



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 I*





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**Seventh Report of Session 2008–09**

*Volume I*

*Report, together with formal minutes*

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to be printed 20 July 2009*

## 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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Annette Brooke MP (*Liberal Democrat, Mid Dorset & Poole North*)  
Mr Douglas Carswell MP (*Conservative, Harwich*)  
Mr David Chaytor MP (*Labour, Bury North*)  
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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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### Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Kenneth Fox (Clerk), Sarah Thatcher (Second Clerk), Emma Wisby (Committee Specialist), Judith Boyce (Committee Specialist), Jenny Nelson (Senior Committee Assistant), Kathryn Smith (Committee Assistant), Jim Lawford (Committee Support Assistant), and Brendan Greene (Office Support Assistant).

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# Conclusions and recommendations

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## Preface

1. When social workers are poorly trained—lacking in knowledge, skills, or experience—or left unsupported in highly pressured situations, children’s lives are put in danger. Intellectual ability, personal resilience, and good supervision are not important because they bring more prestige to the profession or more job satisfaction to the individual. These things are important because they are needed when analysing potential risks to children, dealing professionally with obstructive parents, and reflecting on whether the right decisions are being made at the right times. Although we refer repeatedly throughout this Report to the needs of employers, we are constantly mindful that it is the needs of children that are most important when those who work with them are trained. (Paragraph 6)

## The Task Force and other initiatives

2. Although we have received reassurances about the Social Work Task Force’s scope to recommend radical reforms, we remain concerned about the plethora of new initiatives which have been announced and set in motion before the Task Force reports. While we appreciate the need to take urgent action in the light of Lord Laming’s report on child protection, we consider that a more strategic approach would serve the social work profession better in the long term. It is not clear how these initiatives fit together either with each other, or with existing structures. (Paragraph 20)

## National Leadership and sector bodies

3. Nine years on from the tragedy of Victoria Climbié, the lack of a coherent and prestigious national profile for the social work profession appears to us to be perhaps the most important failing of the Every Child Matters reforms. It is unusual to hear so uniformly in evidence to a Committee inquiry calls for greater centralisation, prescription and national leadership. With responsibility for social work training spread across three departments, we urge the Government to be bold in establishing coherent leadership for the profession that can take responsibility for all parts of the whole, and present a profile distinct from the wider fields of social care and the children’s workforce. (Paragraph 28)
4. Streamlining of the national sector bodies and rationalisation of their remits is an urgent priority. We acknowledge that the Government is awaiting the recommendations of the Task Force in this regard, but note that several reviews of the relevant organisations have already been put in train, and ask for clarification as to how these will affect each other. We urge the Task Force to consider how one of the existing bodies could be reformed to replicate the role and impact that the Training and Development Agency has had in the teaching profession; a ‘Social Work Development Agency’ should unite the functions of recruitment, workforce development and funding and commissioning of training. Such a body would

replace the social work functions of the Children's Workforce Development Council. It would operate alongside the General Social Care Council which, in addition to its role as workforce regulator, should be freed to act as champion and advocate of the profession at national level. (Paragraph 29)

### Workforce planning

5. High vacancies and retention problems have plagued children and families social work for too long. It is no longer tenable that there is no mechanism for employers to influence the supply of graduates, and no national model for estimating future demand. We recommend that the Government prioritise the research necessary to establish such a model, link to it the future funding and commissioning of training places for students, and explicitly allocate the task of workforce planning to one of the sector bodies. (Paragraph 39)
6. There should be a mechanism for retaining funding for social work training places when universities cease to offer these courses. Funding for social work training should be allocated by a social work organisation—such as the 'Social Work Development Agency' which we have proposed—which commissions places on the basis of quality assessments and workforce planning. (Paragraph 40)

### Academic standards

7. A-levels are an imperfect measure of potential, but as they are a proxy for the intellectual ability that social work students need we wish to see an improvement in the average grades required for acceptance to undergraduate social work training. This should not, however, preclude universities ensuring that they have the means of offering places to experienced applicants who lack an academic background but whose personal attributes would be valuable assets to the profession. (Paragraph 47)

### Personal qualities

8. The 'Social Work Development Agency' that we have proposed should make available more guidance about best practice in assessing the personal qualities of applicants to social work degrees. We are encouraged to hear that some universities involve service users already, and we believe this should become standard practice. Employers should be routinely involved in application processes to help universities identify those candidates with the potential to be effective social workers, not just successful students. (Paragraph 51)
9. Previous practical work experience in related fields seems to us an immensely valuable attribute to bring to the study and practice of social work. This should be taken into account in application procedures, and consideration should be given to making it a mandatory requirement. (Paragraph 53)

### Fast track and other routes

10. We are persuaded that there is little scope for routinely compressing the content of the social work degrees into a shorter, 'fast track' package. However, as an option for

students with relevant experience, a clear idea of what sort of social work they wish to specialise in, or prior qualifications incorporating clearly relevant content, a ‘fast track’ would make a valuable contribution to increasing opportunities for applicants through non-traditional routes. (Paragraph 57)

11. We consider the proportion of students on Grow Your Own schemes to be surprisingly low. These schemes appear to be a concrete way in which employers can exert more influence on the type of training and preparation they wish social work students to receive, as well as an important route into the profession for people with highly relevant skills and experience. We recommend that the Government consider funding arrangements that would encourage more local authorities to offer more of these opportunities. (Paragraph 60)

### Standards on degree courses

12. It is unacceptable that social work courses, or any element of them, should have a reputation for being ‘difficult to fail’. A review of the funding arrangements for social work degrees is needed to ensure that there are no incentives to keep unsuitable students on a course. Funding should be channelled through a sector-specific body to reflect the fact that the degrees are not just an academic course—they are a test of fitness for professional practice. Every university should make provision for students deemed not suitable for practice to put credits towards an alternative, non-qualifying award. (Paragraph 65)

### Quality assurance of degree courses

13. Quality assurance of degree courses should not be delegated to such an extent to universities themselves. A much more active role in quality assurance should be established, whether for the GSCC—with whom it would naturally sit under current arrangements—or for Ofsted, as an extension of its role as the children’s social services inspectorate. (Paragraph 69)

### Content of degree courses

14. Current requirements for the social work degrees should be rationalised, combined and, where appropriate, set out in greater detail to form a basic common curriculum. This must be done by universities and employers in collaboration, so that agreement can be reached about the key components that must be learned through the initial degree, and what skills can be acquired while in employment. We particularly wish to see consensus on the content of training on child protection, child development and communication with children. Adoption of a common core curriculum should not preclude flexible and innovative delivery. (Paragraph 79)

### Specialisation in degree courses

15. We are persuaded of the merits of a generic base for social work training, but we agree that social workers are often insufficiently prepared for specialist work with children. We note that specialisation often occurs in practice in university courses as students select particular modules and placements. We recommend that each course

makes these choices formal and explicit, so that students may specialise in children and families work if they wish by choosing a defined package of course elements, and employers are given clarity about what a student specialising in this way would have covered in their degree. In our opinion, however, the principal problem is not that the initial degree is generic; it is that expectations of engagement in further training and development after qualification are too low. (Paragraph 88)

### **Collaboration between employers and universities**

16. Collaboration between employers and universities, while working well in some places, should not be left to chance. Close partnership would bring mutual benefits at all stages of social work education, including selection of students, relevance of the curriculum, provision of placements, exchange of staff, assessment, Newly-Qualified Social Worker years, post-qualifying training and integration of research with practice. We recommend that the Government consider introducing a requirement that all social work education is delivered by formal partnerships of higher education institutions and employers. (Paragraph 94)

### **Supply of practice placements**

17. Training future and current members of the profession must be seen as a core part of the social work task and a fundamental responsibility of employers. This should be reflected in performance frameworks; specifically, Ofsted should take into account how effectively a local authority provides for and delivers placements for social work students and further development of its workforce when assessing children's services. (Paragraph 103)
18. Workforce planning should provide a centrally-driven mechanism for judging the numbers of students for which a local authority should be providing placements. Employers should commit to providing placements as part of a comprehensive partnership with higher education institutions, and this must happen in advance of student intakes. It is unacceptable that students have to accept below-par arrangements at the last minute when universities are unable to persuade local authority employers to provide placements. (Paragraph 104)
19. Arrangements for funding placements should be reviewed to ensure that the amount received reflects the true cost and the division of responsibilities. Funding should be allocated to formal partnerships of universities and employers, rather than passed on from one to the other. (Paragraph 105)
20. In the light of our findings about the remits of the various social work sector bodies, we question the wisdom of setting up another body, the Social Work Development Partnership, to oversee the development of practice placement quality and supply. We expect that the 'Social Work Development Agency' which we have proposed would be charged with overseeing the necessary changes. (Paragraph 107)

## Type of practice placements

21. It is not sufficient to stipulate that students should get “experience of statutory social work tasks involving legal interventions”. It should not be possible for a student to achieve a Bachelor’s or Master’s degree in social work without having undertaken at least one of their placements in a statutory social work agency, and without being supervised and assessed by a qualified social worker in both of their placements. Information should be readily available to prospective students about any courses which have a poor track record in securing the requisite placements. (Paragraph 110)
22. In the interim, consideration should be given to reducing the length of individual placements, if this would help to ensure that every student has a placement in a statutory service. We consider that quality of placements is more important than the number of placement days. (Paragraph 111)

## Quality of practice placements

23. Quality assurance of placements should not be delegated to universities alone. The quality of practice placements must be taken into account explicitly in overall inspections of both university courses and local authority children’s services. (Paragraph 114)

## Practice teaching

24. An expectation that teams and individuals contribute to the training of future generations of social workers should be supported by reforms to pay scales and structured career progression. Practice teaching must be built into job descriptions so that social workers are not expected to undertake practice teaching on top of their normal workload but as an integral part of it, with commensurate reductions in the caseload they are expected to carry. In theory these changes could be achieved by local authorities on their own initiative, but the evidence we have received shows that this is not happening to any great extent. We recommend therefore that the Government consider ways of developing these features of the workforce on a national basis. (Paragraph 118)
25. Requirements for placements should be amended to stipulate that all placements be supervised by qualified and experienced social workers who either hold or are working towards specific qualifications in practice teaching. Withdrawal of the dedicated Practice Teaching Award has given a damaging impression of the status of practice teaching in social work, and consideration should be given to reinstating it. Training enough of the current workforce to the right level will require ‘pump-priming’ with dedicated funding. (Paragraph 122)

## The Newly-Qualified Social Worker Programme

26. The Newly-Qualified Social Worker year is a significant step in the right direction of recognising that graduation is only the first of many stages of career development that social workers should be guided through. We welcome its extension to the whole of the statutory and voluntary sectors. However, we recommend that the

Newly-Qualified Social Worker year develop more of the character of a compulsory internship. The programme should be reviewed to ensure that it delivers genuine development for participants, building on their previous work at university and on placements. Universities should be involved in a student's education throughout the year, including in assessments. Opportunities to gain experience in more than one service area would help those students who found their placement choice too limited, and would produce more rounded professionals. Registration as a social worker should be provisional until the NQSW year is satisfactorily completed. (Paragraph 130)

27. Many local authorities operating under the pressure of high referrals and caseloads will find it difficult to accommodate Newly-Qualified Social Workers on this basis. We recommend that the Government consider some means of subsidising the employment of an NQSW in recognition of the year acting as an extension of training, such as by extending the bursary scheme for social work students. (Paragraph 131)

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

28. Requirements for post-registration training and learning must be made more stringent, and explicit links made with the formal post-qualifying training expected of professionals at different stages of their career and in different practice specialisms. Courses counting towards the 90 hours needed for re-registration should be approved and accredited by a body with the functions of a 'Social Work Development Partnership'. These courses must be brought clearly within an overall framework of professional development. (Paragraph 134)

### The Post-Qualifying Framework

29. The current offer of post-qualifying training appears to us to be unhelpfully diffuse. Training at this level should become the principal vehicle for specialisation in children and families social work, but this requires both compulsory participation and agreement about the content of courses so that employers know what they are getting, and social workers know what they can expect afterwards in terms of career progression. For example, a clear pathway for developing expertise in child protection should be set out. (Paragraph 139)
30. We note that the Government has accepted Lord Laming's recommendation to make the General Social Care Council's Code of Practice for Employers of Social Care Workers mandatory, but we are concerned about how effective it will be if it is not supported by inspection frameworks. Furthermore, the Code risks being a blunt instrument unless it sets out the specific development needs of social workers as opposed to 'social care workers'. (Paragraph 141)
31. Funding for participation in post-qualifying training should be guaranteed centrally for social workers employed in all sectors, rather than being dependent on the differing and changing budget priorities of employers. This funding must be at a level that enables an employer to compensate meaningfully for a social worker's absence for study. (Paragraph 146)

32. Obtaining a degree in social work must be only the starting point of career-long learning and development. This expectation should be supported by a more formalised structure of career progression linked to training, which would provide clarity for social workers and their employers on the skills that are acquired at each stage and the responsibilities that can then be assumed. We particularly ask for clarity about how the Children's Workforce Development Council's career framework and the Government's intention to develop 'practice-focused' Master's degrees will contribute to this and link to the Post-Qualifying Framework. (Paragraph 149)
33. Registration as a social worker with the General Social Care Council should be specific to different social work specialisms. No new social worker should be registered to practice a specialism in which they have not previously undertaken a period of supervised and assessed training, whether that is in a student placement or as part of a Newly-Qualified Social Worker year. Re-registration should be dependent on participation in further training within that specialism. (Paragraph 152)

### Pay and career structures

34. We are not persuaded that pay should remain the responsibility of individual employers, particularly given the evidence of how a more vigorous national policy has transformed the outlook for the teaching profession. We therefore recommend that a national pay structure for social work be introduced, allowing for regional variation, incorporating a system of spinal points for extra skills and responsibilities and supported by the necessary funding. (Paragraph 161)

### Social work in practice

35. No social work student should have a placement in a local authority whose services to children and families are assessed by Ofsted as performing poorly. (Paragraph 165)

### Pressures in the workplace

36. We have stressed that education must be a core part of the social work task, but a workforce already stretched beyond its capacity is in no position to realise this ambition. While some aspects of this situation may be addressed creatively through workforce restructuring and partnerships between authorities, we contend that investment is needed on a substantial and sustainable scale, not just directly in training, but in frontline service delivery and workforce capacity. Without such investment, both our recommendations and those of the Social Work Task Force risk falling on stony ground. (Paragraph 169)

### Remodelling the workforce

37. We are encouraged by the example of some local authorities that are restructuring their social work teams in ways that improve the levels of administrative and para-professional support to social workers, while creating roles for senior practitioners as

‘consultants’. We consider that these units, as well as offering benefits to staff, offer the potential of a particularly good learning environment for students and newly-qualified social workers, and we would like to see the model taken up by more local authorities. We recommend that the Government formally assess the benefits of this model for social work education. (Paragraph 176)

### Agency workers

38. Agency workers are an important source of flexible, skilled social workers for employers, but we are concerned that their widespread and prolonged use can erode the integrity and continuity of the workforce in a way that may impede the development of student and new social workers. Investment in and planning for the workforce over the long term is the best way to ensure that local authorities do not rely excessively on agency workers. (Paragraph 180)
39. New social workers joining agencies immediately after graduation potentially lose out on continuity of supervision and development opportunities that come with permanent employment. We note that the expansion of the Newly-Qualified Social Worker Programme in September 2009 will not cover workers in the private sector. Completion of a Newly-Qualified Social Worker year with a statutory sector employer should be made a mandatory condition of full registration, so that no worker can become a locum immediately after completing their degree. We note that Cafcass do not recruit social workers with less than three years’ experience; the Government should explore attaching a similar restriction to locum social workers. (Paragraph 181)
40. The quality of private agencies is currently only known by employers through trial and error. Agencies themselves should be rigorously inspected and rated. (Paragraph 183)

### Chief Social Workers

41. We recommend that the Government establish a formal pilot of Chief Social Worker roles in local authorities. This person would be the lead professional for all social workers employed by the authority, undertaking a role complementary to that of the Director of Children’s Services without undermining the latter’s statutory accountability. Their functions could include leading collaboration with training providers, taking overall responsibility for practice teaching and student placements, workforce planning, and ensuring that effective supervision and professional development is available to all social workers. (Paragraph 186)

## Summary

Children's lives are put at risk when those who have responsibility for protecting the most vulnerable are not adequately prepared for the task or supported in performing it. The quality of entrants to the social work profession, the knowledge and skills imparted to them in their training, and the supervision and further development they have access to once in employment are all vital to keeping children safe.

