

social work
Connections
DECEMBER 2008



Messages from conduct hearings
– public protection and fairness to social workers

Newsletter of the General Social Care Council



Baby P – a professional approach to tragedy

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Newsletter of the General Social Care Council

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Editorial statement

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A warm welcome to your third, but my first issue of *Social Work Connections*, the GSCC's quarterly newsletter.

I am new to the GSCC – I started as Chair on 1 November – and lead a Council of ten members, who meet six times a year and determine the GSCC's strategic direction. I feel fortunate to join the GSCC at a time when social care is firmly on the national policy agenda, and radical changes are afoot to bring choice and control to people who use services and to ensure a system equipped to deal with an ageing population. I firmly believe that social care workers will play a critical part in making this a reality.

My first few weeks have been largely dominated by the tragic case of Baby P, which again focuses the country and the national media on the work and professionalism of social workers.

We are conducting

enquiries into whether the actions of social workers involved in the case have any bearing on their suitability to remain on the register. However, we do not yet know if there has been misconduct on the part of any social workers, and until the facts are clear, it is important that all professionals involved in this case are treated fairly, with understanding and are not prejudged.

Cases like Baby P highlight just how challenging social work can be. This is why all social workers are trained professionals, who are required to register with the GSCC – and who can be held to account if they are found to have breached the standards set out in the GSCC's code of practice. We expect all registrants to meet these standards and it is important to emphasise that tens of thousands of social workers successfully work



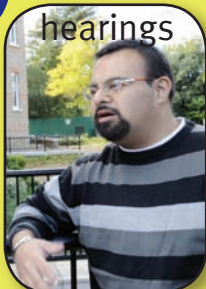
to these rules every day.

The GSCC is also the regulator of social work education and training, and this case further underlines the need for high quality support and training, which cannot guarantee that tragic cases like this will not happen, but can help reduce the risk. However, training is not a substitute for experience and the support social workers receive on the job is crucial.

Rosie Varley OBE
GSCC Chair

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Messages from conduct hearings

'I never thought of social workers doing bad things before. I've always thought of them like doctors and nurses. You know... really good, caring people who want to help people like me. I was really shocked to read about the kinds of things some social workers do. It's made me wonder if any of my social workers have done things like that. Then again, some doctors and nurses do bad things, don't they? It's a bit worrying to think that social work wasn't regulated before 2003. At least it's good to know that something is being done now.' (Response from a service user, who had used mental health services for 20 years, to the GSCC's first report on conduct.)

These words highlight the impact that the implementation of the *Code of Practice for Social Care Workers* has had on public confidence in social workers. For the majority of social workers, abiding by the code is straightforward but the minority who breach it must be held to account.

It's been over two years since the GSCC held the first hearing into the conduct of a Registered Social Worker or student. Since that first case, there have been a further 55 hearings covering a whole range of allegations, from inappropriate personal relationships with service users to dishonesty on applications. This is just a snapshot of the issues raised and information about previous hearings can be found on the [GSCC's website](#).

As a result of these hearings, 25 people have been removed from the register, 8 suspended and 20 admonished, a public record on the register. The committee assesses the seriousness of the offence and takes into account mitigation and rehabilitation, using GSCC guidance to inform their decisions.

Some hearings have related to dishonesty or a failure to be straightforward, such as not declaring disciplinary findings or criminal convictions, either to employers or



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the GSCC. Some social workers have said that they thought the information would have been irrelevant, or did not know they had to disclose it. Those who made dishonest entries on case files often say it was as a result of stress or lack of support. Whatever the mitigation, when a social worker falsifies, or deliberately misleads or omits information, their integrity in all aspects of their work will be called into question.

Any social worker who uses work equipment for unauthorised access of sexually explicit material will provoke questions about their commitment to social work values. Defence is often centred on inadvertent and unintentional access, or the lack of any real harm to service users, yet those cases brought before the hearings have found periods of sustained and deliberate access to such sites. The GSCC believes social workers should understand that sexually offensive websites exploit vulnerable people. If social workers need to access such websites in the course of their work, this should always be sanctioned by the employer, be transparent in case records, and be operated in accordance with employment procedures.

Our statistics show that inappropriate relationships account for 40 per cent of conduct cases. In mitigation, some social workers have pointed to a lack of clear guidance, policy and supervision.

