sufficient flexibility to encourage mature entrants and people considering a career change. Traditional qualifying social work programmes have always attracted more mature candidates and the widening participation agenda has ensured that this issue remains a key priority. Work based routes also exist in a number of universities that offer an effective alternative for employers who wish to "grow their own" and for students who otherwise might not consider a more traditional route either because of other responsibilities or increasingly the desire to remain in work and study. However, it should be recognised, that the UCAS system (which is used by the vast majority of social work applicants) is geared towards school leavers and therefore the bulk of applications received early on are those from 18 years old. Only through careful management, are mature candidates (who may apply later on) not disadvantaged.

## STRUCTURE OF TRAINING

3. It is important that there is some choice in the level of training so that it includes both undergraduate and post graduate programmes. We would support the findings of the three year evaluation of the New Social Work Degree Qualification (Orme *et al*, 2007) that the evidence for making major changes into the new degree is limited. What is important however is how that initial social work training is followed up once graduates are in employment. There should be a commitment from employers to support Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) to support for at least a year that involves proper induction, close supervision, protected caseloads and continued links with HEIs for a probationary period. It may be that full registration as a qualified social worker is delayed until that period is over. We would also support the integration of post qualifying training with NQSW status and beyond, as well as being linked with career progression.

## CONTENT OF INITIAL TRAINING

4. There is a strong view in the north east that specialisation in social work should come after initial training, not during it. This view has been echoed in regional conferences and was a key finding in the three year evaluation mentioned above. Students often start with a clear view of which area they want to specialise in, then change their mind through the various practice learning opportunities offered through the 200 assessed practice days required by the GSCC. Practice placements serve a number of purposes, not least to allow the student to develop a range of skills and knowledge which can then be transferable to other settings and contexts. Research has consistently pointed out the difficulties in “whole family thinking” when workers are entrenched in specialisms (eg Tunstall *et al* 2004). A variety of placement experiences is essential in developing mature, emotionally intelligent and competent social workers and should therefore not be constrained to one service user group. The content of training will also reflect what opportunities students have had so may or may not have prepared them for the tasks a particular employer expects. There can be unrealistic expectations by employers who may want NQSWs to be fully conversant with a particular set of roles and responsibilities. Given that social work is a very broad church indeed, this can be impractical. It is the employer responsibility to prepare students for very specific tasks but the HEIs should develop generic skills and knowledge around specific areas such as carrying out assessments or dealing with conflict.

## QUALITY

5. SWENE would welcome more clarity and direction about the curriculum and expectations as the areas identified for the degree by the Department of Health in 2002 were minimal. Recent concerns around the loss of the Practice Teachers award could easily be addressed in Post Qualifying training if there were clearer direction and minimum expectations around the content and requirements. HEIs will often have learning and teaching objectives around module hours and assessment that will be given priority unless the professional body specify what must be done. The quality and supply of practice placements, particularly around statutory placements, will never be assured as long as employers continue to marginalise these activities. Placements must become central to the operational delivery of large social work employers and the removal of the Performance Indicator relating to placements has not been helpful. There is a significant amount of research on practice learning which suggests that, to improve the quality of placements, national direction is needed for practice learning to be taken seriously and “owned” by employers rather than being seen as the responsibility of the HEIs.

## SUPPLY OF INITIAL TRAINING

6. HEIs must be financially viable and therefore will not support social work programmes if they become too costly to operate. Recent events at Reading have seen how social work programmes have become very vulnerable to efforts by HEIs to manage their budgets. Social Work programmes are expensive to run given the nature of their core subject and so HEIs should be supported to maintain their provision rather than seeing them simply in terms of HEFCE numbers. There is also a great need for more “joined up” working between the DCSF, DIUS, CWDC and other national bodies as the tensions between adults and children’s services at workforce level have had a significant impact on social work training. It has caused duplication of effort for HEIs in liaison, negotiation of placements and practice education.

## POST QUALIFYING TRAINING AND CAREER PATHS

7. The comments above about workforce planning and the need for joined up thinking apply equally to PQ training. There have been difficulties caused by not linking up NQSW status and the first module (Consolidation of Social Work practice) at Specialist level of the GSCC PQ training. There appears to have been little workforce planning about who should receive PQ training and what career paths this might facilitate. For example some local authorities allow any qualified social worker to apply to HEIs for PQ while others must wait in turn. There has been very limited attention paid to the GSCC requirements for practice education to come at the end of a PQ award and many HEIs are unable to plan ahead because of the uncertainties and lack of coherence about PQ pathways and workforce issues. From an HEI perspective, support for students on PQ programmes is very varied with many getting no support or time allocation for

undertaken study. This has led to significant problems for HEIs in retention and completion. The recent change to HEFCE funding for students already with PG degrees has also affected the willingness of HEIs to continue providing programmes.