In 2003 the qualification route for social workers changed from a diploma to a Bachelor's or Master's degree. The degrees aim to train social workers to work with either children or adults, and are now mandatory for new social workers registering to practise with the General Social Care Council. After qualification, a variety of different courses and qualifications are available for social workers to maintain and develop their knowledge and skills. We have considered this system to see how effective it is in training those who will work specifically with children and families.

We have heard widely diverging views about whether the current system of training is adequate. Many employers of social workers have pointed out what they regard as deficiencies in the degree programmes, and some view the generic nature of the courses as obstructive to imparting the requisite specialist skills and knowledge for dealing with child protection in particular. Universities emphasise how valuable the generic basis of the training is for social workers dealing with families in the round, and say that employers expect too much from those newly qualified.

The gulf in understanding between employers and educators of social workers has been one of the most troubling aspects of the evidence we have received. Both constituencies need to work in tandem to produce effective training programmes; universities must bear in mind that they are delivering professional training rather than abstracted academic studies, and employers must provide the high-quality training placements that make up half of the training time. We recommend that all training be delivered by formal partnerships of employers and higher education institutions. This would give employers greater opportunities to influence the intake to and content of courses, while making firm commitments to providing placement opportunities.

A common core curriculum for social work degrees should be agreed between universities and employers so that there is clarity about what can be expected of graduates. We consider that the generic basis of the degrees is valuable and should be retained, but that specialist routes should be available. Post-qualification training should be reformed to become a compulsory means of developing social workers from newly-qualified to expert specialist practitioners. The Newly-Qualified Social Worker Programme is a potentially valuable component of this, but should be recognised as an extension of the training period as well as an induction. Beyond their first year, social workers' participation in a more robust and well-defined Post-Qualifying Framework should be compulsory, and should be supported by centralised funding. Partnerships of employers and higher education providers must encompass post-qualification as well; the character of social work as a learning, research-based profession would be enhanced by career-long involvement with higher education. We recommend that it is worth considering the benefits of 'Chief Social

Worker' posts in local authorities to champion these aspects of professional practice and facilitate these partnerships.

Stricter control over the type of placements which students undertake during their degrees would allay some concerns about the adequacy of social work training. Placements in statutory agencies should be made a compulsory condition of achieving the social work degree, and students should in all their placements be supervised by a qualified social worker who has, or is working towards, a specific qualification in practice teaching. Quality assurance of practice placements must be included in much more rigorous and active quality assurance of degree courses, but should also be taken into account when local authority children's services are themselves inspected. No new social worker should be registered to take full responsibility for cases pertaining to a particular client group without having undertaken supervised training placements in that specialism.

Stronger national leadership is needed for social work as a profession. The remits of the national sector bodies must be rationalised and clarified, and the Government must authorise one of them to take responsibility for funding and commissioning of social work degree courses and workforce planning. We would welcome an approach similar to that taken by the Government for the teaching profession, with responsibility for training more tightly concentrated in one body, backed by an assumption that a national approach to this workforce is needed. This includes pay and career progression: we recommend the introduction of national pay scales for social workers, with progression that rewards increasing expertise and encourages retention in front-line practice. We recommend that a 'Social Work Development Agency' be established, uniting functions relating to training and development which are at present neglected or spread across other organisations. We also recommend that the General Social Care Council take on more responsibility for professional leadership.

We look forward to the conclusions of the Social Work Task Force. However, we are concerned that too many disparate initiatives have been announced before the Task Force has had an opportunity to reflect, and that a strategic perspective would serve the profession better in the long term.

Our desire to see education and training recognised as core parts of the social work task is jeopardised by one factor above all: the huge pressure under which social work teams in local authorities are currently operating. Where vacancies and caseloads are high, and where teams rely too much on agency workers and suffer turnover of staff, managers cannot spare the time staff need to participate in training or to supervise the training of students. Restricted caseloads for new social workers are not feasible if they join teams struggling to keep pace with referrals. While workforce restructuring should be explored as a way of using resources more efficiently, especially in the interim, we consider that only a substantial injection of resources into front-line social work capacity will in the long term enable the changes in training and professional development we have outlined.

## Preface

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1. In April 2009 we published a report of our inquiry into Looked-after Children.<sup>1</sup> In the course of that inquiry, we took evidence on the relationships between children in care and those responsible for managing their care—their social workers. We found that children and young people valued good social workers very highly, but that vacancies and high turnover in the workforce meant that they were often denied the opportunity to form lasting relationships with them. We also took evidence from local authorities which suggested that children and families social workers in England are poorly equipped by their training for the work of intervening in families and protecting children. At the same time, news about the terrible tragedy of Baby Peter was again putting the media spotlight on the social work profession, giving rise to a great deal of public criticism—not always well-informed—of the way social workers go about their extremely difficult and important jobs.

2. We have a long-standing interest in how well all parts of the children’s workforce are recruited, trained and supported. It is our belief that the efficacy of services to care for, educate and protect children depends very substantially on the quality of those who staff those services. Having already decided to embark on an inquiry into the training of teachers, we decided to undertake a parallel inquiry into the training of children and families social workers. Throughout our deliberations, the comparison with the teaching profession has been useful and instructive, although in drawing our conclusions we have often had in mind too the example of the medical professions.

3. In December 2008, the Department for Children, Schools and Families published the 2020 Children and Young People’s Workforce Strategy. The Strategy identified social work as an area facing significant challenges, and among its provisions was the establishment of a Social Work Task Force to examine these in greater detail. The Task Force was established in January 2009; its role has been described by the Government as conducting a “nuts and bolts review of social work”. The Task Force made its initial report to the Secretaries of State for Children, Schools and Families and Health on 5 May 2009, in which it identified social work education as one of the six key themes for its work. An interim report in July will be followed by the final report in October 2009.

4. Lord Laming was asked by the Government to report on the current state of safeguarding services following the findings of significant weaknesses at Haringey Council in December 2008.<sup>2</sup> His *Progress Report on the Protection of Children in England* was published on 12 March 2009.<sup>3</sup> The report expressed grave concerns about the adequacy of the training social workers receive for child protection work, and made many recommendations relevant to the training of social workers.

5. Many of our witnesses confirmed our impression that the current focus on social work provides the profession with an almost unprecedented opportunity for reform.<sup>4</sup> The

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1 Children, Schools and Families Committee, Third Report of Session 2008–09, Looked-after Children, HC 111-I, para 29

2 *Haringey Children’s Services Authority Area Joint Area Review* (December 2008)

3 Lord Laming, *The Protection of Children in England: a progress report*, HC 330 (March 2009)

4 Qq 34, 40, 185

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children, Young People and Families, Baroness Morgan, told us:

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 academic 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.<sup>5</sup>

6. The importance of seizing these opportunities cannot be overstated, and the issues are far from academic. **When social workers are poorly trained—lacking in knowledge, skills, or experience—or left unsupported in highly pressured situations, children's lives are put in danger. Intellectual ability, personal resilience, and good supervision are not important because they bring more prestige to the profession or more job satisfaction to the individual. These things are important because they are needed when analysing potential risks to children, dealing professionally with obstructive parents, and reflecting on whether the right decisions are being made at the right times. Although we refer repeatedly throughout this Report to the needs of employers, we are constantly mindful that it is the needs of children that are most important when those who work with them are trained.**

7. We issued a call for written evidence on 31 March 2009, asking for views on the structure, quality, content and provision of initial and post-qualifying training for children and families social workers. Nearly 50 written submissions were received, which have greatly assisted our work. We held four oral evidence sessions in May and June 2009, and are grateful to all of those who took part; a list is published at the end of this report. We took the opportunity of a visit to New York City and Washington D.C., primarily arranged in connection with a separate inquiry, to learn about how social workers are trained and deployed in the USA. Finally, we were pleased and grateful to have the opportunity to meet with a group of ten recently-qualified social workers from eight different London boroughs, and to hear directly from them about their training and the work they are now doing. They were a credit to their profession and we found their thoughtful and passionate contributions to our debate very stimulating.<sup>6</sup>

8. Our thanks are also due to the specialist advisers who have helped us throughout the inquiry and in the preparation of this report: Teresa Smith, Professor Geoff Whitty, Dr Sharon Vitali and John Coughlan.<sup>7</sup>

9. Throughout the Report, we have tried where possible to use the terminology that we believe makes most sense to the interested layperson: hence, we refer to student placements rather than 'Practice Learning Opportunities', to universities as well as 'Higher Education

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5 Q 285

6 See Annex

7 Teresa Smith is Head of the Social Policy and Social Work Department, University of Oxford. Professor Geoff Whitty is Director of the Institute of Education, a member of Universities UK and a member of the General Teaching Council for England. Dr Sharon Vitali is Senior Lecturer and Field Chair for Social Work at Oxford Brookes University, and participated in the research project 'Evaluation the Outcomes of Social Work Education' for the Social Care Institute for Excellence and the Social Policy and Social Work subject centre of the Higher Education Academy. John Coughlan is Director of Children's Services at Hampshire County Council and a member of the Association of Directors of Children's Services.

Institutions’, and we use the term ‘agencies’ to mean primarily private businesses which supply locum social workers to other employers. A list of acronyms used in the text follows:

ADCS	Association of Directors of Children’s Services
ASPW	Association of Professors of Social Work
BASW	British Association of Social Workers
Cafcass	Child and Family Court Advisory and Support Service
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CWDC	Children’s Workforce Development Council
GSCC	General Social Care Council
GYO	‘Grow Your Own’
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
JUC SWEC	Joint Universities Council Social Work Education Committee
NQSW	Newly-Qualified Social Worker programme
PLOs	Practice Learning Opportunities
PQ	Post-Qualifying
PRTL	Post-Registration Training and Learning
QAA	Quality Assessment Agency
TDA	Training and Development Agency for Schools
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service

# 1 Social work training in England

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10. The Care Standards Act 2000 introduced greater regulation of the social work profession through the establishment of the General Social Care Council. To practise as a social worker, professionals must be registered with the GSCC; in registering they must demonstrate that they have achieved an appropriate social work qualification and are undertaking post-registration training and learning. There are 78,635 registered social workers across all settings and specialisms in England (children's services, older people, mental health, disabilities).<sup>8</sup>

11. In 2003, a three-year Bachelor's degree in social work replaced the two-year diploma (DipSW) as the main qualification route; there is also the option of a two-year Master's for those with a first degree. The degrees are generic in nature, meaning that students learn about social work with both adult and child client groups.<sup>9</sup> To achieve either the Bachelor's or Master's degree, students must undertake 200 days of assessed practice, giving them experience in at least two practice settings with at least two user groups.

12. The General Social Care Council approves Higher Education Institutions to deliver the social work degree, and grants programme approval for individual courses. In February 2009 there were 231 approved social work degree courses delivered by 71 universities and 9 associated HEIs.<sup>10</sup> Funding for social work degree courses comes from four sources:<sup>11</sup>

- £27m for universities from the General Social Care Council;
- £5m for placements from the Children's Workforce Development Council and Skills for Care (the sector skills bodies for children's and adults social care respectively);
- £70m from the NHS Business Services Authority for student bursaries;
- Per student funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

13. The number of students enrolled on initial social work qualifying degrees in 2007–08 was 5,221; 24% were studying at Master's level. There has been a decline in students qualifying through part-time study since the introduction of the degree in 2003, from 19% to 8%.<sup>12</sup> An age barrier to qualifying as a social worker, previously set at a minimum of 22 years, was withdrawn when the degree was introduced; students over the age of 25 now account for 61% of the total intake.<sup>13</sup> The intake for social work tends to represent a more

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8 Ev 125. Throughout the inquiry we made frequent comparisons to the teaching profession, which has a very much larger workforce; over half a million teachers are registered with the General Teaching Council for England.

9 Ev 50

10 GSCC, *Raising Standards: social work education in England 2007–08* (February 2009)

11 *Community Care*, 13 November 2008

12 GSCC, *Raising standards* (February 2009), paras 10–11

13 GSCC, *Raising standards* (February 2009), para 12

ethnically diverse profile than other degree courses, but only 13% of enrolments are by men.<sup>14</sup>

14. The social work degree has been successful in encouraging higher numbers of people to train as social workers; there has been a 37% increase in student numbers since 2003. Not all those who study on the degree courses, however, go on to practice as social workers.<sup>15</sup> A system of non-income assessed bursaries for students while they train was established at the same time as the new degree courses. The vast majority of applications for bursaries are accepted; in the 2008/9 academic year, 9848 undergraduates and 2660 postgraduates received bursaries. Some local authorities or voluntary organisations second or sponsor their employees to study the social work degree through the Open University or a local university, following a period of employment with them. This sponsorship will include financial support or salary through the duration of the course.

15. Registered Social Workers are required to keep their training and learning up to date in order to re-register with the GSCC after the initial three-year period. In September 2007 the GSCC launched a new Post-Qualifying Framework which is divided into three levels: Specialist Social Work, Higher Specialist Social Work and Advanced Social Work. There are five specialisms in the post-qualifying framework: mental health; adult social care; practice education; leadership and management; and children and young people, their families and carers.

