

social work
Connections

March 2009



**The 2020 children's
workforce strategy**

17 March
World Social
Work Day

Newsletter of the General Social Care Council

Photo: John Brasell

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Support through standards

Social work has continued to stay high up the political and media agenda over the last few months.

This rising level of interest is a double-edged sword. In some cases, such as the establishment of a government taskforce to look into improvements in practice, and Lord Laming's progress report on child protection we welcome the positive and long overdue attention that the profession is receiving. On the other hand, with increased scrutiny has also come a negative portrayal of social workers in the media. This has called into question and undermined the work of a profession that deals with the most intractable problems in our society.

Some of you have asked why the GSCC has not 'stood up' for social workers in response to criticism. The answer is simple – as the regulator, rather than a professional body, our role is to drive up standards. We help to raise the standing of social work by ensuring that only suitable people enter the workforce and that those

who do not abide by the codes of practice are held to account. The death of Baby P and other tragic cases highlight the importance of a system for investigating potential wrongdoing and taking action where it is found. The overwhelming majority of social workers carry out their duties conscientiously and professionally, and we ensure public confidence in their work by being seen to uphold and enforce high standards across the profession.

Those who register with us must understand that they will be under scrutiny if standards are not met. However, we always emphasise that it is a very small minority of social workers that we need to investigate, and we also take every opportunity to promote social work. Later in this edition we detail activities we are organising to mark World Social Work Day, which focus on raising awareness of the challenges involved in social work.



It is heartening to see that so many commentators and high profile figures have berated those who have cast aspersions over social work. In particular, we welcome Community Care's attempts to defend the profession, which includes an **e-petition to the Prime Minister**. Let's hope this marks the beginnings of a sea change in people's attitudes towards social work and results in greater support for frontline practitioners.

Rosie Varley OBE
GSCC Chair

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The 2020 children's workforce strategy



The new strategy will ensure that social workers have the skills to deliver the aims of *Every Child Matters*

Photo: John Birdsell

Who would want to be a social worker in children's services? The recent bad press for social work has discouraged some, but fortunately there are still plenty of people who are attracted to this rewarding role.

Furthermore, the GSCC, in tandem with key partners, is working on a package of reforms that we hope will attract more people to the profession – and just as important, retain them.

The Government is also aware of the need to look at children's services and recently published its vision for the children's workforce – **The 2020 children's workforce strategy**. It reinforces our view that boosting the skills and knowledge of children's social workers must be a key priority. The strategy is firmly based on **Every Child Matters**, which set out five key outcomes for children and young people:

- Be healthy
- Stay safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic well-being.

The 2020 strategy aims to ensure that the workforce is equipped to deliver

the services that will be needed to ensure the five outcomes are achieved. It takes a holistic approach and proposes measures that will need to be applied to the whole workforce – including teachers, nursery nurses and youth workers – not just social care workers. The 'whole workforce' issues cover leadership and management, recruitment, training and qualifications and safeguarding. However, the strategy also has some comments specifically relevant to social work and

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with these issues, the GSCC has much to contribute. For instance, we have a rich source of data in the Social Care Register, including information about what post-registration training and learning social workers do, and from our inspection of social work courses

Government aims include improving initial training, driving up quality in professional practice, attracting and retaining the 'brightest and the best', and strengthening leadership and supervision.

To support this programme and to drive improvements in social work practice in both adults' and children's services, ministers at the DH and DCSF have set up a taskforce to be chaired by Moira Gibb, a former director of social services. The group has been asked to look at frontline social work and to recommend any further changes which they judge to be necessary. The GSCC will be providing evidence to the taskforce as well as being represented on the Key Partners Group which will work closely with the taskforce and inform its work.

Following Lord Laming's progress report, the Government has also announced a number of steps to improve child protection in England. A more detailed action plan will be published by the end of April, and we will report on this in the next edition.

How we are training social workers

In December's edition, we reported on the social work degree. Since then, we have published our annual report: **Raising Standards – Social work education in England 2007-08**. This reports on the overall picture of social work education and training for the academic year 2007-2008, based on our role in inspecting the quality of social work education.