*Di Bailey*  
Durham University

*Julie Irvine* (chair)  
Northumbria University

*Jane Maffey*  
New College Durham

*Sarah Matthews*  
Open University in the North

*Wade Tovey*  
Teesside University

*Jane Tunmore*  
Sunderland University

May 2009

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### **Memorandum submitted by Surrey County Council**

#### **CHILDREN'S SOCIAL WORKER PROFESSION—BOOSTING THE SUPPLY IN THE SE REGION**

We would like to contribute some key data and information to your Select Committee Inquiry into the training of children & families social workers. Earlier this year, a large group of local authorities in the south east, hosted by Surrey County Council, got together to try and seek collective and significant solutions to the problem we all share of the critical supply shortage of suitably qualified social workers to effectively run our front line child protection services.

The cause of the problem is complex with long roots but:

Employers of social workers do not have a strong voice in organising the “supply” of the profession in the UK which is now through Universities overseen by the General Social Care Council (GSCC).

Leadership for the profession is diffused across Skills for Care, Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC), GSCC, Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) and Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) with no one agency really leading on sorting out the critical shortage.

Workforce planning at a national and regional level has not delivered sufficient supply of competent qualified workers to fulfil the role. Local authorities produce their own local workforce plans but they have no control over the number and type of training provided by Universities who can decide whether to support social work training or not. This is extremely critical for such a key statutory role. It is a problem which has largely been grappled with and resolved in other key areas of the public sector eg teaching, nursing, police, by a concerted national approach to workforce supply, by training backed by funding and by a national pay and standards approach. The deep problems with Children's Social Workers have persisted for the last 5–10 years with little concrete progress.

The job is increasingly specialised and requires different training. The concept of generic training for social workers, whether they work with adults or children and young people is attractive to the profession but not for employers at the sharp end of child protection service delivery. With the introduction of care management and self directed support the role of the qualified social worker in adult social care is very different from that of a children's social worker dealing with child protection as part of an integrated children's service. The quality of social work training is not delivering in terms of preparing people for the role once qualified.

Too long a lead time to produce a fully competent children's social worker. The response from CWDC to date has been to look at additional support for newly qualified social workers, and additional development for senior practitioners. Universities also offer post qualification specialist awards in children's social work at additional cost. The social worker degree introduced in 2003 which is three years long and includes 200 days of work placement ought to be sufficiently practically-focused to produce competent workers. Although it has succeeded in attracting a younger cohort towards qualifying in the profession it has arguably exacerbated the recruitment crisis as it now takes three years to become qualified rather than two years under the previous Diploma.

We need to increase the use of support roles to help maintain manageable workloads. The demand for qualified workers has increased as legislation has expanded the scope of roles that must be undertaken by a qualified social worker; however, no consideration was made of the need to prepare for these changes by increasing supply in advance.

A clear career path from support roles into qualified professional is needed and a clear training package for family support workers, for whom there is no definition of their role or clear progression route to become qualified. Family support workers are increasingly being relied on in areas of acute shortages to undertake work without proper training in the absence of sufficiently qualified social workers.

We now have an opportunity to take steps to increase the number of people at the front line working in services to children and families but we need key things to change to get there. We are finding as local authorities that it is relatively easy, for example, to recruit competent and committed people to work as family support workers in social care, and we also receive lots of enquiries from individuals wanting to get into this area of work. This potential supply of labour has increased significantly in the South East as the economy has gone into recession. Also, the new school Diploma promises a potential supply of future younger workers who would benefit from a para-professional route into the profession. Working in a support role in children's social care gives a much better understanding of the work and an individual's aptitude for it than academic study and allows individuals to see if they have sufficient emotional resilience, analytical skills and ability to communicate with children, young people and their families on a daily basis. We need your help and the help of your Select Committee to bring about changes in social work training.