## The Task Force and other initiatives

16. The Social Work Task Force was set up in December 2008 “to advise the Government on the content of a comprehensive programme of reform for the whole social work profession”.<sup>16</sup> The Secretaries of State for Health and for Children, Schools and Families told us that they “are prepared to consider radical reforms of the social work education system if that is what the Task Force recommend.”<sup>17</sup>

17. As part of the Government’s response to Lord Laming’s report on child protection in May 2009, the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families announced funding of £58m for a new Social Work Transformation Fund “to increase the capacity of the system to train and support social workers and implement change in the immediate term”. It will fund a range of initiatives:

- An additional 200 places on the Graduate Recruitment Scheme from September 2009 (this scheme sponsors graduates with a minimum of 2:1 in a first degree to undertake the social work Master’s route into the profession);
- A Return to Social Work scheme to help former social workers move more easily back into the profession; “Our aim is that there should be 500 social workers back

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14 GSCC, *Raising standards* (February 2009), para 13

15 Ev 125

16 Ev 1

17 Ev 124

in the workplace from this autumn, supported by refresher training where they need it.”<sup>18</sup>

- Introduction of a ‘practice-focused’ Master’s degree for qualified social workers, to be piloted from 2011, with an aspiration that, over time, social work becomes a Master’s-level profession;
- Expansion of the Newly Qualified Social Workers programme so that it is available to all new children and families’ social workers in statutory services and the third sector from September 2009;
- Additional support for frontline managers “to help them develop their leadership, management and supervision skills” from autumn 2009.

Also previously announced was the development of a “career framework” by the Children’s Workforce Development Council, to “provide greater focus on training and development needs and set out expected standards of practice at various career points”.<sup>19</sup> The framework will build on the Newly-Qualified Social Worker Programme to establish: an Early Professional Development Programme for those in their second and third years of employment, and Advanced Social Work Practitioner status which will create senior practice-focused roles for “excellent and experienced” social workers in local authority children and families services.<sup>20</sup> In July 2009, the Secretary of State announced plans for a work-based training route for career changers.<sup>21</sup>

18. We asked Moira Gibb, Chair of the Social Work Task Force, whether the Government’s announcements in response to the Laming report had inhibited the work of the Task Force in any way. She responded:

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.<sup>22</sup>

Task Force Joint Deputy Chair Andrew Webb told us “it does not feel like a constrained exercise.”<sup>23</sup>

19. We asked the Minister, Baroness Morgan, why so many new initiatives had been announced before the Task Force had had a chance to make its recommendations. She told us:

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18 Department for Children, Schools and Families, *The Protection of Children in England: action plan, The Government’s Response to Lord Laming*, Cm 7589 (May 2009), para 85

19 Ev 129

20 Ev 126

21 ‘Career changers asked to take on new challenge and help some of society’s most vulnerable young people’, Department for Children, Schools and Families press notice 2009/0130, 9 July 2009

22 Q 17

23 Q 22

It would be unacceptable for the Government to sit back and simply wait until the Task Force had finished its deliberation [...] We had already identified some very significant steps such as rolling out the Newly-Qualified Social Worker initiative to all statutory and voluntary providers in September. It was widely accepted that that was the right thing to do [...] There are some very straightforward things we can be 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.

**20. Although we have received reassurances about the Social Work Task Force's scope to recommend radical reforms, we remain concerned about the plethora of new initiatives which have been announced and set in motion before the Task Force reports. While we appreciate the need to take urgent action in the light of Lord Laming's report on child protection, we consider that a more strategic approach would serve the social work profession better in the long term. It is not clear how these initiatives fit together either with each other, or with existing structures.** For example, the links between the Children's Workforce Development Council's new "career framework", the existing Post-Qualification Framework overseen by the General Social Care Council, and the future introduction of a 'practice-focused' Master's degree have not been articulated.<sup>24</sup>

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24 Ev 54, 191, 104; see below, para 150.



23. Many believe that the children’s social work sector is beset by “too many cooks”, and that there is an urgent need for greater clarity about the distinct roles and functions of these organisations.<sup>27</sup> The Social Work Task Force has reported in its initial findings that many social workers “have expressed confusion about unclear roles or overlapping remits of those organisations or find it hard to understand the work that they do.”<sup>28</sup> The GSCC has itself admitted that there is confusion about which body does what in relation to the funding of social work education.<sup>29</sup> The Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS) argued that there should be a single body planning for the non-schools children’s workforce, because duplication in the roles of CWDC, Skills for Care and GSCC “does not provide value for money or allow a comprehensive approach”. In particular, the ADCS wish to see commissioning and funding of qualifying courses united under the Children’s Workforce Development Council, to parallel the role of the Training and Development Agency for Schools for teacher training.<sup>30</sup> The influence of the CWDC is currently circumscribed by the fact that they deal with children’s social workers only after they have completed their initial training, and not at all with adults’ social workers, for whom the sector skills body is Skills for Care. Higher education institutions have found that the division of responsibilities between adult’s and children’s sector bodies has meant duplication of work.<sup>31</sup>

24. Various pieces of work are being undertaken within Government in relation to these bodies. The 2020 Children and Young People’s Workforce Strategy announced a review of the remits of several non-departmental public bodies serving the children’s workforce to consider “whether they are configured appropriately to provide the most effective delivery of workforce reform and development”.<sup>32</sup> Re-licensing of the Sector Skills Councils which have responsibility for parts of the children and young people’s workforce was underway in early 2009. The Department of Health in September 2008 commissioned a review of the roles of the Social Care Institute for Excellence, Skills for Care, and the GSCC. As part of this exercise, a review of the organisations’ roles in social work training was due to be carried out jointly with the DCSF.<sup>33</sup>

25. One consequence of the proliferation of bodies appears to be a sense that the social work profession lacks leadership at a national level.<sup>34</sup> Andrew Webb, Joint Deputy Chair of the Social Work Task Force spoke of the need for a “central point of defence” of the profession.<sup>35</sup> The Task Force reported in its initial findings that social workers

do not feel that their profession speaks with a strong national voice or is well supported at national level. [...] the profession is not felt to be setting standards for

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27 Qq 3–4 [Andrew Webb], 107 [Rosie Varley], 218 [Bruce Clark, Rita Krishna], 268–9 [Sue Berelowitz]

28 *First Report of the Social Work Task Force*, 5 May 2009; see also Ev 184.

29 GSCC, *Raising standards* (February 2009), para 29

30 Ev 88; Q 203

31 Ev 198

32 Department for Children, Schools and Families, *2020 Children and Young People’s Workforce Strategy* (December 2008), para 5.33

33 *Community Care*, 17 September 2008

34 Ev 199

35 Q 4

itself and is, therefore, vulnerable to being ‘done to’ by Government and others seeking reform. Some social workers look to Government-funded regulatory or delivery bodies for this leadership, but do not necessarily find it there.<sup>36</sup>

Bridget Robb of the British Association of Social Workers pointed out that there is no social work equivalent of the Chief Medical Officer, and issues affecting social workers are often subsumed under the general banners of social care (a category including residential and home care workers, who often train on the job), or children’s services.<sup>37</sup>

26. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children, Young People and Families, Baroness Morgan, told us that there is a need for “a strong voice for social work”, making a comparison with health and teaching professional bodies which help to promote knowledge about what those professions do.<sup>38</sup> However, she stated that “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.”<sup>39</sup>

27. Asked which Government department takes the lead on developing policy in this area, Baroness Morgan told us: “The Task Force has been jointly established between DH and DCSF. I work very closely with Phil Hope [Minister of State for Care Services]. We have a shared interest in developing the social work profession together. It is fair to say that we are, literally, cheek by jowl on this.”<sup>40</sup> Responsibility for universities passed in June 2009 to the newly-created Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

**28. Nine years on from the tragedy of Victoria Climbié, the lack of a coherent and prestigious national profile for the social work profession appears to us to be perhaps the most important failing of the *Every Child Matters* reforms. It is unusual to hear so uniformly in evidence to a Committee inquiry calls for greater centralisation, prescription and national leadership. With responsibility for social work training spread across three departments, we urge the Government to be bold in establishing coherent leadership for the profession that can take responsibility for all parts of the whole, and present a profile distinct from the wider fields of social care and the children’s workforce.**

**29. Streamlining of the national sector bodies and rationalisation of their remits is an urgent priority. We acknowledge that the Government is awaiting the recommendations of the Task Force in this regard, but note that several reviews of the relevant organisations have already been put in train, and ask for clarification as to how these will affect each other. We urge the Task Force to consider how one of the existing bodies could be reformed to replicate the role and impact that the Training and Development Agency has had in the teaching profession; a ‘Social Work Development Agency’ should unite the functions of recruitment, workforce development and**

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36 *First Report of the Social Work Task Force*, 5 May 2009

37 Q 67

38 Q 292

39 Q 297

40 Q 317

**funding and commissioning of training. Such a body would replace the social work functions of the Children’s Workforce Development Council. It would operate alongside the General Social Care Council which, in addition to its role as workforce regulator, should be freed to act as champion and advocate of the profession at national level.**

## Workforce planning

30. The large increases in the numbers of students applying to social work qualifying courses when the degrees were introduced was a reversal of the trend in the immediately preceding years, and is in itself a development to be celebrated.<sup>41</sup> However, the increases have not necessarily been evenly spread across the country, meaning that in some areas too many graduates are being produced for the available jobs, and in others too few.<sup>42</sup> The General Social Care Council’s main preoccupation with regard to training places is that they are available in the right parts of the country. They point out that mature students, who make up around 60% of the annual intake, are typically less mobile and therefore need access to local courses.<sup>43</sup>

31. Although the GSCC regulates degree courses, it does not commission them or plan their provision; none of the national sector bodies in fact perform this function. Universities make individual decisions about whether to offer qualifying courses in social work, decisions which are influenced by a wide range of factors and the context of their own strategic business planning.<sup>44</sup> The London School of Economics is one of a small number of universities that used to, but no longer, offer social work degrees. Dr Eileen Munro told us this is because of the higher education performance management regime, which “makes it very unattractive for research-intensive universities to provide social work training”.<sup>45</sup> The University and College Union drew attention to departmental closures “in areas where social workers are sorely needed”, referring specifically to Reading University which took a decision to close its School of Health & Social Care in March 2009, despite opposition from local councils.<sup>46</sup>

32. We asked the Minister, Baroness Morgan, what the Government can do about universities electing to discontinue their social work training. She responded that “What we can do is to 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.”<sup>47</sup>

33. While there have been high-profile cases of universities ceasing to offer social work courses, others have capitalised on the popularity of the courses amongst students. There is

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41 Q 85

42 Ev 29–30

43 Q 99 [Mike Wardle]; see also Ev 144–5.

44 Ev 46–7; Q 99 [Mike Wardle]

45 Q 142; see also Q 44 and Ev 144–5.

46 Ev 144

47 Q 293

some concern that this is principally a response to pressure on course leaders from the management of institutions keen to maximise income from social work student bursaries.<sup>48</sup> Bridget Robb of the British Association of Social Workers told us that universities have come to look on social work as “a cash cow”; “departments have been under great pressure to take more and more students. [...] 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 workforce”.<sup>49</sup> John Barraclough of London Metropolitan University argued that

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 [...] and consideration should be given to providing protection for professional courses from the vacillations of the economic realities in higher education<sup>50</sup>

34. At present, decisions affecting the numbers of student places, the supply of social workers into the workplace, and the posts available are taken by many individual organisations.<sup>51</sup> This does not only have implications for the numbers of social workers in the workforce; as discussed below, the expansion in university training places appears to have outstripped the supply of good quality, statutory sector practice placements.<sup>52</sup> However, any reduction of student numbers to ameliorate this situation risks exacerbating recruitment problems in the short term.<sup>53</sup>

35. In the absence of an overarching strategy, employers have no means of influencing the numbers of students taken on to social work courses, which deprives them of one possible means of tackling the significant recruitment challenges they face.<sup>54</sup> A survey of two-thirds of England’s social services authorities in January 2009 revealed an average vacancy rate of 10.9%. London had the highest vacancy rate at 18.6%, the North East the lowest at 6.5%.<sup>55</sup> The Local Government Association says that recruitment and retention of social workers is a particular problem in children and families teams.<sup>56</sup> Despite this, the GSCC has reported anecdotal evidence that some new graduates are having difficulty finding jobs.<sup>57</sup>

36. Lord Laming recommended that a national children’s social worker supply strategy be implemented to address recruitment and retention issues.<sup>58</sup> Witnesses to our inquiry overwhelmingly agreed, and the Government has accepted the recommendation in

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48 Ev 46–7; see also Q 86 [Professor White].

49 Q 43

50 Ev 152

51 Q 106 [Keith Brumfitt]

52 Qq 23, 43

53 Q 276

54 Ev 86, 199–201

55 ‘Highest vacancy rate in London boroughs’, *Community Care*, 15 April 2009

56 ‘LGA: Child social work is councils’ biggest recruitment headache’, *Community Care*, 10 December 2008

57 GSCC, *Raising standards* (February 2009), para 42

58 Lord Laming, *The Protection of Children in England: a progress report* HC 330 (March 2009), paras 5.5–6

principle while awaiting the views of the Social Work Task Force.<sup>59</sup> It was argued that national workforce planning needs to encompass a mechanism to ensure that the provision of training places is linked to professional recruitment shortages.<sup>60</sup> Jane Haywood, Chief Executive of the Children’s Workforce Development Council, explained that

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.<sup>61</sup>

37. Jane Haywood told us that while the CWDC does track numbers of social workers, it has not been given “the powers or the levers to then really take a hold of that and make a whole workforce plan work”. She added that there were several organisations who could undertake this work, but the Government needs to allocate the task to one of them.<sup>62</sup> Overall, the CWDC reported that “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.”<sup>63</sup>

38. Effective workforce planning for social work needs to take account of demography, levels of deprivation and the characteristics of the local population.<sup>64</sup> At present no satisfactory method exists for modelling this on a national scale. Mike Wardle, Chief Executive of the GSCC, explained the complexities:

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. [...] 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 [...] 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.<sup>65</sup>

**39. High vacancies and retention problems have plagued children and families social work for too long. It is no longer tenable that there is no mechanism for employers to**

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59 Qq 61, 103 [Mike Wardle], 295

60 Q 96 [Rosie Varley]; Ev 28, 30, 199–201

61 Q 106

62 Q 108

63 Ev 47

64 Q 103 [Mike Wardle]

65 Q 106

**influence the supply of graduates, and no national model for estimating future demand. We recommend that the Government prioritise the research necessary to establish such a model, link to it the future funding and commissioning of training places for students, and explicitly allocate the task of workforce planning to one of the sector bodies.**

**40. There should be a mechanism for retaining funding for social work training places when universities cease to offer these courses. Funding for social work training should be allocated by a social work organisation—such as the ‘Social Work Development Agency’ which we have proposed—which commissions places on the basis of quality assessments and workforce planning.**

## 2 Entry to the profession

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### Academic standards

41. Social work demands a great deal of those who practise it. Cathy Ashley, Chief Executive of the Family Rights Group, emphasised that a high standard should be expected from entrants to the profession because “it is a job in which you are investing the state’s responsibility for protecting the most vulnerable children and families”.<sup>66</sup> Professor Lena Dominelli, giving evidence on behalf of Universities UK, outlined the qualities needed to be a social worker:

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.<sup>67</sup>

Several witnesses were keen to stress the intellectual dimension of the social work task, and the analytical, cognitive and writing skills that it requires.<sup>68</sup> Moira Gibb, Chair of the Social Work Task Force, concluded that “you need both academic and emotional intelligence”.<sup>69</sup>

42. There is considerable concern that the intellectual aspect of the social work task is not consistently reflected in the level of qualifications held by those embarking on social work degrees.<sup>70</sup> All applicants must have achieved at least Key Skills Level 2 in English and mathematics and have undergone a Criminal Records Bureau check, but beyond this, higher education institutions set their own academic entry requirements.<sup>71</sup> Almost half of students entering social work undergraduate degree programmes in 2006–7 had fewer than 240 UCAS points (3 grade Cs or equivalent at A level), compared to fewer than a quarter of entrants to teaching and nursing degrees.<sup>72</sup>

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66 Q 260

67 Q 75

68 Qq 23, 69 [Professor White], 281; Ev 103

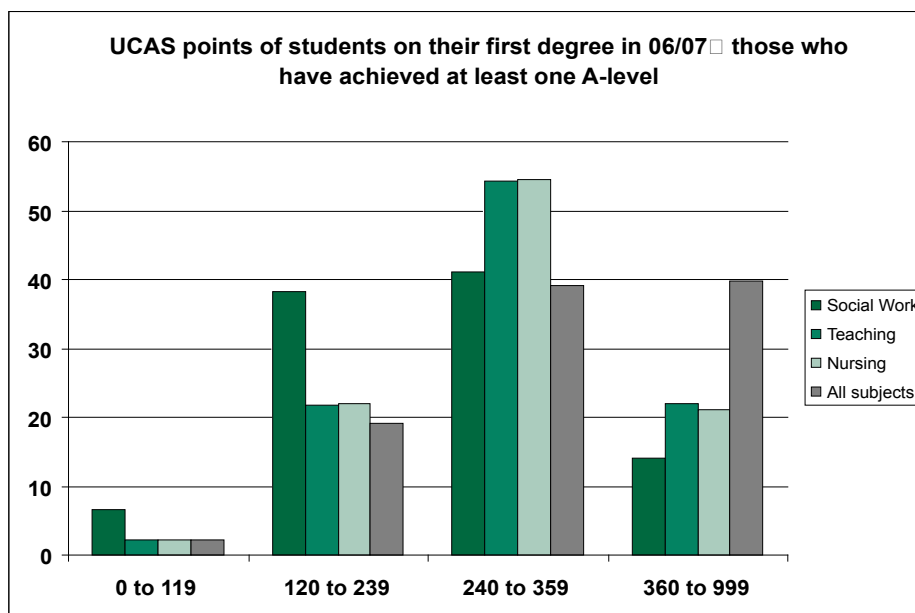
69 Q 24

70 Q 82; Ev 31, 105

71 GSCC, *Raising standards* (February 2009), para 8

72 Department for Children, Schools and Families, *2020 Workforce Strategy: the evidence base* (2008), p 32; Ev 126

Figure 1:



Source: Ev 126

43. The range of UCAS points held by applicants appears to be significantly greater in social work than in nursing, medicine or teaching, and while courses and universities with good reputations can have their pick of students boasting A and B grades at A level, we heard that others admit students with E grades.<sup>73</sup> The Joint Universities Council reported complaints from some employers about the standards of literacy amongst graduates from social work courses.<sup>74</sup> It is important to note, however, that a substantial proportion of the total number of students embarking on social work qualifying courses—principally those studying for Master’s degrees—already hold a first degree. In 2007–08, this group made up 24% of the student cohort.<sup>75</sup>

44. Heather Wakefield, National Secretary of Unison’s Local Government Services Group, argued that A-level scores are less important than ensuring that the social work workforce reflects the composition of the population.<sup>76</sup> However, Professor Sue White drew attention to what she called the “contradictory imperatives” of widening access to the profession, and ensuring that entry and assessment is robust enough to keep the standard of the workforce high.<sup>77</sup> The General Social Care Council identify this tension as an aspect of the Government’s drive to widen participation in higher education in general, to which social

73 Q 24, 258, 261; Ev 31, 85

74 Ev 28

75 Ev 48

76 Q 42

77 Q 70 [Professor White]; see also Q 258.

work courses have contributed.<sup>78</sup> The Children’s Workforce Development Council advocated “a more rigorous recruitment and selection process, with high expectations”.<sup>79</sup>

45. The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) has proposed that a “national benchmark” for A-level entry onto undergraduate social work courses be adopted.<sup>80</sup> Deputy Children’s Commissioner Sue Berelowitz drew a comparison with the teaching profession, where, after some years of crisis, there is now healthy competition to get onto teacher training courses and thereafter into teaching posts: “That is not about lowering the benchmark. [...] 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.”<sup>81</sup>

46. Two main objections were made in our evidence to the idea of a national benchmark imposing higher academic entry requirements. The first is that A-levels are not necessarily a good, nor the only, indicator of future success on the social work course or in employment.<sup>82</sup> The second is that capable candidates with the right personal qualities, particularly mature candidates, could be discouraged or excluded from social work training by a rigid emphasis on A-level results.<sup>83</sup> Heather Wakefield argued that life experience is as important as academic qualifications: “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.”<sup>84</sup> The Association of Professors of Social Work pointed out that some universities have developed a range of selection procedures in order to assess potential and capability in more imaginative ways.<sup>85</sup> The Minister, Baroness Morgan, admitted that she found the statistics on UCAS points “troubling” but cautioned that they “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.”<sup>86</sup>

**47. A-levels are an imperfect measure of potential, but as they are a proxy for the intellectual ability that social work students need we wish to see an improvement in the average grades required for acceptance to undergraduate social work training. This should not, however, preclude universities ensuring that they have the means of offering places to experienced applicants who lack an academic background but whose personal attributes would be valuable assets to the profession.**

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78 GSCC, *Raising standards* (February 2009), para 28

79 Ev 44

80 Ev 14

81 Q 258

82 Ev 17, 26, 31

83 Q 80; Ev 26, 183, 197

84 Q 42; see also Q 239 [James Brown].

85 Ev 31

86 Q 306

## Personal qualities

48. Application processes need to assess not only academic ability, but also whether a candidate possesses the personal qualities needed to be an effective social worker.<sup>87</sup> Intervening to protect children requires courage as well as skill, and the ability to handle risk, uncertainty, stress and conflict.<sup>88</sup> The NSPCC conducted a brief consultation with young people about their views of social workers. Among the traits they highlighted were: being a good listener; sincerity and honesty; reliability; understanding and empathy; respectfulness; calmness and confidence. To this list the Association of Directors of Children's Services added resilience, fairness and reluctance to pre-judge.<sup>89</sup> One young woman told the NSPCC that "social workers should have experience with young people in general [...] Having a social worker qualification does not mean you can or have the experience to work with young people."<sup>90</sup> The Family Rights Group reported that many parents express concern about qualities of social workers such as perceived prejudices and lack of knowledge about issues affecting their families, and the Association for Improvements in Maternity Services complained about lack of respect shown by social workers to parents.<sup>91</sup>

49. The General Social Care Council (GSCC) state that:

there is a rigorous selection process for entry to the social work degree, stipulated by the Department of Health. This includes requirements that entrants should possess appropriate personal and intellectual qualities to be social workers. All short-listed applicants must be assessed through group or individual interviews, which should involve employers and people who use services and their carers.<sup>92</sup>

Mike Wardle, Chief Executive of the GSCC, explained that existing requirements "give various general statements about the types of quality you should be looking for [...] and say you must have a process to make that selection", but that "there is no nationally prescribed guidance as to exactly what you are looking for and what you should be doing when selecting students".<sup>93</sup>

50. Bournemouth University commented that "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."<sup>94</sup> Enid Hendry, representing the NSPCC, commended some universities for involving children and young people in their selection processes, but suggested that assessment of students could more regularly involve observing social workers' interactions with children and young people.<sup>95</sup> The Family Rights Group argued

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87 Ev 146; Q 238 [Sue Berelowitz]

88 Q 235

89 Ev 86

90 Ev 121–3

91 Ev 103, 174

92 GSCC, *Raising standards* (February 2009), para 8

93 Q 101

94 Ev 150

95 Q 238; see also Q 238 [Sue Berelowitz], Ev 83.

that universities should take into consideration the applicant's personal history and motivation in choosing to train as a social worker.<sup>96</sup> Professor Sue White said that universities have an opportunity to develop imaginative methods of assessing candidates' emotional aptitude for the job.<sup>97</sup> In particular, there may be opportunities to involve employers more closely in application processes, to ensure that candidates show potential to develop the personal qualities needed to be an effective social worker.<sup>98</sup>

**51. The 'Social Work Development Agency' that we have proposed should make available more guidance about best practice in assessing the personal qualities of applicants to social work degrees. We are encouraged to hear that some universities involve service users already, and we believe this should become standard practice. Employers should be routinely involved in application processes to help universities identify those candidates with the potential to be effective social workers, not just successful students.**

52. Surrey County Council argued that prior experience in the field, such as in a support role in children's social care, is a much better way to test an individual's aptitude for the work than academic study.<sup>99</sup> It also enables candidates to get a better understanding and more realistic view of the work they are studying for.<sup>100</sup> One recently-qualified social worker who worked for a year in residential care before commencing her studies told us that she still draws on that experience every day.<sup>101</sup>

**53. Previous practical work experience in related fields seems to us an immensely valuable attribute to bring to the study and practice of social work. This should be taken into account in application procedures, and consideration should be given to making it a mandatory requirement.**

### Fast track and other routes

54. The Children's Workforce Development Council put forward the view 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."<sup>102</sup> One of these possible alternative routes is through a Foundation degree, which could function as a way to qualify staff to work in roles supporting and supervised by social workers, or which could be preparatory to a social work degree.<sup>103</sup> Diplomas and apprenticeships offer other possible routes.<sup>104</sup> The NSPCC have developed a traineeship scheme which attracted over 3,000 applicants from a diverse range of backgrounds in its first year. However, they reported facing a number of barriers to introducing an NVQ

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96 Ev 103

97 Q 75

98 Q 239 [James Brown]; Ev 2, 44, 180, 195, 201

99 Ev 200

100 Ev 167

101 See Annex

102 Ev 44

103 Ev 27, 32, 179

104 Ev 188-9

route to a social work qualification: “academic elitism, the extra work involved for universities, and less revenue from courses if students are exempted from some elements of the course.”<sup>105</sup>

55. The Children’s Workforce Development Council is developing options for a fast track to social work for mature graduates with experience in “allied professional areas”.<sup>106</sup> There was significant anxiety about such a proposal in our evidence from the academic community, largely because of the breadth of theory and practice which social workers must assimilate during their degrees.<sup>107</sup> Whilst an undergraduate degree takes three years, the time available for communicating the knowledge base is limited by the requirement for 200 placement days. Professor John Carpenter cited research showing that the topic of first degree does not make a significant difference to the final outcomes or marks of students taking the Master’s in social work.<sup>108</sup> Professor June Thoburn wrote that

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 [...] 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.<sup>109</sup>

Anything less than 18 months’ full-time study, Professor Thoburn argued, would “compromise standards at the point of qualification”.<sup>110</sup> Professor Michael Preston-Shoot rejected the idea of a fast track to social work qualification because of the distinctiveness and complexity of social work “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.”<sup>111</sup>

56. Dr Eileen Munro, however, offered qualified support for the idea of a ‘fast track’ when applied to mature students, supported by high-quality supervision.<sup>112</sup> Surrey County Council were keen to see alternative routes developed through foundation degrees, and even shorter ‘intensive’ foundation degrees for those with extensive relevant professional experience such as youth workers or police officers. They considered that people already working in the field would not need the same amount of time for practice placements, and that quicker qualification would help to ease the current staffing shortages.<sup>113</sup>

**57. We are persuaded that there is little scope for routinely compressing the content of the social work degrees into a shorter, ‘fast track’ package. However, as an option for**

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105 Ev 107

106 Ev 44

107 Ev 27

108 Ev 172

109 Ev 180–1

110 Ev 180–1

111 Q 181

112 Q 181

113 Ev 199

**students with relevant experience, a clear idea of what sort of social work they wish to specialise in, or prior qualifications incorporating clearly relevant content, a ‘fast track’ would make a valuable contribution to increasing opportunities for applicants through non-traditional routes.**

58. ‘Grow Your Own’ (GYO) is a term referring to schemes whereby a student is supported and funded through their social work studies by an organisation that will employ them once qualified. These schemes can take various forms, principally secondments or sponsorships of current employees, or traineeships into which external candidates are recruited. The proportion of schemes falling into the latter category has recently increased, and as employers often prefer the Master’s route—being shorter and therefore cheaper—this has increased opportunities for highly-qualified external recruits, sometimes at the expense of internal candidates with long experience in the sector. Heather Wakefield, representing Unison, reported evidence from its members that it is increasingly difficult for unqualified staff to obtain secondments to gain a social work degree; “we are being told that they have to resign from their jobs and apply for bursaries if that is what they want to do.”<sup>114</sup>

59. The benefits of GYO schemes include students’ prior experience in the field—traineeships often include a pre-study year in employment—and one or more guaranteed placements.<sup>115</sup> Students on these schemes are also less likely to withdraw from courses. However, of the 2007–08 intake onto social work degrees, only 10.4% were studying on employment-based routes.<sup>116</sup> Research carried out for the General Social Care Council found evidence of local authorities cutting back their GYO schemes because they are unwilling to commit to funding places over a number of years when working within annual budgets.<sup>117</sup> This is especially so when an authority feels there is no guarantee a student supported in this way will remain with them in the long term.<sup>118</sup>

**60. We consider the proportion of students on Grow Your Own schemes to be surprisingly low. These schemes appear to be a concrete way in which employers can exert more influence on the type of training and preparation they wish social work students to receive, as well as an important route into the profession for people with highly relevant skills and experience. We recommend that the Government consider funding arrangements that would encourage more local authorities to offer more of these opportunities.** GYO schemes could be a particularly fertile ground for the ‘fast track’ study options discussed above.