The report shows that the degree is performing well, with most approved providers running good quality social work courses. However, in 10% of courses, one or more requirements were not being met. This has led to closer monitoring of these courses by the GSCC, with agreed action plans to achieve full compliance.

The majority of practice placements, which are a key element of degree-level training, provided children and families experience, and most had at least one placement in the statutory sector. Although out of 11,500 placements, only 82 were reported by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) as not meeting their own quality standards; the quality and provision of practice learning was a common area identified for improvement in re-approving courses. The key to improving the quality of practice learning opportunities is in strengthening the partnerships between HEIs and their local employers. We are working to improve that relationship, and are looking at making partnerships with employers a formal requirement for HEIs.

In 2008 we involved people who use services and carers in the course approval process. This has resulted in the service user and carer perspective being taken into account in the development of course programmes, and students hearing first hand from those they will be working with. Given the success of this, we have now adopted it as an integral part of every approval and re-approval, and in time, we hope to include people who use services and carers in our inspection process.

The social work degree is the core generic training, designed to equip social workers for the beginning of their career. However, some newly qualified social



Photo: Care Images Limited

Involving people who use services in course approval has resulted in their perspective being taken into account in the development of course programmes

workers (NQSW) have reported unrealistic demands of them in their first job. The Department for Children, Schools and Families responded to this by piloting a new programme of induction training, supervision and support to help NQSWs in their first post. This is now going to be rolled out to all NQSWs starting this year. We welcome this, as to achieve a well-trained and highly skilled workforce, NQSW support together with good quality ongoing training is crucial.

Following the NQSW programme, we believe that all social workers should be supported to continue to develop practice knowledge and proficiency through post-qualifying training as is the case with the other professionals they work alongside. We have, therefore, recommended that the requirements

relating to post-qualifying training should be strengthened, and in particular that there may be a need to introduce a further specialist post-qualifying award in safeguarding. We are delighted that these recommendations are now being taken forward by the Government, and we are developing ideas for discussion with the sector on post-qualifying training in safeguarding.

Social work education and training is now clearly a key priority for the Government, and will be a central focus of the social work taskforce. We will be sharing the findings of the *Raising Standards* report, as well as other evidence, to help inform the development of reforms that we hope will build a workforce that is both inspired and inspiring in its delivery of social work.

Poll reveals social workers feel undervalued

'Meddling', 'Nazis', 'bunglers' – just a few examples of the words used in the tabloid press to describe social workers in recent months. Similar descriptions could also be found in letters to the editor from members of the public.

It's not surprising then, that in the last edition's readers' poll, the overwhelming majority of you felt that the public does not value the role social workers play in society. **When asked whether the Baby P and other cases had damaged the public's view of social work**, the majority (97%) also thought it had. Only 4% felt they were as valued as much as the other professionals they work with – for example, doctors or teachers.

Many in the profession may well be feeling concerned about finding themselves held to account if something goes wrong.

It is important that social workers feel confident that action will not be taken against them if they have carried out their role diligently and professionally, but their employer has failed to provide the support required in the **Code of Practice for Employers**.

However, it is very difficult for social workers to establish retrospectively that they failed in a duty because of caseload pressures, workplace culture or a lack of management support. This is especially so if they have not made this explicit in written communication at the time of the events.

It is therefore critically important that social workers recognise the



Photo: Care Images Limited

importance of properly demonstrating, through written evidence, that procedures have been followed and that you have been completely transparent in the management of your caseload. It is then extremely unlikely that you would ever face disciplinary or regulatory action. However, if you have not met the standards required of you and cannot evidence that you have acted professionally, this could result in regulatory action being taken, such as suspension or removal from the Social Care Register.

The likelihood of a social worker being subject to such action is extremely low, with less than 1% of social workers being referred to the GSCC each year with an allegation of misconduct. Even then, fewer than 10% of these

referrals result in a conduct hearing. The overwhelming majority of referrals received are closed at very early stages. Usually, the evidence gathered demonstrates that social workers carry out their duties in a highly dedicated and professional manner.