While GSCC conduct hearings will determine what weight to give to mitigation on a case-by-case basis, it can be difficult for a social worker to argue that a personal relationship with a service user was appropriate if they never told their employer about it at the time. Perhaps, more than any other profession, social workers should be acutely aware of boundaries in terms of their relationships with people who use services, their families and carers. Social workers must recognise and use responsibly the power that comes from their work, and ensure that nothing impairs their objectivity and ability to make sound judgements. We are looking into producing guidance for social workers on this issue.

It is important to remember that the number of social workers and students who come into contact with the GSCC following allegations represents just over 1 per cent of the 95,000 social workers and students on our register. Sometimes malicious, vexatious or inappropriate allegations will be made. The GSCC recognises this is stressful for the social worker involved and strives to maintain a balance between resolving these cases quickly and maintaining rigour in the process. For the small numbers who do commit misconduct, it is vital that we take action to protect people who use services from harm and promote confidence in social care services.

Update on the social work degree

The degree in social work was introduced in 2003 to improve the supply, quality and status of social workers. Five years on, government and some employers have raised questions about whether all social work graduates are confident and competent to practise in a rapidly changing workplace.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and the Department of Health (DH) have therefore carried out a joint priority review (JPR) of qualifying social worker training.

They have visited eight local authority sites across the country, talking to universities, employers, people who use services, carers, students and NQSWs. They have also interviewed and taken written evidence from the GSCC.

The JPR has been looking at how students are selected, what they are taught and by whom, the role of employers and people who use services in the degree, and the extent to which the degree, including practice learning, prepares people for practice. Evidence from the DH three-year *Evaluation of the Degree* and the recently published GSCC-commissioned research *Fit for Purpose? The Social Work Degree in 2008* was also considered.

Fit for Purpose was based on evidence from six universities and 22 employers from the voluntary and statutory sector about current practice in preparing student social workers for the children's workforce. The key findings were:



- course providers are engaging with the change agenda in children's services and are incorporating the necessary teaching into the curriculum;
- partnerships between higher education institutions (HEIs) and local employers in some areas need to be strengthened – this is central to addressing the quality and availability of practice placements and ensuring that the design and delivery of courses is up to date; and
- some NQSWs are given large and complex caseloads, which leads to burn-out and impacts on retention in some areas.

Findings from the JPR will be presented to ministers shortly. Recommendations will be incorporated into the children's

and adults' social care workforce strategies and may include:

- the introduction of specialist pathways into the degree, while retaining the generic framework;
- strategies to improve the supply and quality of practice learning;
- mechanisms to strengthen the regulation of social work education to support more consistent outcomes;
- strategies to promote stronger partnership arrangements between HEIs and employers; and
- initiatives to provide support and training for NQSWs through their first year of training.

Updates on these developments will be included in future newsletters.

Learning together to safeguard children

The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) has launched a 'systems approach' to learning from serious case reviews (SCRs).

This aims to identify what factors are likely to lead to good or poor safeguarding practice, thereby informing practice to improve outcomes in children's and young people's services.

SCRs and public inquiries into the death or serious injury of a child from abuse or neglect offer tremendous opportunities for learning. Yet these repeatedly identify the same problems and generate the same proposed

solutions. Other areas of high-risk work, such as aviation and health, have experienced similar problems in improving the quality and safety of services. This has led to the development of a systems approach.

In order to adapt the model to children's services, SCIE conducted a scoping review of safety management literature, followed by pilot case reviews. Valuable feedback was provided at all stages of development.

More information on the model and how it can be implemented can be found at [SCIE's website](#).

Learning together to safeguard children: developing a multi-agency systems approach for case reviews



Further information

The **report** can be read at [SCIE's website](#), where a **resource guide** is also available.

Post-registration training and learning

Keeping skills and knowledge updated is absolutely essential for all social workers. Most of us would be pretty unhappy if we knew that we were being treated by a doctor who had made no effort to keep informed about new medical knowledge. People who depend on social work support need to know that their worker understands the latest research and is informed about the good practice that is constantly developing in fields like mental health, foster care, palliative care and safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults.