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114 Q 41

115 Ev 204

116 GSCC, *Raising standards* (February 2009), p iii

117 GSCC, *What works in Grow Your Own initiatives for social work?* (December 2008), p55; see also Ev 82.

118 Ev 200

## 3 Initial training

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### Standards on degree courses

61. We heard concern from several quarters that it is too easy to pass a social work degree course—both the academic elements and the demonstration of fitness to practice.<sup>119</sup> In the three cohorts to have completed degree courses since 2003–04, the failure rate was on average 2.62% and the withdrawal rate 15%.<sup>120</sup> Deputy Children’s Commissioner Sue Berelowitz told us:

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.<sup>121</sup>

John Barraclough, a senior lecturer in social work, wrote that students are often given the benefit of the doubt about their suitability to practice or their performance in placements, because the level of proof required to terminate studies is much higher than for academic factors. This, he argued, is inappropriate when a degree course constitutes a professional qualification.<sup>122</sup> The NSPCC reported that “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.”<sup>123</sup>

62. Some suggest that penalties for student attrition in the higher education funding regime encourage universities to keep students on who are unfit for practice.<sup>124</sup> We have noted in evidence to our parallel inquiry into teacher training that the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA), which funds initial teacher training, is regarded as taking a less “punitive” approach to student attrition than the Higher Education Funding Council for England, which funds social work courses. The TDA made an explicit decision to remove any incentive universities might have for retaining students who were not likely to pass the course or become competent teachers.<sup>125</sup>

63. The suggestion that social work degree providers feel under pressure not to fail students was strongly refuted by Professor Michael Preston-Shoot:

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,

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119 Ev 102; Q 249

120 Ev 64

121 Q 258

122 Ev 152

123 Ev 109

124 Ev 102, 150; Qq 70 [Professor White], 86, 260

125 Uncorrected transcript of oral evidence taken before the Children, Schools and Families Committee on 15 June 2009, HC (2008–09) 369-v, Q 211

the parent, the mentally unwell person—and we are very clear that we have to send people out who are ready to begin practice.”<sup>126</sup>

Students can be required to repeat practice placements if they are not deemed to have met the standards of assessment.<sup>127</sup> Liz Davies, a Senior Lecturer at London Metropolitan University, explained that incorporating the GSCC Code of Conduct into student misconduct regulations allows questions of suitability for professional practice to be taken into account in the academic requirements of the course.<sup>128</sup>

64. Andrew Webb, Joint Deputy Chair of the Social Work Task Force, posed the question of whether graduating from the degree course should be decoupled from the practice qualification; he reasoned that “academic knowledge is easily acquired by a bright 21 year-old, but perhaps the practice skills are not.”<sup>129</sup> Bridget Robb argued that exit routes out of the professional programme should be available for those who do not carry on to become social workers, either because they are deemed not to be competent or because they have made the choice that being a social worker is not for them.<sup>130</sup> It is possible at some universities for students not deemed fit for practice to obtain a default academic award, for example in social care.<sup>131</sup>

**65. It is unacceptable that social work courses, or any element of them, should have a reputation for being ‘difficult to fail’. A review of the funding arrangements for social work degrees is needed to ensure that there are no incentives to keep unsuitable students on a course. Funding should be channelled through a sector-specific body to reflect the fact that the degrees are not just an academic course—they are a test of fitness for professional practice. Every university should make provision for students deemed not suitable for practice to put credits towards an alternative, non-qualifying award.**

### Quality assurance of degree courses

66. The General Social Care Council approves higher education institutions (HEIs) to deliver the social work degree, and grants programme approval for individual courses. The GSCC employs a delegated model of regulation which gives responsibility for monitoring quality standards to universities themselves, and then examines the institution’s own quality assurance systems. HEIs are required to report annually to the GSCC to demonstrate that they are continuing to meet the criteria against which they were approved, but only every five years is the course re-approved; this involves visits to the university by GSCC inspectors and social work service users.<sup>132</sup> In 2007–08, 75% of HEIs offering the degree were judged to be providing well-run courses and implementing their

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126 Q 177

127 Q 76 [Hilary Tompsett]

128 Q 179

129 Q 26

130 Q 57

131 Q 84 [Hilary Tompsett]

132 Ev 51

own quality assurance processes effectively.<sup>133</sup> Of the courses due for re-approval, 70% were set conditions to meet. Re-approval has subsequently been granted to all but one institution, which has suspended its undergraduate intake.<sup>134</sup>

67. Rosie Varley, Chair of the General Social Care Council, described their approach to enforcing standards when asked if the GSCC had terminated any courses:

We have not got rid of, as you put it, any universities providing social work courses [...] 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’.<sup>135</sup>

Nevertheless, the GSCC themselves listed a number of weaknesses which they have identified in the current system: delegation of quality assessment to HEIs; little information about the quality of a course being available to prospective students or local employers, meaning there are no ‘market’-based incentives to improve; and a poorly-defined benchmark for quality in the form of high-level ‘output statements’.<sup>136</sup> The GSCC has considered introducing several measures to address these weaknesses: targeted and sample visits (which may include observation of teaching and visits to placements), gathering feedback on courses from graduates and their employers one year on, and publishing annual reports from universities so that students are better informed.<sup>137</sup>

68. In his *Progress Report on the Protection of Children in England*, Lord Laming stated that the quality of social work degree courses is not yet sufficiently developed, and that providers’ standards are not subject to a rigorous assessment regime.<sup>138</sup> John Barraclough argued that the previous regime of regular inspections was more effective in identifying problems and forcing universities to address them.<sup>139</sup> Sue Berelowitz complained of too much variability in the standards of courses, and argued that the GSCC should be more actively involved in assessing against benchmarked standards.<sup>140</sup> Reports of degree courses by the recently-qualified social workers we met varied: some were very complimentary, while others complained that courses were “hit and miss”, or “unstructured”.<sup>141</sup> The Institute of Education drew a contrast with “the tight quality control in the teaching profession, where nationalisation of the curriculum and standard expectations are

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133 GSCC, *Raising standards* (February 2009), para 23

134 GSCC, *Raising standards* (February 2009), para 26–28

135 Q 97

136 Ev 52

137 Ev 52

138 Lord Laming, *The Protection of Children in England: a progress report* HC 330 (March 2009), para 5.9

139 Ev 151

140 Q 269

141 See Annex

accompanied by rigorous inspection by Ofsted of initial teacher training”.<sup>142</sup> Universities UK, however, preferred the current arrangements to what they called “some of the more burdensome mechanisms in other professions.”<sup>143</sup> The Department for Children, Schools and Families said it will await the findings of the Social Work Task Force on quality assurance of degree courses.<sup>144</sup>

69. We accept the General Social Care Council’s analysis of the weaknesses in the current system of quality assurance. While some may consider greater involvement from central bodies to be ‘burdensome’, we believe it is appropriate that courses leading to a professional qualification should be subject to more rigorous examination. **Quality assurance of degree courses should not be delegated to such an extent to universities themselves. A much more active role in quality assurance should be established, whether for the GSCC—with whom it would naturally sit under current arrangements—or for Ofsted, as an extension of its role as the children’s social services inspectorate.** Ofsted performs this function on behalf of the Training and Development Agency for Schools for initial teacher training; however, we acknowledge that the analogy is not exact as the Care Quality Commission inspects adult social care services.

## Content of degree courses

70. Employers in both statutory and voluntary sectors have argued that the degree courses are failing to prepare students adequately for employment.<sup>145</sup> The NSPCC stated that:

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. [...] We have to date been in the fortunate position of being able to do so but this should not be necessary.<sup>146</sup>

Barnardo’s reported that some degree courses are too theoretical, and lack focus on the practical skills needed by social workers.<sup>147</sup> The Children’s Workforce Development Council reported results of a consultation with newly-qualified social workers and employers in 2008, in which one in seven workers said they did not feel the degree had prepared them at all for their roles in employment.<sup>148</sup> Employers also reported that they felt the new social workers were under-prepared for the task of working with children and families in difficult circumstances; one in four thought the course had failed to prepare them for decision-making, and one in five thought this to be the case in relation to analysing information.<sup>149</sup> The Association of Professors of Social Work and the Joint Universities Council Social Work Education Committee (JUC SWEC) disputed the validity of some of CWDC’s conclusions, pointing out that a 2008 Department of Health-funded

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142 Ev 170

143 Ev 25

144 Qq 312–3

145 Ev 86

146 Ev 109

147 Ev 193

148 Ev 45; see also Ev 167.

149 Ev 45



72. Social work degree courses do not follow a prescribed curriculum. Course providers must instead demonstrate to the GSCC that their curriculum meets a set of outcomes and standards derived from three main sources: the Department of Health's requirements for the degree, the National Occupational Standards, and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's Benchmark Statement for Social Work.<sup>163</sup>

73. There is a strong measure of support for greater clarity and consistency in course content.<sup>164</sup> Moira Gibb, Chair of the Social Work Task Force, commented that social work training in England appears to be more variable than in some other countries.<sup>165</sup> Universities may choose to emphasise different parts of the academic course, but these choices are not necessarily made with an eye on the skills and knowledge needed in practice.<sup>166</sup> The GSCC argued 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.<sup>167</sup>

74. Hilary Tompsett, Chair of JUC SWEC, rejected any inference that providers have *carte blanche* in designing their courses—the various sets of requirements are reasonably detailed—but suggested that, as has happened in Scotland, integration and rationalisation of the different sets of requirements with the involvement of employers, training providers and service users would be valuable.<sup>168</sup> Bruce Clark of Cafcass recalled that he had been in favour of more of the statute, regulations and guidance about social work being formally inserted into course curricula when they were drawn up in 2002–03, and he speculated that this might now be rectified by imminent reforms.<sup>169</sup>

75. Nottingham Trent University cautioned, however, that greater prescription in degree content could neutralise the strengths of individual lecturers and students.<sup>170</sup> Universities UK felt that variations reflecting links with local employers and type of placements available contributed to “the necessary diversity in education provision across the country”.<sup>171</sup> Hilary Tompsett was loath to see a core curriculum preclude innovation and

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162 Ev 177 ff.

163 Department of Health, *Requirements for social work training* (June 2002); TOPSS UK Partnership, *The National Occupational Standards for Social Work* (May 2002); Quality Assurance Agency, *Social work subject benchmark statement* (2008).

164 Ev 198

165 Qq 28, 213, 267

166 Qq 136 [Professor Preston-Shoot], 213

167 Ev 50

168 Q 95 [Hilary Tompsett]

169 Q 198 [Bruce Clark]

170 Ev 184

171 Ev 25

creativity in how courses are delivered.<sup>172</sup> Professor Michael Preston-Shoot felt there is already sufficient prescription of content, in relation to values, knowledge and skills, in the QAA benchmark statement (revised in 2008), the National Occupational Standards and the Department of Health requirements:

The focus is as much on content as on outcome [...] 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.<sup>173</sup>

The Department has as yet formed no opinion on whether there should be a common curriculum for social work degrees, anticipating that the Social Work Task Force may express a view.<sup>174</sup>

76. Two criticisms of degree content in particular merit further attention. Barry Luckock, social work course director at Sussex University, wrote that communication with children is neither taught nor assessed effectively in the degree courses.<sup>175</sup> This skill was reported to be often lacking in graduates by Enid Hendry of the NSPCC; “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.”<sup>176</sup> We also heard an example of one course, however, that contains a module solely on communication with children, in different circumstances and in different modes.<sup>177</sup>

77. The second area of specific concern is training in child protection work.<sup>178</sup> Enid Hendry reported worryingly scant coverage of child protection in some degree courses:

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.

78. She confirmed to us that “on a number of occasions”, this day or half day was the only portion of the academic part of the course with a specific focus on child protection.<sup>179</sup>

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172 Q 95 [Hilary Tompsett]

173 Qq 132 ff.

174 Q 311

175 Ev 108, 162

176 Q 264 [Enid Hendry]

177 Q 138

178 Ev 83



81. Lord Laming took a firm view in favour of specialisation in his progress report on child protection in March 2009:

At the heart of the difficulty in preparing social workers through a degree course is that, without an opportunity to specialise in child protection work or even in children's social work, students are covering too much ground without learning the skills and knowledge to support any particular client group well. [...] It is currently possible to qualify as a social worker without any experience of child protection, or even of working within a local authority, and to be holding a full case-load of child protection cases immediately upon appointment. The current degree programme should be reformed to allow for specialism after the first year, with no graduate entering frontline children's social work without having completed a specialised degree including a placement within a frontline statutory children's social work team, or having completed further professional development and children's social work experience to build on generic training.<sup>186</sup>

82. Reaction to this recommendation has been very mixed. In the evidence we received, those speaking on behalf of employers were typically the most supportive of introducing specialisation to the degrees, though only after broader foundations have been laid in either the first one or two thirds of the course.<sup>187</sup> Jane Haywood, Chief Executive of the Children's Workforce Development Council said that "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 underway."<sup>188</sup> The Association of Directors of Children's Services argued that because of the policy context of *Every Child Matters*, the multi-agency approach to service delivery and the complex corpus of legislation and regulation specific to children and families work, there is a strong justification for specialisation in initial training.<sup>189</sup> Janet Galley, an independent consultant with 40 years' experience in social work and inspection, commented that:

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 [...] 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.<sup>190</sup>

83. Surrey County Council told us that, as a result of these increasingly specialised tasks, the idea of generic training "is attractive to the profession but not for employers at the

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186 Lord Laming, *The Protection of Children in England: a progress report* HC 330 (March 2009), para 5.10

187 Ev 44, 105, 108, 193; Q 235 [Enid Hendry]

188 Q 99

189 Ev 85

190 Ev 159

sharp end of child protection service delivery”.<sup>191</sup> Surrey’s Strategic Director for Children, Schools & Families argued that relying on post-qualification training and support to produce fully-competent social workers means too long a lead time for employers needing to fill vacancies.<sup>192</sup>

84. The Social Work Task Force has received Lord Laming’s recommendation cautiously; although it was announced at the height of concerns about the Baby Peter case, the Task Force itself has been formed to consider the social work profession as a whole. Andrew Webb told us that “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.”<sup>193</sup> Moira Gibb spoke of not wanting to “pull up the drawbridge once [children’s and adults’] services had separated”.<sup>194</sup> The Family Rights Group also feared that specialisation would have the consequence of further distancing adult and children’s services.<sup>195</sup> Unison was strongly opposed to specialisation, wanting social work to remain cohesive “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.”<sup>196</sup>

85. Academic opinion seems to be overwhelmingly in favour of retaining the generic course.<sup>197</sup> Hilary Tompsett, Chair of the Joint Universities Council social work committee, argued 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. [...] 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.<sup>198</sup>

She pointed out that Serious Case Reviews frequently highlight the importance of factors such as parental mental health problems and domestic violence in safeguarding work.<sup>199</sup> Social Work Education North East cited research showing that workers “entrenched” in specialisms have difficulty in implementing a ‘whole family’ approach.<sup>200</sup> Professor Lena Dominelli argued that three years is actually “a very short time [...] to learn what I would argue is one of the most difficult professional tasks in the world”, and specialisation would therefore be to the exclusion of much vital material.<sup>201</sup> Professor Stephen Scott drew an

191 Ev 199

192 Ev 199

193 Q 26 [Andrew Webb]; Ev 2

194 Q 27

195 Ev 103

196 Ev 17

197 Ev 25, 27, 32, 184, 189, 198

198 Q 74; see also Ev 83, 193.

199 See also Q 158 [Professor Preston-Shoot and Liz Davies].

200 Ev 198; see also Ev 50.

201 Q 74

analogy with training in psychology, where specialisation in child psychology comes only after a thorough general grounding.<sup>202</sup> Nottingham Trent University characterised the call for a specialist degree as “a knee jerk reaction to current issues” which would not serve children well in the long run.<sup>203</sup>

