

Building a Safe, Confident Future

Final Report of the UK Social Work Task Force - November 2009

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Background

- The task force was an expert group jointly appointed by Secretaries of State for Health, and Children, Schools and Families to advise on social work reform.
- Interim report July 2009 Facing up to the Task
- Task - to undertake a comprehensive review of frontline social work practice and to make recommendations for improvement and reform of the whole profession, across adult and children's services.

Vision for social work profession

"Our vision for social work is a profession:

- confident about its values, purpose and identity;
- working in partnership with people who use its services, so that they can take control of their situation and improve the outcome;
- working cohesively with other professions and agencies in the best interests of people in need of support;
- demonstrating its impact and effectiveness and, therefore, its value to the public;
- committed to continuous improvement, with the training and resources it needs to be effective and a vigorous culture of professional development;
- understood and supported by employers, educators, government, other professionals and the wider public; and
- well led at every level: in frontline practice; in influencing the shape and priorities of local services; in setting and maintaining the highest possible standards within the profession; and in influencing policy developments and priorities at national and political level."

Themes

Six themes were identified in the interim report. These were seen as obstacles to the delivery of a consistent high quality social work service.

1. We have been told that social workers feel they do not have enough time to devote directly to the people they want to help.
2. We have been told that social workers feel very frustrated by some of the tools and support they are given to do their jobs.
3. We have been told that new social workers are often not properly prepared for the demands of the job and that the education system does not effectively support ongoing development and specialisation.
4. We have been told that the social workers do not feel that their profession speaks with a strong national voice or is well supported at national level.
5. We have been told that systems for managing the performance of social workers are not driving quality first and foremost.
6. We have been told that the social workers feel that their profession is undervalued, poorly understood and under continuous media attack. This is making it hard for them to do their jobs and hard to attract people into the profession

Building Blocks for Reform

High quality appropriate initial training	Resources which support and enable effective practice	Strong national professional leadership
High quality ongoing training and development	Supply strategy – understanding demand and influencing supply	Public value and understanding
Clear roles and career structure	Inspection and accountability regime supporting improved outcomes	Delivery system providing strong local and national leadership
Founded on a clear understanding of the work that we need social workers for, and how their effective practice can improve outcomes		

Six Ambitions for Reform

We believe therefore that the quality of social work practice now needs to be raised significantly, through comprehensive, ambitious reform, including;

- better training – with employers, educators and the profession all taking their full share of responsibility for investing in the next generation and in enabling social workers already in practice to develop their skills
- improved working conditions – with employers signing up to new standards for the support and supervision of their frontline workforce that make good practice possible
- stronger leadership and independence – with the profession taking more control over its own standards, how it is understood and valued by the public, and the contribution it makes to changes in policy and practice
- a reliable supply of confident, high quality, adaptable professionals into the workforce, where they can build long-term careers on the frontline
- greater understanding among the general public, service users, other professionals and the media of the role and purpose of social work, the demands of the job and the contribution social workers make
- more use of research and continuing professional development to inform frontline practice

Recommendations in Summary

- A reformed system of initial training and education
- A national college of social work
- Clear universal and binding standards for employer
- Single nationally recognised career structure
- System for forecasting demand for social workers
- Programme of public understanding

Fifteen Recommendations in Detail

1. **Calibre of Entrants:** that criteria governing the calibre of entrants to social work education be strengthened.
2. **Curriculum and Delivery:** an overhaul of the content and delivery of social work degree courses.
3. **Practice Placements:** that new arrangements be put in place to provide sufficient high quality practice placements, which are properly supervised and assessed, for all social work students.
4. **Assessed Year in Employment:** the creation of an assessed and supported year in employment as the final stage in becoming a social worker.
5. **Regulation of Social Work Education:** more transparent and effective regulation of social work education to give greater assurance of consistency and quality.
6. **Standard for Employers:** the development of a clear national standard for the support social workers should expect from their employers in order to do their jobs effectively.
7. **Supervision:** the new standard for employers should be supported by clear national requirements for the supervision of social workers.
8. **Front Line Management:** the creation of dedicated programmes of training and support for front line social work managers.
9. **Continuing Professional Development:** the creation of a more coherent and effective national framework for the continuing professional development of social workers, along with mechanisms to encourage a shift in culture which raises expectations of an entitlement to ongoing learning and development.
10. **National Career Structure:** the creation of a single, nationally recognised career structure for social work.
11. **National College of Social Work:** the creation of an independent national college of social work developed and led by social workers.
12. **Public Understanding:** a new programme of action on public understanding of social work.
13. **Licence to Practise:** the development of a licence to practise system for social workers.
14. **Social Worker Supply:** a new system for forecasting levels of supply and demand for social workers.
15. **National Reform Programme:** the creation of a single national reform programme for social work.

What do we take from the report – some reflections?

1. Enhanced engagement between employers and the schools of social work
2. A shared responsibility for fieldwork and the quality of graduates
3. Ensuring relevance in professional education and balancing generic education vs specialisation
4. Leadership in the profession
5. Public awareness of social works contribution. Attracting people to the profession
6. More coherent approach to CPD
7. Employers creating the environment for social workers to practice as a profession

References Copies of the reports available at: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/swtf/index.shtml>