To strengthen the onus on employers to provide necessary support and supervision, the GSCC has recommended for some time that the **Code of Practice for Employers of Social Care Workers** should be mandatory. We are delighted that this is now being taken forward, following Lord Laming's report. This will empower social workers and regulators to hold organisations to account if they fail to provide adequate support to enable social workers to undertake their work safely and to high standards.

Setting boundaries

Inappropriate relationships between social workers and people who use services have been a consistent theme in allegations of misconduct made to the GSCC, and 40 % of these allegations have been taken through to a conduct committee. We have other evidence of inappropriate relationships being an issue and that social workers feel uncertainty about what is and is not a boundary transgression. For example, a survey undertaken by *Community Care magazine* in 2008 revealed that a

fairly high percentage of those surveyed had worked with someone who they believed had behaved inappropriately, either professionally (40%) or sexually (12%) and uncertainty was shown by the number of respondents answering 'don't know' to many of the questions.

The GSCC has developed a project to provide guidance for social workers and social work students on professional boundaries. This will be in consultation with stakeholders, including partner bodies such

as WITNESS, social workers and students, people who use services, employers and education providers. We will consider whether the proposed guidance should cover a range of boundary issues or whether it should focus on a particular area such as sexual boundaries.

Further information

The GSCC expects to publish its guidance in late 2010.

Introducing an online service for registrants

We regularly remind you to update your personal details, and of course pay your annual fee. Many of you have pointed out that this would be quicker and easier using the Internet. We have listened, and are pleased to announce the roll out of an online self-service account for GSCC registrants.

This system will not only allow you to update your personal details and pay your annual fee, but also to keep a log of your post-registration training and learning (PRTL) – all without having to email or phone the GSCC.

At the beginning of the year, we piloted this service to a group of 3000 registrants and, based on their feedback, we are confident that the system is efficient and user friendly. After you have created an account, you can easily navigate your way around the site.

If you are a registered social worker or social work student you will receive an invitation in the next few months giving details of how to set up your account. If you experience any problems you will be able to contact the GSCC for assistance.

All pages containing personal information will only be accessible



Registrants can now update their personal details and pay their annual fee online

Photo: SXC

using a secure browser that requires a unique login. This means that when you use the service you can be sure that your personal details are secure.

In addition to being quicker and easier to use, the online service also reduces the need for paper

communication and it saves you money on phone calls and stamps. In the future, it will also allow you to renew your registration online.

We look forward to hearing your thoughts on the new system.

GSCC parliamentary reception



Photo: Matthew Pulitzer

The GSCC hosted a parliamentary reception on 25 February 2009, which saw over 100 MPs, Peers and representatives from social care organisations gather in the House of Lords to talk about the work of the GSCC and the future of social work.

Speaking at the reception, GSCC Chair Rosie Varley called on the social work taskforce to look at strengthening the education and training of social workers; tightening the requirements on employers to provide support for social workers, and share information with the GSCC about potential misconduct.

Ed Balls MP, Secretary of State for

Children, Schools and Families, and Phil Hope MP, Minister for Social Care, also addressed the reception. Both outlined the important work of the GSCC and the need for the Government and the GSCC to work closely together to deliver improvements in the sector. Claudia Megele, a social work student also spoke, giving a personal account of her experience in social work and her observations of what needs to change in the profession.

Further information

Full copies of Rosie's and Claudia's speeches are available on the [GSCC website](#).

Social work: making a world of difference

By IFSW President, David N Jones
Today (17 March) is World Social Work Day, a day to celebrate the contribution of social work to national and community life, recognise its international context and explore the evolving role of social work in a changing world.

England is hosting a major World Social Work Day conference this year, which is particularly poignant given the way in which social work here has been thrust into the spotlight following recent tragic cases.

Around 400 frontline social workers from across England will be in London for a conference, where they will be able to share their thoughts and experiences with Moira Gibb, head

of the Social Work Taskforce. We are working with local authorities and



other social work employers across the country to use the day to promote

the positive contribution social work makes to society and are providing local authority press offices with materials they can use to get positive media coverage of social workers in their area.