86. Students embarking on generic social work courses value the opportunity to keep their options open, and often end up specialising in areas they had not previously considered.<sup>204</sup> James Brown, director of employment agency SocialWork 2002, posed the question “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.”<sup>205</sup> Several witnesses pointed out that specialisation can and does already happen within degree courses, as students choose and combine particular academic modules and types of practice placement according to their developing preferences.<sup>206</sup> However, there is no requirement for universities to offer a course structure catering for those who know the specialism they wish to pursue.<sup>207</sup> Dr Eileen Munro suggested that mature entrants, with previous degrees and relevant experience, might benefit from specialised child welfare training as they may have a clearer idea of what they want from their training.<sup>208</sup>

87. While the landscape of children’s services has changed significantly over recent years, it is also argued that social workers make their most effective contributions to multi-agency working when they are confident about their unique duties and skills. Moira Gibb said that social workers will struggle most where they or those around them do not understand their role.<sup>209</sup> Professor Michael Preston-Shoot commented that social work students must be equipped with skills and knowledge particular to social work, but also need to know how to work with other professionals, including when they should be taking the lead in those relationships. Some of this can only be taught effectively by training people from different professions together, as it is a challenge they all share.<sup>210</sup> Whether such ‘multi-professional’ training should be integrated into initial training or post-qualification is an unresolved issue, but we were encouraged to hear from recently-qualified social workers that the multi-agency context of their work had featured strongly from the outset.<sup>211</sup>

**88. We are persuaded of the merits of a generic base for social work training, but we agree that social workers are often insufficiently prepared for specialist work with children. We note that specialisation often occurs in practice in university courses as students select particular modules and placements. We recommend that each course makes these choices formal and explicit, so that students may specialise in children and**

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202 Q 74

203 Ev 184

204 Ev 168, 189, 193, 198

205 Q 272

206 Qq 158 [Professor Preston-Shoot], 162 [Liz Davies]; Ev 171, 180

207 Ev 51

208 Q 156

209 Q 26

210 Qq 26 [Andrew Webb], 148 [Professor Preston-Shoot]

211 Ev 105; See Annex

families work if they wish by choosing a defined package of course elements, and employers are given clarity about what a student specialising in this way would have covered in their degree. In our opinion, however, the principal problem is not that the initial degree is generic; it is that expectations of engagement in further training and development after qualification are too low. It is as if a doctor were to be trained in general medicine, and then allowed to specialise in paediatrics without undertaking additional training. Initial degrees cannot, and should not be expected to, produce social workers capable of assuming full responsibility for complex specialist caseloads. In addition, the generic degrees were introduced only in 2003, and fundamental structural changes at this stage could be unnecessarily disruptive.<sup>212</sup> We will look in more detail at expectations of post-qualifying training in Chapter 5.

### Collaboration between employers and universities

89. Among its immediate next steps, the Task Force lists “working 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 challenge to which the social work education system needs to be able to respond.”<sup>213</sup> There is widespread acknowledgment that employers and higher education institutions are not working together satisfactorily on a consistent basis, although there are examples of good local partnerships.<sup>214</sup> Eleni Ioannides of the Association of Directors of Children’s Services told us, “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”.<sup>215</sup>

90. Bob Reitemeier, Joint Deputy Chair of the Social Work Task Force, articulated the underlying importance of the relationship between employers and social work educators:

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.<sup>216</sup>

The relationship between employers and universities must be built up in a systemic way so that employers are confident in their role in as “learning communities” and trainers of future professionals.<sup>217</sup> Social workers need throughout their careers to have access to new

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212 Ev 180

213 Ev 2

214 Ev 88, 180; Qq 70 [Professor White], 99 [Jane Haywood]

215 Q 198

216 Q 25

217 Qq 2 [Moirra Gibb], 58 [Bridget Robb], 120 [Jane Haywood], 164 [Professor Preston-Shoot], 231 [Bruce Clark]

research, so that they can integrate it into their practice.<sup>218</sup> On the other hand, social work educators need regular engagement with practice to ensure their courses are relevant.<sup>219</sup>

91. Moira Gibb, Chair of the Social Work Task Force, reported that joint appointments between universities and employers had been frequently raised with the Task Force as a way of ensuring that the two sectors work together and share the same perspective. At the moment, there is not even necessarily agreement about what students are being trained to do: “The universities would say that it is important that they are training [students] to be social workers, not simply processors of referrals, which happened in the least effective authorities.”<sup>220</sup> The CWDC suggested that there are two different views of competence in social work: the academic and the employers’.<sup>221</sup> Professor Sue White commented that there could be more opportunities for social work practitioners and managers to contribute to university programmes, and for academics to be seconded to undertake practice-based research; each group needs to be knowledgeable about what happens in the other’s organisations.<sup>222</sup> Bruce Clark of Cafcass summed up the situation thus: “We are in it together and we must climb out together.”<sup>223</sup>

92. Mike Wardle of the General Social Care Council set out a comprehensive view of the ways in which employers could be more closely involved with courses:

We must think of ways to spread the good practice in partnerships [between employers and HEIs] 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.<sup>224</sup>

Keith Brumfitt of the Children’s Workforce Development Council reported that:

When I talk to employers [about placements], 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.<sup>225</sup>

93. It is a matter of great concern to us that there seems to be so little common understanding between employers and training providers about the purpose, content and success of social work education. Universities are unhappy with criticism of degree courses and feel powerless to improve the choice of practice placements their students have, while

218 Q 95 [Professor Scott]

219 Ev 87, 171

220 Q 29

221 Ev 45

222 Q 72; see also Ev 193.

223 Q 231

224 Q 100

225 Q 120



## 4 Practice placements

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95. To achieve either the Bachelor's or Master's degree, students must undertake 200 days of assessed practice. This must include placements in at least two contrasting practice settings with two different client groups, and experience of statutory social work tasks involving legal interventions in at least one of their placements. Just under half (48.4%) of placements in 2006–07 were in local authorities; 24.4% in a voluntary agency; 5% in a private agency; 3.7% in health settings and 2.8% in education settings.<sup>226</sup> On the definition used by the GSCC, however, 58% of placements were classified as 'statutory' because they gave students some experience of statutory tasks.<sup>227</sup> In terms of the social work focus, by some way the largest category of practice placements is children and families work, accounting for more than a quarter of all placements in 2005–06 and 2006–07.<sup>228</sup>

### Supply of practice placements

96. The current requirement for 200 placement days is an increase from 130 days under the previous Diploma in Social Work qualification. Combined with the 37% increase in students that has taken place since the degrees were introduced, this has placed considerable strain on the supply of good quality placements, particularly in the statutory sector.<sup>229</sup> Bridget Robb recalled that

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.<sup>230</sup>

97. We heard about the difficulties posed by under-supply of placements from the recently-qualified social workers we spoke to. Several had been offered placements that were not only outside the statutory social work arena, they were not even supervised by qualified social workers. These included placements in schools and GP surgeries. In these circumstances, some students were so concerned about the learning they would get from such a placement that undertook to arrange their own. One social worker characterised the situation as "a total lottery".<sup>231</sup> John Barraclough of London Metropolitan University commented that universities continually have to "persuade, cajole and occasionally beg agencies to provide student placements." This makes it impossible to plan placements well, and every year a proportion of students cannot be placed at the right time.<sup>232</sup> Less than a quarter of respondents to a survey of heads of university social work departments thought

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226 Ev 52

227 GSCC, *Raising standards* (February 2009), para 65

228 GSCC, *Raising standards* (February 2009), p 14

229 Q 125 [Mike Wardle]; Ev 28

230 Q 46

231 See Annex

232 Ev 152–3; see also Ev 198.

that the supply of statutory sector placements is adequate.<sup>233</sup> The survey results also show that only 37% of universities were able to report that all of their students had at least one placement in a local authority in which they were taught and assessed by a qualified social worker.<sup>234</sup> Sue Berelowitz told us that because of the lack of placements, “people are desperate and take whatever they get”.<sup>235</sup>

98. There is a sharp contrast with how training placements are organised in some other professions. In social work, Cafcass argued, supply of placements “is overly dependent on the initiative and commitment of individual employers who may struggle to prioritise and fund this area with other competing demands”, whereas in medicine and teaching, training new entrants and being involved in assessing them “is a more central part of the culture and structure”.<sup>236</sup> Andrew Webb commented: “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.”<sup>237</sup>

99. The consensus view is that local authorities do not offer more practice placements because it is difficult to accommodate students in workplaces already under pressure from vacancies and high workloads.<sup>238</sup> Heather Wakefield of Unison told us:

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.<sup>239</sup>

These pressures, said Bridget Robb, bring about a widespread perception that taking on students is “a burden, rather than part of the solution”.<sup>240</sup>

100. Part of the role of the Children’s Workforce Development Council, in partnership with Skills for Care (the adult social care sector skills council), is supporting employers to provide practice placements.<sup>241</sup> Rather than subjecting employers to a requirement to make placements available, Jane Haywood, CWDC’s Chief Executive, reasoned that quality placements were more likely to be generated by “people who want to do it and see that it is

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233 Ev 206

234 Ev 207

235 Q 274

236 Ev 84

237 Q 36

238 Qq 37, 125 [Keith Brumfitt], 207, 314

239 Q 45

240 Q 47

241 Ev 46

important, not from people who are forced to do it.”<sup>242</sup> The General Social Care Council argued that a formal requirement for partnerships between higher education institutions and employers would help;<sup>243</sup> in some parts of the country partnerships have already made important contributions to improving supply.<sup>244</sup> Incentives to employers was the favoured approach of Universities UK.<sup>245</sup>

101. A performance indicator for social work practice learning was introduced for local authorities in 2003 but discontinued in April 2008; in the higher education sector there is a widespread feeling that its discontinuation has contributed to serious difficulties in some areas in securing enough quality placements.<sup>246</sup> Although the GSCC stated that there is “anecdotal” evidence that the availability of statutory placements has reduced, they reported having no evidence to attribute this to the withdrawal of the performance indicator.<sup>247</sup>

102. Funding for practice placements was raised as a factor in placement supply by employers, who reported that the placement fee does not meet the substantial cost of providing supervision, training, and support for the student.<sup>248</sup> Practice learning funding is paid by the General Social Care Council to universities, who then pass it on to employers hosting placements. The rates since April 2005 have been £18 per day in the statutory sector and £28 per day in the voluntary sector.<sup>249</sup> Universities are obliged to pass on the fully daily rate unless there has been an agreement that the university will supply some of the assessment or supervision needed to support the placement. Although we heard an argument that universities are more reliable custodians of practice placement funding than employers,<sup>250</sup> Bruce Clark of Cafcass told us that institutions do not in fact always pass on the full sum to employers; he reported that some have offered Cafcass as little as £4 a day.<sup>251</sup> Although Cafcass make a loss on the placements they provide, they are willing to absorb this because of the “non-financial benefits” of hosting placements. For local authorities, these ought to include supporting local higher education institutions, to which they can send staff to gain qualifications, and from which they can expect to recruit social workers in the future.<sup>252</sup> Bridget Robb suggested that employers ought to correlate the number of placements they offer with the number of posts for new social workers they expect to need to fill two years hence.<sup>253</sup>

**103. Training future and current members of the profession must be seen as a core part of the social work task and a fundamental responsibility of employers. This should be**

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242 Q 120

243 Ev 53

244 Ev 190

245 Ev 26; see also Q 274 [Cathy Ashley]

246 Ev 33, 198

247 Ev 52

248 Ev 84, 87; Q 188 [Eleni Ioannides]

249 General Social Care Council

250 Qq 88, 92

251 Q 190

252 Q 186 [Bruce Clark]

253 Q 58

reflected in performance frameworks; specifically, Ofsted should take into account how effectively a local authority provides for and delivers placements for social work students and further development of its workforce when assessing children's services.

104. Workforce planning should provide a centrally-driven mechanism for judging the numbers of students for which a local authority should be providing placements. Employers should commit to providing placements as part of a comprehensive partnership with higher education institutions, and this must happen in advance of student intakes. It is unacceptable that students have to accept below-par arrangements at the last minute when universities are unable to persuade local authority employers to provide placements.

105. Arrangements for funding placements should be reviewed to ensure that the amount received reflects the true cost and the division of responsibilities. Funding should be allocated to formal partnerships of universities and employers, rather than passed on from one to the other.

106. The Department of Health and Department for Children, Schools & Families jointly established a Social Work Development Partnership in 2008. The Departments told us that the Partnership "is responsible for the development of appropriate, high quality 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."<sup>254</sup> The Partnership was mentioned only once in our evidence,<sup>255</sup> outside the Government's own evidence, which leads us to doubt that it has yet impinged much on the consciousness of employers or universities. We note that an initiative with similar aims, the Practice Learning Taskforce, was funded by the Department of Health to run from January 2003 to March 2006.<sup>256</sup>

107. In the light of our findings about the remits of the various social work sector bodies, we question the wisdom of setting up another body, the Social Work Development Partnership, to oversee the development of practice placement quality and supply. We expect that the 'Social Work Development Agency' which we have proposed would be charged with overseeing the necessary changes.

## Type of practice placements

108. Placements make up half of students' time on qualifying courses, so the type of placements a student undertakes is a very important influence on the overall skills and knowledge they acquire through initial training.<sup>257</sup> Lord Laming highlighted the fact that, because of a lack of the right sort of placements, it is possible to start work as a new children's social worker without any practical experience of child protection.<sup>258</sup> Aware of

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254 Ev 127–8

255 Q 46

256 [www.practicelarning.org.uk](http://www.practicelarning.org.uk)

257 Ev 50, 194

258 Lord Laming, *The Protection of Children in England: a progress report* HC 330 (March 2009), para 5.10

this, employers are choosy about the placements a candidate has done when recruiting permanent staff. Eleni Ioannides, Director of Children’s Services at Bury Council, told us that “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.”<sup>259</sup> There have been suggestions that some employers elect to carry vacancies rather than filling them with new social workers whose experience of statutory work is lacking.<sup>260</sup> Bruce Clark commented that

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 [...] 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.<sup>261</sup>

109. Both Unison and the British Association of Social Workers proposed tighter restrictions on the type of placements that make a student eligible for qualification.<sup>262</sup> There has also been some criticism of the GSCC requirement for a student’s two placements to be ‘contrasting’. Liz Davies, Senior Lecturer at London Metropolitan University, told us that “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.” She stated that in her opinion, the social worker in charge of Baby Peter’s case had been “set up to fail” because both her placements had been in adult services, and she had no post-qualifying training in child protection.<sup>263</sup>

110. The selection of new social workers according to the placements they have undertaken should not happen by default at the point of recruitment by local authorities: it should be an integral part of the requirements for passing the degree course. Although a case could be made for decoupling graduation from attaining the professional qualification, we consider that it would be more straightforward for existing requirements simply to be more strictly defined and more rigorously applied. **It is not sufficient to stipulate that students should get “experience of statutory social work tasks involving legal interventions”. It should not be possible for a student to achieve a Bachelor’s or Master’s degree in social work without having undertaken at least one of their placements in a statutory social work agency, and without being supervised and assessed by a qualified social worker in both of their placements. Information should be readily available to prospective students about any courses which have a poor track record in securing the requisite placements.**

111. **In the interim, consideration should be given to reducing the length of individual placements, if this would help to ensure that every student has a placement in a statutory service. We consider that quality of placements is more important than the number of placement days.**

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259 Q 193; see also Q 195 [Bruce Clark].