That is why the duty to complete a minimum of 90 hours or 15 days of post-registration training and learning (PRTL) in the three years between each renewal of registration is important. It is aimed at ensuring that social workers are equipped to provide the best service possible to people who need their support.

The GSCC provides **advice and guidance** (General Social Care Council: Post-registration training) for registrants about how to meet the PRTL requirements. Courses that are part of the post-qualifying framework are a good way to ensure that you get the training you need; but there are lots of other activities, which genuinely contribute to your ability to do the best possible job. Reading about the latest good practice research in journal articles is one way of keeping up with latest knowledge.

Don't forget to keep a running record of your PRTL as you do it. Don't leave it until you get the renewal reminder

– remembering back to learning you did many months ago can be really difficult.

Update on post-qualifying courses

Studying for an approved post-qualifying award is an ideal way to develop the specialist knowledge and skills for undertaking more complex work and keeping up to date with policy and practice development. These awards are currently available in five specialisms: working with children, young people, their families and carers; mental health; social work with adults; leadership and management; and practice education. The awards are offered at three different levels, allowing progression in a logical way to support career development.

So far 242 courses, to be offered by 53 universities, have been approved under the new post-qualifying (PQ) framework. 1,408 students have enrolled, of which 82 per cent are on specialist level courses. Working with children, young people, their families and carers is by far the most popular, attracting 54 per cent of students, followed by mental health and social work with adults. A multi-agency group continues to respond to feedback about the courses and to ensure that the framework is as



responsive as possible to workforce and provider needs.

The GSCC fully supports the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) pilots to provide additional support and protected caseloads for NQSWs, introduced this autumn; as well as the DH/Skills for Care initiatives launched recently, which also link outcomes to existing PQ courses.

This year sees the closure of all GSCC PQ awards that were introduced by the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW) in December 1991.

Enrolments for all these awards finished on 31 March 2007, and final results were due into the GSCC by 30 September 2008. Planning over a two-year period has allowed candidates the opportunity to complete awards or to transfer into the new framework.

Social care bodies under the microscope

The Department of Health has recently commissioned a review of three workforce delivery agencies providing support, regulation, training and research in social care: the GSCC, the Social Care Institute for Excellence and Skills for Care.

Coming in the wake of the recently published strategies for adults and children's services, *Putting People First* and *Building Brighter Futures*, the review will look at the structures, responsibilities and funding of the three organisations

to ensure the best arrangements for delivering the new social care workforce and improvement agendas.

It is to be carried out by independent consultants with the assistance of Dame Denise Platt, DBE, Chair, Commission for Social Care Inspection. It is scheduled to be completed and published by mid-January next year.

Commenting on the review, GSCC Chief Executive Mike Wardle said: "Given the changes we have seen in the social care landscape in the seven

years since the GSCC's inception, it is absolutely right that we look at the current arrangements to make sure they will effectively deliver outcomes of the *Putting People First* and *Building Brighter Futures* programmes.

"In particular we welcome the review's examination of the responsibilities of the various agencies involved in social work education and training. We think that simplification of these arrangements could bring real improvements in the quality of social work training."

Personalisation: a rough guide

Personalisation is at the centre of the vision to transform adult social care.

It means starting with the individual; responding to their preferences and needs with appropriate services, rather than making everyone fit into an existing service. The aim is to give people more choice and control over their lives and the care they receive.

Personalisation itself is not a new idea, but it does challenge us to think about public services and social care in a new way. The Social Care Institute for Excellence has produced *Personalisation: A rough guide* as an initial response to this challenge. This tells the story so far about the personalisation of adult social care services. It explains the basics and examines what personalisation might mean for the sector, including for social workers. The report argues that, while there has been some concern about the professional role of the social worker being undermined by personalisation, it could also be an opportunity to reaffirm



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and clarify the role. Social workers could move away from gatekeeping and resource management to advocacy and support tasks – which may be seen as their more traditional role.

The guide was developed with stakeholders through SCIE's Partners' Council and partner organisations.

SCIE is also planning a series of short,

tailored personalisation briefings for specific social care stakeholders (eg, care home and domiciliary care staff).

Further information

For more details, visit the [SCIE website](#), where the [report](#) can be accessed.

Notifiable Occupations Scheme



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The Notifiable Occupations Scheme covers professions or occupations that carry special trust or responsibility.