The costs and time commitment of undertaking a social work degree are the major barriers to "career changers". Increasingly local authorities are offering sponsorships and bursaries to students; or seconding staff to undertake social work training. However, this approach places a heavy burden on local authority budgets with no guarantee the individual will stay in the profession or with the authority in the longer term or that they will have the proven aptitude to undertake the work when qualified. Authorities in London and the South East may make this investment only to have workers move to areas with cheaper living costs once qualified. Moreover the quality of training for children's social work in this country is variable and sometimes very poor according to anecdotal feedback from employers and research summarized in the recent Local Government Association report *respect and protect*:

- only one-third of newly qualified children's social workers believe their degree courses prepared them fully or largely for their job.
- only half of newly-qualified practitioners said their training "completely or mostly" covered child protection and only one-third said it "completely or mostly" covered child development.
- just over half of social workers said their course prepared them "just enough" for their role, with the rest saying it had not prepared them at all to practice.

The finding, from a survey of 500 newly qualified practitioners, compares poorly with a 2005 survey of more than 2,000 newly-qualified teachers, in which 85% agreed that their training course had prepared them to be an effective teacher.

One in five new social work graduates is currently unemployed. Despite reports of recruitment problems in local authorities across England, the unemployment rate for graduates was nearly a fifth. Of the 6,000 newly-qualified social workers who registered in 2007, 23% were described as unemployed. There may be a number of reasons for this, such as students taking a break before searching for a job, but the GSCC also refers to some anecdotal evidence that some new graduates were having difficulty in obtaining work. This is supported by anecdotal evidence from employers that the quality of some newly qualified workers was so poor that despite acute shortages they were unwilling to offer them a role.

The current system of social worker training is very costly to administer with a complex system of arranging work-based placements, practice teaching and work-based supervisors. Local authority departments under pressure find it difficult to support students properly and students face uncertainty around getting placements and gaining sufficient experience in areas they want to work.

The Laming report identified the shortcomings in social worker training, calling for more inspection of social work courses, specialisation in children's social work after the first year and for all social workers to return to university to do a post-qualification award.

However, as employers we do not believe this goes far enough in terms of dealing with the urgent supply crisis. As workloads rise, particularly for experienced social workers, more social workers will leave the profession and the vicious circle intensifies. Adding on post qualification training does nothing to address the shortcomings on initial training and puts further pressure on authorities to release frontline staff.

From Surrey County Council, here are our views as to what we believe will help bring about the scale of change we need:

A single national body—taking responsibility for workforce planning for the profession, setting qualification standards, marketing, promoting and funding social work training and enabling employers of social workers to have a strong voice on this body.

A proper reform of social worker training—recognising the failure of the current social work training to supply sufficient qualified competent children's and adults social workers.

A two year part-time work based foundation degree for family support workers, undertaken whilst working in social care on a day release basis, be developed in children's social work. This should cover practical skills and key knowledge around child development, child protection legislation, working with parents and families. As they would already be working for an employer in the field it would remove the need for complex work placements. The employer would pay the salary but the training provision should receive significant funding from the Government through Universities/FE colleges.

Additional responsibilities following foundation degree—once qualified, these workers would be able, with supervision, to hold cases and work with families with children in need, be the designated worker for Looked After Children, work with foster parents and prospective adoptive parents, work in residential settings and schools. They would need to register with the GSCC to practice.

Intensive foundation degree level qualification for those with complementary degrees eg psychology, sociology, social policy, law, be developed or extensive relevant professional experience eg youth workers, police officers, early years workers, health professionals. For example six months intensive academic study to cover the same syllabus as the foundation degree in a shorter timescale. Once qualified they would need to work under supervision as a family support worker or Social Work Para-Professional for six months before being able to undertake children's social worker duties and register with the GSCC.

Introduce a one year masters level qualification in children's social work and child protection for either existing social workers or those with a foundation degree and two years post qualification experience. Social workers with this qualification can lead on child protection proceedings, and manage teams of children's social workers. The one-year training would be focused on child protection legislation, management and supervision skills, data analysis and risk management. Again this training needs to be fully funded by government through Universities with financial support for local authorities to release workers to participate. Over time more and more children's social workers should become qualified to masters level.

More systematic selection for degree courses— in terms of identifying individuals with the emotional resilience, analytical skills and ability to work with children and young people effectively. Employers should recruit jointly with Universities/FE colleges to all courses, with more use of competency testing rather than interviews/academic credentials.

We also believe change is needed around pay:

A national pay structure be developed for:

Family support workers.

Family support workers undertaking the foundation degree.

Qualified social workers holding at least the foundation degree.

Senior social workers holding at least the masters level qualification.

Team managers and Senior practitioners/specialists.

National pay spine/pay ranges be developed to avoid the current situation of employees "salary hopping" and increasing reliance on agency staffing, developing pay spines and ranges with weightings to reflect the additional living costs of working in London and the South East. These might be formally or informally agreed between employers.