260 ‘Students are undertaking practice learning without social worker supervision’, *Community Care*, 10 December 2008

261 Q 195

262 Ev 12, 17; see also Qq 99 [Jane Haywood], 274 [Sue Berelowitz].

263 Q 136

## Quality of practice placements

112. Responsibility for ensuring 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 lies with universities—there is no direct quality assessment by the GSCC.<sup>264</sup> The GSCC and CWDC both expressed scepticism about higher education institutions' self-reporting that only 82 of the 11,500 placements provided in 2007–08 failed to meet their own quality standards.<sup>265</sup> Rosie Varley, Chair of the GSCC, noted that the formula for placement funding at present takes account only of numbers of students, not the quality of the placements provided.<sup>266</sup> CWDC argued that universities should be held accountable for “the quality and relevance of their arrangements” for practice placements.<sup>267</sup> In partnership with CWDC and Skills for Care, the GSCC are piloting a new ‘tool’ for assessing the quality of placements, with the intention of making it a compulsory part of the quality assurance regime.<sup>268</sup>

113. The majority (86%) of heads of university social work departments responding to a survey considered that the quality of placements provided by statutory sector employers was either ‘good’ or ‘excellent’.<sup>269</sup> Evaluation of the social work degree carried out for the Department of Health found that 78% of students rated their placements as good or better. However, it was also found that not all agencies could offer a useful range of work experience, that the quality of assessment was variable, and that some students received inadequate support and supervision during their placement.<sup>270</sup> The NSPCC claimed that efforts to raise and guarantee the quality of practice placements have been abandoned because of the difficulty of getting enough placements.<sup>271</sup> There is concern that in some settings, students on placements are overloaded with inappropriately advanced work to absorb some of the pressure in teams with vacancies.<sup>272</sup> Professor June Thoburn argued that “there is urgent need for the placement experience of each student to be more tightly monitored”.<sup>273</sup>

**114. Quality assurance of placements should not be delegated to universities alone. The quality of practice placements must be taken into account explicitly in overall inspections of both university courses and local authority children’s services.**

## Practice teaching

115. Research commissioned by CWDC and Skills for Care has found significant differences between councils in the roles, qualifications and experience of practitioners

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264 Ev 52

265 Ev 46

266 Q 120

267 Ev 44

268 Q 125 [Mike Wardle]

269 See Annex

270 Department of Health, *Evaluation of the new social work degree qualification in England* (July 2008)

271 Ev 109

272 Ev 104, 184

273 Ev 181

who were supporting students on placements.<sup>274</sup> Some local authorities employ dedicated ‘Practice Learning Co-ordinators’, but others have no-one within the organisation to oversee placements, and some co-ordinators are located in general human resources teams where there may be less knowledge of training requirements specific to social work.<sup>275</sup> The Association of Directors of Children’s Services argued that central Government funding for ‘placement managers’ in every local authority would protect the function from local budget cuts.<sup>276</sup>

116. Department of Health requirements state that each student must “be assessed as competent and safe to practise by a qualified and experienced social worker” but do not stipulate that placements must be directly supervised by someone with those attributes.<sup>277</sup> Some practice learning takes place in settings which do not employ qualified social workers, so that a student’s work is supervised by members of another profession.<sup>278</sup> Even when the supervisor is a social worker, they may not always be on site with the student.<sup>279</sup>

117. The fact that those with responsibility for students on placement typically receive little in the way of status or remuneration to compensate for the extra time and responsibility was cited by several organisations as a factor restricting placement supply.<sup>280</sup> Professor John Carpenter noted that among the many things that doctors would find surprising about social work education are the fact that senior members of the profession are not expected or required to teach new entrants, and “the lack of recognition accorded to those social work practitioners who do teach [...] Many of those who do take a student on placement do so only two or three times and so do not build experience.”<sup>281</sup> Eleni Ioannides explained that her authority pays an honorarium to practice teachers, but “it is not seen as part of their career progression”.<sup>282</sup> An independent practice teacher described how long journeys, low pay and long waits for payment lead to those experienced in this field withdrawing their services.<sup>283</sup>

**118. An expectation that teams and individuals contribute to the training of future generations of social workers should be supported by reforms to pay scales and structured career progression. Practice teaching must be built into job descriptions so that social workers are not expected to undertake practice teaching on top of their normal workload but as an integral part of it, with commensurate reductions in the caseload they are expected to carry. In theory these changes could be achieved by local authorities on their own initiative, but the evidence we have received shows that this is not happening to any great extent. We recommend therefore that the Government consider ways of developing these features of the workforce on a national basis. Later in**

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274 CWDC and Skills for Care, *Sustaining Practice Learning* (April 2009)

275 Ev 29

276 Ev 87

277 Ev 52

278 Ev 171; Qq 71, 136 [Liz Davies]

279 Qq 136 [Liz Davies], 274 [Sue Berelowitz]

280 Ev 194; Q 188 [Bruce Clark, Eleni Ioannides]

281 Ev 171

282 Q 188

283 Ev 168–9

the report, we will consider how this could partly be achieved by developing a national framework for pay and career progression.

119. Because the social work qualifying degrees were only introduced in 2003, the majority of the current workforce—and therefore, the majority of potential practice teachers—qualified through a two-year Diploma in Social Work. The Deputy Children’s Commissioner, Sue Berelowitz, argued that “low thresholds” to qualification through the Diploma mean that current practice teachers have not been subject to the same academic rigour in their training as the students they are now supervising.<sup>284</sup>

120. A Practice Teaching Award was introduced with the Diploma in 1992 to prepare qualified social workers for the task of supervising student placements. This award was superseded in 2005 by the introduction of the GSCC’s new Post-Qualifying Framework, under which a five-day module on ‘Enabling Learning’ is included in every ‘specialist’ Post-Qualifying Award (the first of three levels). Views on the reasons for and impact of this change vary. Dramatically increased demand for placements may have made it unrealistic in the short term to expect all practice teachers to hold a relevant qualification.<sup>285</sup> Moira Gibb commented that the old Practice Teaching Award required a considerable commitment from hard-pressed social workers.<sup>286</sup> Mike Wardle of the General Social Care Council explained that the GSCC’s reasoning for withdrawing the Award 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. [...] 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.<sup>287</sup>

121. John Barraclough commented that “in the eyes of many, [the withdrawal of the Practice Teaching Award] constituted a downgrading of practice teaching.”<sup>288</sup> Eleni Ioannides spoke in favour of a stand-alone practice teaching qualification; Bruce Clark suggested that it would be helpful if a single set of standards for practice teachers, and a single route to becoming a practice teacher, were adopted.<sup>289</sup> Professor June Thoburn argued: “no student should qualify who has not, for the majority of their time on

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284 Q 280; Ev 104

285 Qq 73 [Hilary Tompsett], 275 [Enid Hendry]

286 Q 38

287 Q 126

288 Ev 153, 168

289 Qq 208 [Eleni Ioannides], 231; see also Q 274 [Sue Berelowitz].

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”.<sup>290</sup>

**122. Requirements for placements should be amended to stipulate that all placements be supervised by qualified and experienced social workers who either hold or are working towards specific qualifications in practice teaching. Withdrawal of the dedicated Practice Teaching Award has given a damaging impression of the status of practice teaching in social work, and consideration should be given to reinstating it. Training enough of the current workforce to the right level will require ‘pump-priming’ with dedicated funding.** This could be done while retaining the new ‘Enabling Learning’ modules in specialist-level Post-Qualifying awards.

## 5 Post-qualifying training and careers

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123. Much of the debate about whether social work degrees constitute adequate preparation for employment centres on the period immediately after qualification, when the need of employers to staff their teams and allocate large caseloads is potentially at odds with the need to recognise the limitations of inexperienced, new social workers.<sup>291</sup> Several witnesses pointed out that the expectations employers typically place on new social workers are unrealistic, and significantly out of step with other professions which manage entry to the workforce in a more controlled fashion.<sup>292</sup> Professor John Carpenter pointed out that doctors in particular would be surprised to observe “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.”<sup>293</sup> 58% of children’s social workers surveyed by Unison in December 2008 said that newly-qualified or unqualified staff are now more likely, compared with 2003, to be doing child protection work for which they are insufficiently experienced.<sup>294</sup> The tendency of more experienced staff to choose to move away from frontline practice as their careers progress leaves newly-qualified staff even more exposed to complex, high-risk work.<sup>295</sup>

124. Universities are acutely aware that graduates from their qualifying courses cannot be considered the finished article. Bournemouth University wrote that the degree “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.”<sup>296</sup> Professor June Thoburn suggested that five to six years after embarking on initial training is a reasonable timescale for expecting a social worker to assume full accountability for complex cases involving the possibility of significant harm to children.<sup>297</sup> New College Durham reasoned that “we do not and cannot train students to fulfil the particular requirements of whichever job they take after qualification [...] the variety of opportunities available to them [...] makes it unrealistic to even suggest that the social work degree should prepare them for individual roles”.<sup>298</sup> Liz Davies of London Metropolitan University told the Committee that social workers whose training has not prepared them for the specific jobs they go into are “set up to fail”.<sup>299</sup> Referring to high-profile cases such as that of Victoria Climbié and Baby Peter, she reported: “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.”<sup>300</sup> James

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291 Ev 17

292 Qq 28, 33 [Bob Reitemeier], 235 [Enid Hendry]; Ev 184, 192

293 Ev 171

294 Unison, *Still slipping through the net?* (2009)

295 Ev 89

296 Ev 149

297 Ev 179

298 Ev 189; see also Q 28.

299 Q 136

300 Q 183

Brown, Managing Director of SocialWork 2000, related in stark terms what he saw as the consequences for many new to the profession: “In the first year after qualification, you have to be protected and supported. If not, you may come out damaged on the other side.”<sup>301</sup>

125. To prevent this, some form of protection for social workers in their initial year of practice is mooted, usually in the form of limiting the number or complexity of cases that new social workers should be allocated.<sup>302</sup> Bruce Clark of Cafcass told us, “There has been talk about protection in the first year or two after qualification for as long as I have been in the business, and longer.”<sup>303</sup> Enid Hendry called for “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.”<sup>304</sup> However, there are risks too in seeking to shelter social workers too much; some of the recently-qualified workers we met told us that they knew they had to learn to exercise the responsibility that is at the heart of the social work task, and questioned the value of ‘shadowing’ others, even on student placements.<sup>305</sup> There should always be room for discretion with capable candidates. Heather Wakefield of Unison told us that new social workers “don’t necessarily need not to have complex cases, but they need fewer of them and much better supervision.”<sup>306</sup>

### The Newly-Qualified Social Worker Programme

126. This problem is now being addressed by the introduction of the Newly-Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) programme. The programme was devised and introduced by the Children’s Workforce Development Council to “provide a bridge from initial training to confident and competent practice that is based on a firm foundation of skills and knowledge”.<sup>307</sup> The pilot programme was launched in September 2008 to support a first cohort of around 1,000 new social workers. Ten per cent of participants’ time is protected for training and development purposes, regular supervision is mandatory, and the new social workers work towards ‘outcome statements’ which set out expectations of the level of practice that social workers should be operating at by the end of their first year.<sup>308</sup> In its response to Lord Laming’s safeguarding report, the Government announced that the Newly Qualified Social Worker programme would be expanded, making it available to all new children and families’ social workers in statutory services and the voluntary sector from September 2009. CWDC stated 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.”<sup>309</sup>

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301 Q 250

302 Ev 88

303 Q 223

304 Q 249

305 See Annex

306 Q 50

307 Ev 129

308 Ev 129

309 Ev 46

127. The Newly-Qualified Social Worker programme has largely been welcomed as a practical step in the direction of easing social workers' entry into the workplace, ensuring both that they get enough support, and that employers are fully aware of the legitimate needs of those coming straight from degree courses.<sup>310</sup> There are, however, some significant caveats. Local authorities worry that restricting caseloads and setting aside extra supervision time will increase the pressure on the rest of their social workers.<sup>311</sup> The success of the programme, according to Enid Hendry of the NSPCC, will depend on excellent supervision, effective workload management and sufficient time for reflective practice—all of these things being difficult to achieve in local authority teams working under pressure.<sup>312</sup> Having trained some of the supervisors involved in the pilot programme, Enid Hendry reported 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.”<sup>313</sup> Moreover, it is also difficult to see at the moment how the programme could be applied to agency workers, who may be moving around to several different employers during their first year.<sup>314</sup>

128. The Deputy Children's Commissioner, Sue Berelowitz, listed what she saw as the prerequisites for an NQSW year, including identification of learning needs and action taken to address them, and making completion of the year contingent on observation of effective practice.<sup>315</sup> The NSPCC argued that progression through such a programme must be dependent on demonstrating practical competencies at an appropriate level.<sup>316</sup> Keith Brumfitt, CWDC's Director of Strategy, explained the Council's approach to defining expectations from the NQSW programme, which it intends to follow also in the case of future 'early professional development' programmes:

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.<sup>317</sup>

129. We received mixed feedback about the utility of the NQSW programme as a development tool from some of the recently-qualified social workers that we met. There were complaints that the requirements to demonstrate competences duplicate work

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310 Q 223 [Bruce Clark]; Ev 15, 108, 189

311 Ev 15, 89, 142

312 Q 249

313 Q 249

314 Q 249

315 Ev 105

316 Ev 108

317 Q 128

undertaken as part of degree courses and are not always relevant or progressive. There was a strong feeling that more emphasis on reflective supervision and opportunities to discuss cases rather than ‘ticking boxes’ would make a greater contribution to participants’ development.