World Social Work Day activities have been planned by a group co-ordinated by the British Association of Social Workers – including the GSCC, the government, the Children's Workforce Development Council, Skills for Care and the Social Care Institute for Excellence.

Social work is frequently in the public eye, often when things go wrong or when there are problems. This day offers an opportunity to celebrate the essential contribution to communities made by social workers, not only in this country but also around the world.

Photo: SXC

Could you be an Accolades 2009 winner?



The Accolades was first launched in 2003 to commend and celebrate best practice in social care workforce development. It was the first awards scheme to reward organisations for the support and development of individuals, rather than rewarding the individuals themselves.

To achieve an Accolade proves an organisation's success in improving the lives of people who use social care services through workforce development.

If you provide a high quality service and invest in training and developing your staff, we want to hear from you. You can also nominate another organisation or employer that you think would be a worthy winner.

This year, nomination forms are to be completed electronically. The nomination pack is available at the [Skills for Care website](#) or by [email](#). If you do not have internet access please call Skills for Care on: 0113 241 1295.

Nomination forms must be returned by 1 May 2009.



Photo: John Birdsall

Draft outcome statements for newly qualified social workers in adult services

The Department of Health is working with Skills for Care, the GSCC and SCIE to develop a newly-qualified social worker (NQS) scheme for social work in adult services. A similar framework is being introduced for NQSWs in children's services.

As part of this work, SCIE has been asked to draft for comment a set of 'outcome statements' for social workers with adults, their families, carers and communities. The statements seek to capture the core elements of social work practice in adults' services, so as to enable NQSWs to demonstrate that they are competent social workers after an initial year in employment.

The draft statements can be accessed on [SCIE's website](#), together with an exemplar of the format for the detailed statements and a letter with questionnaire for responses. SCIE would welcome comments on the draft material, and in particular would like to hear from social workers in their first year after qualifying, social work degree students, supervisors and practice teachers. The questionnaires should be returned to [SCIE by email](#).

Talk to the media – volunteers wanted!

There is no substitute for hearing firsthand experience – newspapers, magazines, television and radio are always on the look out for people to discuss their knowledge and understanding of a story – it's the personal touch that brings a story to life.

We are working hard to get positive media coverage of social workers, and to reinforce this we need a bank of people who can describe good practice in social care and highlight the issues facing

those who provide or use services.

Would you be willing to talk about your work to journalists? Do you know anyone who receives social care services that might be willing to talk about it? If so, please contact Lorna Harris by phone on 020 7397 5829, or by **email**.

All information provided will be kept strictly confidential and none of our media volunteers will be approached by a journalist without their prior consent.



Photo: SXC

C4EO launches 'one stop shop' for children's services

The Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services (C4EO) is a dynamic new organisation, developed for the children's sector, from the children's sector.

It has launched a free online 'one stop shop' resource for children's sector professionals. The resource contains evidence of 'what works' best to facilitate systems change for providing effective family support and narrowing the gap in outcomes for vulnerable young children. Go to the **C4EO website** to view the resource. You can also **sign up at CE4O** for regular email updates.

Free training resources from SCIE

Strong communication and leadership skills are vital for social workers if they are to provide excellent social care, and it is crucial that they continually develop and update their learning in these areas. The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) has a range of resources to support social care learning and development; two new resources have recently been launched in this suite:

- **Leading Practice** is a programme for first-line managers. It consists of discussion and activity sessions, which link in with wider standards for leadership and management.
- **Care Skillsbase** offers free, practical web-based resources to help employers improve the communication and numeracy of their staff.

Further information

All SCIE social work education and workforce resources can be freely accessed via the **SCIE website**.

Keep in touch and stay registered!

Please let us know promptly of any changes to your contact details. If we need to get in touch we will usually write to you, so we need to know your current address. But it's also important for us to have an up-to-date telephone number and email address for you, especially as we are increasingly using electronic forms of communication.

You can update your details by telephone on 0845 0700 630 or by **email** – for security purposes you will need to confirm your date of birth or national insurance number, as well as the address details we currently hold for you when you contact us.

You also need to keep us informed of changes to your employment details. Please tell us the address of your employer's head office and the address where you work (including postcode).



Photo: SXC