Under the Scheme, public interest in the disclosure of conviction and other information by the police generally outweighs the normal duty of confidentiality owed to the individual. Police forces will disclose conviction information about individuals in certain occupational groups to designated authorities, regulators or employers. Registered social workers and social work students have been included in the Scheme since 1 June 2008.

In view of the need to protect vulnerable people, social work is regarded as a category one notifiable occupation.

This means that the police will inform the GSCC of any conviction, caution, reprimand and warning, or any local

information about social workers or social work students, in accordance with Home Office guidance that sets out the arrangements for the operation of the scheme.

Registrants with the GSCC are, of course, already expected to inform the GSCC directly of relevant changes in their circumstances, including convictions and other disciplinary findings.

In the event of receiving a notification from the police, the GSCC will hold this information in accordance with the principles of the Data Protection Act. The information will only be used for its designated purpose, which is to assess whether the issues raised call into question suitability to remain on the register. If this happens, the GSCC will contact the registrant to discuss what has occurred and its relevance to their ongoing registration.

Proposals for newly qualified social workers

The Options for Excellence report, published at the end of 2006, set out a range of proposals for improving the support given to the social work workforce. Government welcomed the report, and a key recommendation – ensuring that social workers who have just qualified and who are starting their first job get extra support – is now being taken forward by the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) and by Skills for Care (SfC).

The CWDC is developing a newly qualified social worker (NQSW) pilot programme for those who work in the children's sector. The pilot began in September 2008, with 90 statutory and voluntary organisations and nearly 1000 NQSWs. This pilot is supported by outcome statements that set out what

NQSWs are expected to achieve by the end of their first year. Individuals receive a 10 per cent reduction in their workload, bespoke supervision and a structured programme of support to help them demonstrate these outcomes. If you would like to know more about this pilot, please visit the **CWDC website**, or if you would like to join others and take part in 2009, then to register your interest and receive updates please **email the CWDC**.

SfC is developing advice and guidance for adult social care departments so that they can develop their own formal NQSW schemes. A poster session was held at the National Children and Adults Services conference to get feedback on the progress to date. The framework

builds firmly on examples of current good practice. It stresses the value of building in links to the personal development plans that social work graduates take with them from their qualifying courses; and of good quality induction and supervision. It also emphasises the importance of on-going CPD – as outlined in the CPD strategy developed by the CWDC and SfC – and of the post-qualifying framework developed by the GSCC. Anyone seeking more information in relation to NQSW in adult services, in particular employers who are interested in becoming champions for this work, should **email Amanda Hatton** at SfC.

These two complementary schemes will help to ensure that NQSWs get the start they deserve in their careers.

Change of details

Don't forget to let us know as soon as possible if any of your details change. We need up-to-date contact details so that we can get in touch with any important information throughout the year.



Renewals

Please remember to return your renewal form before your registration expires. This is essential if you wish to remain on the register and continue to practise as a Registered Social Worker. You can contact us via:

- e-mail registration@gsc.org.uk
- phone 0845 070 0630
- post GSCC, Myson House, Railway Terrace, Rugby CV21 3HT

Skills for Care Accolades 2008

The Skills for Care Accolades celebrate outstanding achievement in social care workforce development. The awards ceremony took place on 7 November, with the GSCC sponsoring the award for best involvement of people who use services and/or carers in developing social care.

This award was won by the Truro-based project, Time for Change. Set up by Cornwall County Council's Department of Adult Social Care, the project involves people who use services (cited as 'experts by experience') in training staff teams throughout the health and social care sector.

The GSCC's Heather Wing presented the award, and said, "So often we read the rhetoric about intentions relating to service users and carers. Tonight we applaud those who have managed to turn this rhetoric into reality, and I am honoured to present this award to Time for Change on behalf of the GSCC. As the social care workforce regulator in England, we value highly all staff who work tirelessly to support and care for people who use social care services, and hope other employers will look to the example tonight's winners and nominees have set."

Newsflash – message to social workers

We are looking for the perspectives of people who use services on the articles in *Social Work Connections* and their thoughts on current issues.

Please mention this to anyone who uses services who you think might be interested. Please contact us by **email** or phone on 020 7397 5829 to find out more.