If we can provide any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me, as we are keen to see a solution to this long standing problem.

*Andrew Roberts*

Strategic Director for Children, Schools & Families

May 2009

### Memorandum submitted by Essex County Council Children's Residential Services

“SOCIAL PEDAGOGY IS A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT, USING REFLECTION AND PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS TO EXPLORE, INSPIRE AND EMPOWER”

1. Essex County Council are introducing Social Pedagogy into children's services, beginning with residential services, in response to a number of issues including the following:

- Current training for residential (and other social care) staff does not equip them for the complex task of working with groups of very traumatised children.
- The existing culture of children's services generally, as expressed through policy, procedure and practice does not produce good enough outcomes for children.

2. Our strategy for implementing a social pedagogic approach into residential services therefore has four core elements:

- Training—introductory training in social pedagogy for over a quarter of the residential workforce accredited at 30 level 5 CAT points. A smaller number of staff undertaking additional training to equip them to provide introductory social pedagogy training to other practitioners and to take a lead in making changes to culture and practice within their teams. Training is provided by ThemPra ([www.social-pedagogy.co.uk](http://www.social-pedagogy.co.uk)).
- Structural change—as part of this strategic implementation we are considering how best to restructure our staffing and services.
- Cultural change—this process is not just about training practitioners. It's about changing the culture and ethos of residential services. The leadership and strategic implementation of the project try to embody central pedagogic values such as empowerment, democracy, holistic learning and creativity. In practice that means that individual homes are being given more autonomy, decision-making is increasingly shared or devolved, proposals are assessed based on values and learning not just procedures or outcomes and practitioners are being given more freedom to pursue new ideas.
- Research—we have commissioned research to evaluate the effectiveness of this approach, including feedback from children in the homes and residential staff. Research findings inform the ongoing development of the project.

3. This represents a significant investment in residential services aimed at improving children's lives in line with the principles of Every Child Matters by increasing the level of education and qualification of the residential workforce and by changing the underpinning philosophy of children's services. Introducing social pedagogy into residential services is the first step in promoting a strategic change across children's services to a social pedagogic approach, with Fostering services and the Independent Reviewing service in the next wave of development. These ambitious plans have been possible thanks to the enthusiastic support and vision of senior managers and Members. We believe that Social Pedagogy will enable us to realise the aspirations articulated in Care Matters, to transform the lives of children in state care.

4. Senior managers within Essex County Council have visited Denmark to learn more about Social Pedagogy in Danish teaching and practice settings. They have been inspired by the potential there is for us to learn and develop our own services and education of staff through continental European social pedagogic approaches. We are currently making plans for some exchange visits for Essex staff with Danish children's homes.

5. Central to the adoption of Social Pedagogy in Essex is an understanding that Social Pedagogy is not a technique or model to be applied or imported, it is an interdisciplinary approach underpinned by cultural and philosophical values. Therefore our aim in Essex is to construct an English Social Pedagogy, which necessitates that our whole workforce is engaged in developing an understanding of Social Pedagogy and how it can translate into practice in an English context. This is an open-ended process which is deliberately not defined by predetermined learning outcomes. Such an ambitious and collaborative change process will take time and we do not expect rapid seismic changes to practice or outcomes. However, we believe that for the long-term future of children in Essex, Social Pedagogy offers the best path for us to pursue in terms of developing the workforce and improving outcomes.

6. We hope that in the next few years we will begin to see tangible improvements in outcomes for children. We have already received positive feedback from children who have told us that they feel staff are listening to them more and involving them more in decision making. The staff who have undertaken the initial training have also given extremely positive feedback, saying that they found it inspiring and that they believe it has potential for effecting positive change. At our awareness raising sessions for colleagues across children's services, including social workers, youth workers, foster carers and others we have had positive feedback from colleagues who recognise that there is no intention to replace their professional roles or expertise, but that learning about Social Pedagogy may contribute to their own development.

7. We are conscious that there is an inherent conflict with existing English policy and regulatory frameworks which focus on risk, procedure and outcomes as opposed to social pedagogic approaches which value experiential learning, relationships and “intrinsic” (literally “inner steering” or moral compass). Feedback from residential staff and managers has indicated that there is a particular difficulty in reconciling social pedagogic values and the priorities of Ofsted. We are seeking to address these potential barriers to creating meaningful lasting change by working strategically with the National Centre for Excellence in Residential Child Care and inviting Ofsted to join our multi-agency strategy group overseeing the development of Social Pedagogy in Essex.

