

Appendix 1

Social Work Reform Board Briefing

Social work is changing for the better. Working together, the social work sector has developed the tools that will drive up the quality of social work practice and improve services for children, adults and families.

For too long the system that educates, supports and employs social workers has not always resulted in high standards of social work practice across the country. Professional standards and judgement had lost out to bureaucratic approaches. Newly qualified social workers have not been consistently supported or mentored, employers have been dissatisfied with the calibre of newly qualified social workers sometimes expecting too much of them and the children, adults and families that use services have not always had the high quality care and protection that they deserve.

That is why the Social Work Task Force made 15 recommendations for a comprehensive reform programme. The Social Work Reform Board was set up to drive the reforms. In January 2010 representatives of social workers, service users and carers, employers and educators embarked on a joint endeavour to bring about sustained and lasting improvements to social work. Supported by Government and united by a common aim, we have produced a number of wide ranging tools for change.

We knew that prescriptive proposals from the centre were unlikely to work. Well meaning but ultimately short sighted or bureaucratic reforms in the past had not addressed the fundamental need to improve the quality of social work practice. Real and lasting improvements would require a complete programme of sector-led reform, with the social worker's journey from initial training to senior practitioner and to sector leader at its heart.

Working collaboratively to build consensus, we had developed tools that can be of practical help. Building on feedback on draft proposals, evidence from test sites and the recommendations of the Munro Review of Child Protection, we have created a set of products that together can bring about improvements to each part of the system.

Ensuring the quality of social work

For the first time the social work sector has produced and agreed an overarching Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF). This underpins all the Reform Board's products, giving consistency across all aspects of social work. This framework will underpin the social work degree, a

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social worker's first year in employment and their continuing professional development (CPD) throughout their career. It helps social workers to develop their capabilities, deepen their knowledge and extend their skills to deal with increasingly complex and specialist work. It helps employers with appraisal and workforce planning. It shows the public and other professions what social workers do. It should enable more flexibility and choice, promote organisational and personal responsibility for CPD, and will give greater priority to ongoing learning and development. The PCF will be held and developed by the College of Social Work on behalf of the profession.

Getting the right people into social work - a set of recommendations on the best ways to select the right candidates onto the social work degree is now available for higher education institutions (HEIs) to use and adapt to their own procedures. Admissions teams are already telling us that key recommendations are improving the calibre of entrants on to the social work degree. The guidelines will be owned by the College of Social Work who will continue to promote a rigorous and evidenced-based approach to choosing the right people to train as social workers.

Developing the right knowledge and skills – a new curriculum framework will help HEIs and their partners to design social work degree courses that allow students to acquire the knowledge and skills that lead to high quality social work practice. This means that from September 2013 at the latest, students will benefit from a more consistent and relevant degree curriculum. The College of Social Work will own the framework as well as illustrative curriculum guidance for HEIs who want to access more in depth tools to aid curriculum design.

Preparing to work at the front line – guidance for HEIs on the most effective way to structure practice placements and principles for good partnership working between employers and HEIs are now available. These tools will help employers and HEIs to work together so that by 2013, practice placements really will prepare students for the realities of front line practice.

Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) – a programme of support and assessment for all newly qualified social workers will be established from September 2012. With the support of their employers, newly qualified social workers will need to show that they have met the ASYE standards, as set out in the Professional Capabilities Framework. The ASYE is a means for social workers to continue to grow their skills in the first year of practice on the way to becoming an effective social worker.

Supporting social workers at the front line – the Standards for Employers are an agreed set of expectations for people who employ and manage social workers. At the heart of these Standards is the fundamental expectation that social workers will receive regular high quality supervision within an open and supportive environment that promotes time for reflection, collaboration and shared learning. By the end of this year employers' associations will host the Standards for Employers. This will allow the sector, including social workers, service users, trades unions and commissioners to hold employers to account and to expect that the Standards are implemented.

Continuing professional development (CPD) - a new framework has been agreed to promote and support all social workers to develop their capabilities, deepen their knowledge and extend their skills to deal with increasingly complex and specialist work. This will be held and developed by the College of Social Work. It will enable more flexibility and choice, promote organisational and personal responsibility for CPD, and will give greater priority to ongoing learning and development.

Planning for future service delivery – a supply and demand model is now available to enable better national, regional and local workforce planning. It will allow local authorities and other employers to forecast the demand for social workers more accurately and to work with HEIs to ensure that the right numbers of social workers are being trained to meet future service needs.

The Reform Board has been working with organisations within the social work sector to establish the best way for our products to be owned, promoted and developed. Some of these tools are already making a difference but others will need to be embedded within the system before improvements will show.

Social work now has an agreed set of products that can promote high quality social work practice and improve services for children, adults and families. We will shortly have a fully independent College of Social Work acting in the best interests of its members, championing the social work profession and driving up standards of practice. Within the next year we hope to have a Chief Social Worker operating at the heart of Government, helping to shape national policy and keeping social work firmly on the agenda. We will all need to continue to work collaboratively across the sector, to set out the next phase of reform and drive the next phase of sector-led improvement.

It is now up to all of us to build upon this important opportunity for positive and lasting reform.

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