**130. The Newly-Qualified Social Worker year is a significant step in the right direction of recognising that graduation is only the first of many stages of career development that social workers should be guided through. We welcome its extension to the whole of the statutory and voluntary sectors. However, we recommend that the Newly-Qualified Social Worker year develop more of the character of a compulsory internship. The programme should be reviewed to ensure that it delivers genuine development for participants, building on their previous work at university and on placements. Universities should be involved in a student’s education throughout the year, including in assessments. Opportunities to gain experience in more than one service area would help those students who found their placement choice too limited, and would produce more rounded professionals. Registration as a social worker should be provisional until the NQSW year is satisfactorily completed.**

**131. Many local authorities operating under the pressure of high referrals and caseloads will find it difficult to accommodate Newly-Qualified Social Workers on this basis. We recommend that the Government consider some means of subsidising the employment of an NQSW in recognition of the year acting as an extension of training, such as by extending the bursary scheme for social work students.**

### **Post-Registration Training and Learning (PRTL)**

132. The GSCC’s Code of Practice for Social Care Workers, to which all social workers must sign up, states that they must take responsibility for maintaining and improving their knowledge and skills.<sup>318</sup> Keeping training and learning up-to-date is a condition of re-registration with the GSCC every three years. Registration rules specify that every social worker shall, within the three-year period, 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”. The GSCC has deliberately avoided being prescriptive about content; “Instead, we have placed the onus on registrants and their employers to identify relevant and beneficial training and learning.”<sup>319</sup>

133. Although formal training and Post-Qualifying Awards (discussed below) can count towards these re-registration requirements, a wide range of other activities can be included. Even something as informal as reading trade magazines or having discussions at team meetings can count towards the requirement; Eleni Ioannides commented that “it is not very clear or systematic”.<sup>320</sup> Bridget Robb of BASW told us that local authorities may provide a wide range of in-house one-day or half-day courses, but there is no requirement

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318 GSCC, *Code of Practice for Social Care Workers* (2002), para 6

319 Ev 54

320 Q 208

for external accreditation and the individual courses “don’t build up to anything”.<sup>321</sup> She called for “some national prescription and some national resources to go with it.”<sup>322</sup> Cathy Ashley, Chief Executive of the Family Rights Group, suggested that, following the example of the legal profession, all courses counting towards re-registration should be externally accredited.<sup>323</sup> The Institute of Education contrasted social work with the teaching profession, where Ofsted inspect Training and Development Agency-funded postgraduate professional development programmes.<sup>324</sup> The links between Post-Registration Training and Learning, the Post-Qualifying Framework and the Newly-Qualified Social Worker outcomes have not been closely defined.<sup>325</sup>

**134. Requirements for post-registration training and learning must be made more stringent, and explicit links made with the formal post-qualifying training expected of professionals at different stages of their career and in different practice specialisms. Courses counting towards the 90 hours needed for re-registration should be approved and accredited by a body with the functions of a ‘Social Work Development Partnership’. These courses must be brought clearly within an overall framework of professional development.**

### The Post-Qualifying Framework

135. In September 2007 the GSCC launched a new Post-Qualifying (PQ) Framework which offers Awards at three levels: Specialist Social Work, Higher Specialist Social Work and Advanced Social Work. There are five specialisms in the post-qualifying framework: mental health; adult social care; practice education; leadership and management; and children and young people, their families and carers. Approval has been granted for 242 Post-Qualifying courses at 53 universities under the new Framework. By far the most popular provision of courses is in the children and young people specialism, representing nearly 37% of the total courses available and 48% of currently enrolled practitioners; the total number of practitioners enrolled in May 2009 was 4,747.<sup>326</sup> Participation in these courses is not mandatory, but the GSCC are currently considering whether achieving a specialist-level Post-Qualifying Award in the first years of practice should be made a condition of registration.<sup>327</sup>

136. Lord Laming expressed concerns about incoherence in national provision of continuing professional development, the absence of clear links to career progression and the “reticence” of employers to release staff for further training—issues explored in greater detail below.<sup>328</sup> Lord Laming recommended that:

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321 Q 65

322 Q 211

323 Q 253

324 Ev 170

325 Ev 30

326 Ev 54

327 Ev 54

328 Lord Laming, *The Protection of Children in England: a progress report* HC 330 (March 2009), para 5.14

As a first step, a post-graduate qualification in safeguarding children is needed that is practice-based, focusing on the key skills required for effective working with children and families and protecting children from harm. All children’s social workers should be expected to complete this postgraduate qualification as soon as is practicable. It will need to be funded centrally and with protected study time made available.<sup>329</sup>

137. The Children’s Workforce Development Council told us that “responsibility for funding, quality assurance and inspection of current Post-Qualifying training arrangements is so widely spread as to compromise its effectiveness [...] a lack of a national framework or set of expectations has led to fragmentation and variable results”.<sup>330</sup> The Association of Professors of Social Work (APSW) put forward the view that the current Post-Qualifying Framework is in urgent need of simplification and rationalisation. APSW reported that the system does not have international recognition, is not easily understood by practitioners or training providers, and does not incorporate research training.<sup>331</sup> The Association was also critical of the coherence of what is on offer in different parts of the country, with gaps in some areas and over-provision in others.<sup>332</sup> The Social Work Task Force commented that the PQ Framework does not effectively support professional development or specialisation.<sup>333</sup>

138. Enid Hendry described how the NSPCC viewed the courses that are available under the framework 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.<sup>334</sup>

New College Durham reported that employers have not always clearly articulated what they want from PQ programmes.<sup>335</sup> The GSCC, however, report some favourable feedback from employers about the positive effect Post-Qualification Awards have had on the quality of practice.<sup>336</sup>

**139. The current offer of post-qualifying training appears to us to be unhelpfully diffuse. Training at this level should become the principal vehicle for specialisation in**

329 Lord Laming, *The Protection of Children in England: a progress report* HC 330 (March 2009), para 5.15

330 Ev 47; see also Ev 198.

331 Ev 33

332 Ev 33

333 Ev 1

334 Q 251

335 Ev 191

336 Q 129 [Mike Wardle]



142. Incentives for individuals to undertake Post-Qualifying Awards are further weakened by the absence of any formal link to career or salary progression.<sup>342</sup> New College Durham commented that while “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.”<sup>343</sup>

143. The Association of Directors of Children’s Services acknowledged that an authority’s capacity to provide continuing professional development can be severely restricted where vacancy rates and use of agency staff are high.<sup>344</sup> Staffordshire County Council suggested that ring-fencing funding for training budgets would assure the quality, suitability and take-up of post-qualifying training.<sup>345</sup> It is important that, when a member of staff is away on training, sufficient funding is available for employers to “turn it into another body to do the work”.<sup>346</sup>

144. Particular concerns attach to the accessibility of post-qualifying training for social workers employed by private agencies. James Brown, Managing Director of the agency SocialWork 2000, told us that the amount agencies themselves are able to invest in continuing professional development has reduced as the margin on the fees they command from employers has reduced.<sup>347</sup> However, he also emphasised that agencies do run their own training programmes, and locums placed for a substantial period of time with a particular local authority often have access to their in-house training.<sup>348</sup>

145. In 2007–08 the Department of Health made a total workforce development grant of £157m to local authorities. A survey in 2008 (to which 37% of relevant local authorities responded) showed that in the children’s sector only 18% of authorities had in fact spent all of these allocations on workforce development in social care.<sup>349</sup> For the three years from 2008–09, this funding has been subsumed into the Local Area-Based Grant, a non-ringfenced grant which gives local authorities flexibility to determine local priorities for spending.<sup>350</sup> The General Social Care Council supports the idea of protecting this funding by ring-fencing local authorities’ training allocations.<sup>351</sup>

**146. Funding for participation in post-qualifying training should be guaranteed centrally for social workers employed in all sectors, rather than being dependent on the differing and changing budget priorities of employers. This funding must be at a level that enables an employer to compensate meaningfully for a social worker’s absence for study.**

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342 Q 63

343 Ev 191

344 Ev 90

345 Ev 148

346 Q 208 [Bruce Clark]; Ev 191

347 Ev 124

348 Qq 246–7, 255–6; Ev 123–4

349 Learn to Care, *Local government social care workforce development expenditure: a survey of trends and funding 2008* (December 2008), p 20

350 Ibid. p 14

351 Ev 54. Lack of ring-fenced funding was a factor in the difficulties of previous post-qualification training: S. Vitali, *Lessons from the frontline: evaluating the Post Qualification Child Care Award* (2005).

147. Professor Michael Preston-Shoot recalled that

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.<sup>352</sup>

Rosie Varley stated that “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”, but that, in comparison with other professions which have national agreements locally applied, “it is much more difficult to gain that national understanding [...] because we have such a plethora of employers.”<sup>353</sup> Social Work Education North East lamented an apparent lack of planning about who should be expected to receive Post-Qualifying training and what careers paths it should facilitate.<sup>354</sup> Enid Hendry argued that social workers should only be able to move on to particular areas of work when they have demonstrated that they are ready for it and have the requisite competencies.<sup>355</sup> The GSCC have put forward the view that no social worker should be allowed to undertake complex child protection cases until they have obtained a Post-Qualifying Award in children and families social work.<sup>356</sup>

148. In 2008 the Children’s Workforce Development Council was asked to introduce a “career framework” for children and families social workers, of which the Newly Qualified Social Worker programme is the first part. Further stages of the framework are due to be launched late in 2009: Early Professional Development for those in their second and third years of practice, and Advanced Social Work Professional Status to enable experienced workers to stay in frontline practice.<sup>357</sup>

**149. Obtaining a degree in social work must be only the starting point of career-long learning and development. This expectation should be supported by a more formalised structure of career progression linked to training, which would provide clarity for social workers and their employers on the skills that are acquired at each stage and the responsibilities that can then be assumed. We particularly ask for clarity about how the Children’s Workforce Development Council’s career framework and the Government’s intention to develop ‘practice-focused’ Master’s degrees will contribute to this and link to the Post-Qualifying Framework.**

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352 Q 140

353 Qq 103–4

354 Ev 198

355 Q 235

356 Ev 54

357 Ev 126

150. A potentially important tool for effecting and controlling change within the profession is registration. Mike Wardle of the General Social Care Council, which is the registering body, told us:

There is a serious debate [...] 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.<sup>358</sup>

151. The Association of Directors of Children's Services put forward the idea of a 'licence to practise' which would be issued after completion of a mandatory post-qualifying period of work-based training.<sup>359</sup> A similar proposal was made for teachers in the Government's white paper *Your child, your schools, our future*, published in June 2009.<sup>360</sup> Rosie Varley of the GSCC suggested that the register could evolve in such a way that social workers are registered to practise within particular specialist areas, having demonstrated that they have the competence and experience to do so.<sup>361</sup>

**152. Registration as a social worker with the General Social Care Council should be specific to different social work specialisms. No new social worker should be registered to practice a specialism in which they have not previously undertaken a period of supervised and assessed training, whether that is in a student placement or as part of a Newly-Qualified Social Worker year. Re-registration should be dependent on participation in further training within that specialism.**

## Pay and career structures

153. The 2008 Local Government Workforce Survey showed that children's social work was the occupation in which recruitment difficulties were most frequently identified. 64% of local authorities reported recruitment problems with children's social workers, compared to 36% for adults' social workers and 26% for teachers. 39% of authorities reported retention difficulties with children's social workers; this figure is a significant reduction from the 2006 mark of 49%, but compares to 24% for adults' social workers and 12% for teachers.<sup>362</sup> A 2006 survey showed that, of those local authorities experiencing recruitment and retention problems in children's social work, 44% felt that pay was a significant factor.<sup>363</sup> Bob Reitemeier, Joint Deputy Chair of the Social Work Task Force, argued that the responsibility social workers carry in their roles—deciding whether to instigate removal of a child from their family, or managing a child's care on behalf of the

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358 Q 129

359 Ev 86

360 Department for Children, Schools and Families, *Your child, your schools, our future: building a 21<sup>st</sup> century schools system*, Cm 7588 (June 2009), para 35

361 Q 96

362 Local Government Association, *Local Government Workforce Survey 2008—England* (December 2008)

363 Local Authority Workforce Intelligence Group, *Children's, young people's and families' social care workforce survey 2006* (October 2007)



as often the only way of moving up the salary scale while remaining with the same employer is to move into management roles.<sup>370</sup> This removes the most experienced workers from those positions where they can have most day-to-day influence on children and families, and exposes teams increasingly made up of newer social workers to greater pressure.<sup>371</sup>

156. Sue Berelowitz underlined the importance of giving social workers good reasons to stay in the profession, from the point of view of children and young people:

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. [...] 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.<sup>372</sup>

157. Other professions have developed mechanisms to take advantage of the practice skills of their most experienced exponents while rewarding them in career structures, such as advanced skills teachers and specialist nurse practitioners; Rosie Varley also pointed out that “a consultant medical practitioner will be the most highly qualified person and will remain treating patients and supervising colleagues.”<sup>373</sup> Some local authorities have already introduced social work models incorporating ‘consultants’ or ‘senior practitioners’, whose roles include mentoring less experienced colleagues through complex cases, while also taking on some of the most difficult work personally.<sup>374</sup>

158. The CWDC is working with 45 local authorities to pilot the role of ‘advanced social work professional’; post-holders would support student social workers as well as less experienced team members.<sup>375</sup> Jane Haywood argued that there needs to be additional remuneration for those achieving the status of advanced social work professional, “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?”<sup>376</sup>

159. One of the features of other professions which could perhaps most usefully be introduced to social work is the idea of a defined pay structure that rewards experience and further training, or the assumption of extra responsibilities.<sup>377</sup> Teaching and learning responsibility payments (TLRs) are paid to teachers who have significant additional responsibilities within the school. The payments are worth between £2,500 and £11,000

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370 Qq 10, 119 [Rosie Varley], 308

371 Lord Laming, *The Protection of Children in England: a progress report* HC 330 (March 2009), para 5.2; Ev 194

372 Q 233

373 Q 119; see also Ev 194.

374 Qq 11 [Andrew Webb], 119 [Mike Wardle]

375 Q 127; Ev 126

376 Q 119

377 Ev 26, 201; Qq 188 [Eleni Ioannides], 259

depending on the nature of the work.<sup>378</sup> Children England argued that a national framework for social workers' pay and reward, albeit with flexibility for regional variation, would help in developing and retaining staff: "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".<sup>379</sup> Rosie Varley told the Committee that

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 [...] 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.<sup>380</sup>

160. While the Government is planning to launch a national marketing campaign to attract high calibre recruits to social work,<sup>381</sup> Baroness Morgan told us that "pay remains the responsibility of employers and I am not expecting that to change, but I am very interested in career progression".<sup>382</sup>

161. Children and families are ill served by a social work profession that suffers from endemic churn in personnel. It is essential that opportunities for career progression are clarified and strengthened. Introduction of Advanced Practitioner Status is a welcome step, but must be incorporated into more comprehensive reforms; this includes substantial improvements in the pay available to skilled and experienced social work practitioners. **We are not persuaded that pay should remain the responsibility of individual employers, particularly given the evidence of how a more vigorous national policy has transformed the outlook for the teaching profession. We therefore recommend that a national pay structure for social work be introduced, allowing for regional variation, incorporating a system of spinal points for extra skills and responsibilities and supported by the necessary funding.**

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378 Training and Development Agency for Schools; teacher salaries from September 2008.

379 Ev 147; see also Q 119 [Jane Haywood, Rosie Varley].

380 Q 115

381 Ev 126

382 Q 308





