8. We believe that this is just a beginning. Our commitment to creating Social Pedagogy in Essex is based on a recognition that more guidance, regulation or inspection will not alone transform services. We need a fundamental change to our theoretical orientation and ethos and a highly skilled and qualified workforce who feel confident that they are trusted to care for often deeply disturbed children. That is what we believe introducing social pedagogy will help us to achieve.

*June 2009*

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#### **Memorandum submitted by James Thurston**

I have been a social worker since August 2008 and I have really enjoyed my experience. Below is a summary of what I feel are the strengths and concerns currently within the social work profession:

##### **Strengths:**

- Social Work enables children and young people to be supported and be protected.
- Social work provides those children and young people whose parents/carers, who for what ever reason, are unable to meet their needs or keep them safe, an opportunity to lead a normal life as possible.
- Good Social Work can make a real difference in children and families lives, and this is very rewarding.
- As a Social Worker I get to work with many different professionals from a variety of agencies.

##### **Concerns:**

- Recruitment and retention is a major issue within social work and has a negative impact on many levels, not just on team morale and the extra pressure placed upon team members, but more importantly, the service provided becomes compromised due to lack of continuity and increased case loads.
- Furthermore, the recruitment issue has lead to a culture within social work whereby agency social workers are heavily relied upon. The idea of agency workers is to fill the gap and overcome the recruitment problem. However, this only creates more problems as agency social workers come and go, which only makes the situation worse. The culture of over paying agency social workers lowers the morale of permanent social workers who, not only feel demoralised by the lack of continuity, but also by the fact that these workers earn much more than they do.
- The I.T (ICS) system put in place creates an environment where social workers spend around 70% of their time writing reports that are generated within this system. This, without any doubt, has an implication on social workers ability to obtain a true insight into a child's life, as the time we spend with them, and their families, is heavily reduced. As a whole the ICS system works well as an evidence gathering tool, but aspects of this system need to be streamlined in order to open up more time for social workers to visit the children on their caseload.
- Social Work is a risky business. Children and young people depend on social workers to make decisions that will provide more positive lives for them. Often the decisions social workers make are a case of life and death for children. These responsibilities are what make social work such a stressful and demanding career. However, the salary that Social Workers earn does not reflect the level of risk they manage everyday.

##### **Recommendations:**

- It is my view that agency workers need to become the exception, not the norm. Local Authorities should be penalised for recruiting agency staff in order to provide them with an incentive to actively recruit permanent Social Workers. The money saved by employing agency workers could be utilised to increase the salary of permanent social workers.

This would then create a more positive culture where Social Workers are rewarded appropriately to become permanent employees.



- Local Authorities should be provided with the relevant resources to enable them to take on more student social workers. This is where social work training is failing, as there are not enough high quality placements in front line child protection teams. LA's should also be encouraged to create social work trainee posts, where students are employed by the LA, and complete their placements within their workplace. This training route provides the highest quality candidates, as they are given the best possible placements to learn and develop.
- A review of the ICS system needs to take place.
- Finally, in light of potential public spending cuts, the Committee needs to be clear: Social Work is already a profession under immense strain. Case loads are at bursting point and added with the recruitment crisis, there is certainly no room for social workers to "... provide more for less".

July 2009

### **Memorandum submitted by Mr Graham Stuart MP**

#### **INSUFFICIENT NUMBER OF PLACEMENTS FOR SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS THREATENS THE SAFEGUARDING OF CHILDREN, MP SAYS**

A survey undertaken by Graham Stuart MP, a member of the House of Commons' Children, Schools and Families Select Committee, has found that social work lecturers are increasingly worried about the lack of sufficient placements for their students.

Mr Stuart asked heads of social work departments at 79 universities across England to rate the quality and availability of child and family social work placements provided by Local Authorities (LAs). The key findings of the survey are:

- The quality of social work placements provided by Local Authorities is generally seen to be of a high standard, with 86% of respondents saying that statutory (LA) placements are either "good" or "excellent".
- The main problem with placements is that Local Authorities fail to provide them in sufficient numbers. Less than a quarter of respondents (24%) think that the number of statutory placements is adequate.
- 41% of respondents said the main reason for the low number of statutory placements available is that there are no incentives for LAs to provide them. This has become particularly evident since the Government recently decided to no longer include placements in the Key Statistics set (related to Key Performance Indicators) for LAs. This means LAs will no longer have to report to the Department on how many placements they provide.
- Another major reason for the inadequate number of statutory placements available is that social workers are not obliged to take on students. They do not get any form of reward for taking on students (be it financial, status or reduced workload), so the incentive to provide placements is low, according to 33% of respondents.

"It is absolutely clear from these findings that Local Authorities do not provide sufficient placements for social work students", said Mr Stuart. "The Government must accept their share of responsibility for this. They took the short-sighted decision to remove Local Authorities' duty to report on how many placements they provide, thus doing away with any incentive for Local Authorities to meet demand. The losers will be the children and families in need of support from social services. Universities have to reduce their intake of social work students as a result of this problem, potentially leading to a significant shortage of social workers in the future. The shortage of placements also means that the training students do receive may be below par".

In addition to stressing the lack of incentives for Local Authorities to provide placements, one third of respondents (33%) said the lack of a requirement for social workers to take on students results in too few placements. Social workers take on students principally out of "goodwill and professional commitment", according to one head of department. Moreover, the lack of support provided for social workers who do take on students was highlighted by almost three out of four respondents (72%) as a major obstacle to securing enough placements. Heavy workloads and no workload relief for social workers who take on students means that they are unable to prioritise teaching over their front-line duties.

Some respondents also pointed out that the high pressure on social workers results in many students being treated as "unpaid staff". One respondent spoke of a "student [on] an inner city LA placement where she was carrying a high caseload including child protection cases virtually unsupervised".

Mr Stuart added that: "It is unacceptable that students are being used as additional staff when they have not qualified as social workers and are still in the process of training. Staff shortages should not be solved by giving students their own unsupervised caseloads. This can have detrimental effects on the children and families who receive support and can also result in an unsatisfactory learning experience for the student. Instead, we must ensure that we have enough placements of a good standard so that we enable social workers

to achieve their full potential. Financial or workload relief must be given to social workers who take on students, perhaps in addition to including teaching as part of their job description as is already the case in the health sector”.

Another finding of the survey was that a significant number of students complete their social work training without having been taught or assessed by a qualified social worker. At the moment there is no national requirement to be supervised by a qualified social worker, and according to the survey this is the case for around 14% of students. One respondent said that “the lack of social work[er] presence has been problematic and has led to some students completing a placement without coming into contact with a social worker”. Another said that “ultimately there is a real risk for our students that they are simply learning to drive badly and that this will deplete their later capacity to deliver high quality social work”.

Mr Stuart said: “The standard of children’s services in England relies on the quality of our social workers. For students not to receive proper training, and to not even come into contact with a qualified social worker during three years of study, is absolutely unacceptable. Local Authorities must be incentivised to provide a sufficient number of placements, and social workers must be given the support needed to teach the next generation. Too many children are so badly failed by the system which is supposed to protect them. Meanwhile, the Government is jeopardising children’s safety by not taking social work training seriously. Unless the Government acts now, I’m afraid it might not be long before we see another tragic case like Baby P happen again”.

# I. RESULTS OF SURVEY:

Q1. Overall, how do you rate the quality of child and family social work practice learning opportunities (PLOs) provided by Local Authorities (LAs)?

Excellent	16.66% of respondents
Good	69.44%
Satisfactory	11.11%
Poor	2.77%
Very poor	0%

Some comments given by respondents (comments have been copied directly from questionnaire response):

- Very often the agencies expect students to be competent in practice and are unwilling to support their learning if they cannot hit the ground running.
- The lack of social work presence/role has been problematic and has led to some students completing a placement without coming into contact with a social worker.
- The overall quality of placements provided by Local Authorities is very good.
- I have been very surprised and impressed given current pressures that our placement learning opportunities locally have been as good as they have been.
- There is an increasing tendency to place operational efficiency above educational needs.

Q2. What proportion of PLOs provided by LAs offer a good quality learning experience?

100%	11.76% of respondents
91–99%	29.41%
81–90%	29.41%
71–80%	14.70%
61–70%	5.88%
51–60%	0%
41–50%	8.82%
31–40%	0%
21–30%	0%
11–20%	0%
0–10%	0%

= approx. 16% of total number of placements that do not offer a good quality learning experience (error margin: +/- 5 percentage points)

Comments:

- We are very happy with the quality of local authority placement provision.
- 30% or so of practice teachers do not have sufficient skill to support younger, less experienced students, and do not have the time or resources to improve their skills, or they are too busy generally to support students (of whatever calibre), and place unrealistic demands on them in terms of caseload.

Q3. *Generally, how satisfied are you that LAs provide enough PLOs of a satisfactory or good standard to meet the needs of your students?*

Enough most or all of the time	24.32%
It varies from year to year	35.13%
Not enough in most years	40.54%

Comments:

- Acute shortage of PLOs. This results in having to cut intake of students = fewer qualified social workers. Also has to take placements that are poor or inadequate because of the lack of enough placements.
- I have been in this work for 17 years and it has been a problem for 15 years or so.
- We struggle to get enough LA placements and, because of this we are forced to use increasing numbers of private and voluntary placements, which are of varying quality.
- This is because Practice Assessors are expected to offer a PLO based on their goodwill. Providing PLO's is not part of the LA infrastructure that offers protected time or financial rewards.
- The inclusion of an expectation that experienced staff will mentor students as part of their work would all help

Q4. *What are the main obstacles to securing adequate PLOs (both in terms of quantity and quality)?*

- Partly from an over-reliance on targets and risk-averse bureaucracy which stifles innovative and humane approaches to social work practice that still safeguards and protects.
- Where placements are available we cannot always take them up because many of the child care teams insist the student has a car because of the nature of the work and a need to cover a wide geographical area. Students do not always have a car, or cannot afford to run one even if they have a licence.
- Front line workers are stressed, busy and do not receive work load reduction if they have a student—cannot prioritise student placement over their front-line duties.
- When the social work degree was launched with its increased emphasis on learning in practice, insufficient resources were provided to respond to this.
- Student placements are provided principally because of personal goodwill and professional commitment.

Q5. *How satisfied are you with the teaching and assessment available within LAs for PLOs?*

Always Good	25%
Mostly good but sometimes not satisfactory	72.22%
Often not satisfactory	2.77%

Comments:

- Many practicing social workers are not able to keep up to date with theory.
- We have cohorts of students going into placement with practice assessors who have less academic knowledge (through Dip SW training) than the third year degree students will already have. Need for more post-qualification training.
- Ultimately there is a real risk for our students that they are simply learning to drive badly and that this will deplete their later capacity to deliver high quality social work.
- The requirement that students be supervised by qualified social workers has been removed (at a national level).

Q6. *What proportion of your students has at least one local authority PLO in which they are taught and assessed by a qualified social worker? Please give an approximate percentage:*

100%	37.14%
91–99%	17.14%
81–90%	20%
71–80%	5.71%
61–70%	5.71%
51–60%	2.85%
41–50%	8.57%
31–40%	0%
21–30%	2.85%
11–20%	0%
0–10%	0%

= approx. 14% of total number of students who are not taught and assessed by a qualified social worker (error margin: +/- 5 percentage points).

Comments:

- Students desperate for more LA placements.
- All students will have at least one placement where they will undertake statutory work, although this can be a loose definition and actually mean undertaking a placement in a group care setting for children or in a School where we have to “fight” to avoid students being used as teaching assistants

Q7. *In your opinion, are there any LAs that offer particularly good PLOs?*

- Bournemouth Borough Council.
- Brighton & Hove Council.
- Bucks County Council.
- Camden.
- Cheshire.
- Derbyshire.
- Devon.
- East Riding of Yorkshire.
- ESCC.
- Essex.
- Gateshead.
- Gloucestershire.
- Greater Manchester.
- Halton.
- Hampshire County Council.
- Herefordshire.
- Hull.
- Isle of Wight.
- Islington.
- Kensington & Chelsea.
- Kent.
- Knowsley.
- Lincolnshire.
- London Borough of Harrow.
- London Borough of Hillingdon.
- Medway.
- Newcastle.
- Newham.
- Norfolk.
- North Tyneside.

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- Northumberland.
  - North Yorkshire.
  - Nottinghamshire.
  - Oxfordshire.
  - Sefton.
  - Shropshire.
  - Slough Borough Council.
  - Somerset.
  - Southampton City Council.
  - South Gloucestershire.
  - South Tyneside.
  - Staffordshire.
  - St Helens.
  - Stoke.
  - Suffolk.
  - Swindon.
  - Warrington.
  - West Berkshire.
  - West Sussex.
  - Wirral.

*Q9. Do you have any further comments regarding the quality of PLOs provided by LAs?*

*Main obstacles to finding sufficient placements for students (both in terms of quantity and quality), and percentage of respondents who highlighted the respective issues in the questionnaire:*

Regulatory:

- LAs not required to provide PLOs/ Removal of PLOs as Key Statistic (KS1) D59 for LAs has resulted in a fall in number of PLOs overall: 41% of respondents mentioned this in the questionnaire.

Comments from respondents (unaltered):

- Government intervention [should] require LA's to become directly involved in the provision of practice learning in a structured way.
- When provision of PLOs was a Key Performance Indicator for local authority SSDs the quality and quantity was higher and consistent. This changed recently and there has been a marked decrease nationally
- There has been an erosion of national standards, infrastructure and motivation for LAs to provide PLOs. It would be a mistake to blame individual LAs when the environment has been so hostile to quality preservation.
- PLO's need to be reprioritised. This will not happen unless they are reflected in Performance Indicators
- Lack of coordinated approach to PLOs (unlike in health sector)/It is not a requirement for social workers to take on students: 33%

Comments:

- Qualified social workers are requested to take a student—it is not compulsory as in the health model of student mentoring in nursing. If a qualified worker is expected to take a student and this is linked to incremental salary raise—or linked to re-registration with the GSCC we would be in a better position to access quality stat placements.
- Introduction of personalisation: 5%
- Too focused on targets and bureaucracy: 5%
- Limited training budgets/Removal of ring-fenced funding for social work education in LAs: 10%
- No national standards for practice teachers/demise of Practice Teaching award: 36%

## Comments:

- The demise of the Practice Teacher Award has had an effect on the quality of teaching and assessment that is delivered. This has increased the difficulty of assessing the suitability of practice teachers. The current five day award in our view is totally unsatisfactory.
- Since the demise of the GSCC Practice Teacher Award and the introduction of the PQ Framework practice teaching has demised in its status.
- There is a lack of specific training for Practice Assessors within a national framework.
- Since the demise of the GSCC Practice Teacher Award and the introduction of the PQ Framework practice teaching has demised in its status.
- No national requirement to be supervised by a qualified social worker: 3%
- Introduction of new legislation taking up social workers' time/requirement for additional training: 3%

## Practical:

- Little support for practice teachers/Problem of heavy workload and no workload relief for social workers/No other rewards (financial, status, etc) for taking on students: 72%

## Comments:

- The workload planning for Practice Assessors within a local authority does not always take into account the responsibility of student supervision; this can result in the student getting a less than satisfactory learning experience.
- Employers are under such pressure that they seek students that they perceive to be fit for practice (ie turn students into unpaid staff).
- Staff shortages/high staff turnover/vacancies/ Lack of suitable/qualified practice teachers: 49%

## Comments:

- The managers' understanding of the students' level of competence and learning can result in inappropriate case allocation to students. This can be a result of staff shortages; students then become "unpaid workers".
- Student from an inner city LA placement where she was carry a high caseload including child protection cases virtually unsupervised.
- We have cohorts of students going into placement with practice assessors who have less academic knowledge (through Dip SW training) than the third year degree student will already have.
- Lack of space in teams/lack of desk space: 21%.

## Comments:

- In established and fully staffed social work teams, students generally have a very positive experience in which they are able to further develop their confidence, knowledge and skills.
- Students unable to drive/problem of travel costs since these were capped: 15%

## Other:

- LA or team restructuring/local pressures in LAs: 38%

## Comments:

- LA reorganisations have impacted dramatically on quality and the willingness of teams and in situ practice teachers to take a student. In particular reorganisations after Baby P cases and 2003 Laming Report.
- Local Authority constant restructuring and gate-keeping. On the ground, Practice Teachers remain committed and keen. Organisationally, there is some administrative turmoil and lack of clarity about the allocation of placements.
- Our LAs do their best to provide good quality PLOs often in often trying circumstances.
- The general mood within LA PLO providers is one of making the best they can from the resources available to them at a time of change both internally and also externally
- Reluctance in LAs to provide PLOs/lack of commitment from LA senior management: 15%

Comments:

- We constantly seem to be battle against decisions that are taken at a higher level but which impact dramatically on front line staff that are committed to student learning.
- Student numbers have increased: 13%

II. 39 OUT OF 79 RECIPIENTS RESPONDED TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE (49.4%)

III. THE SURVEY WAS UNDERTAKEN BY MR STUART'S WESTMINSTER OFFICE, AND IS NOT PART OF ANY OFFICIAL INQUIRIES OR REPORTS BY THE CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES SELECT COMMITTEE.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Whilst the survey was undertaken by Mr Stuart's Westminster Office, and it is not a document produced by the Committee, Mr Stuart has submitted it as evidence to the Committee's inquiry.