

BRIEFING

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Improving the children's social work profession

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Children's social work is under enormous strain. Chronic funding pressures, a ballooning workload and a poorly trained and supported workforce have all combined to put vulnerable children's lives at risk.

Tackling this problem will require action in a number of areas. In particular, there is a need to improve the quality and training of the workforce. The nature of social work means that it is heavily dependent on the effectiveness of its frontline staff.

Despite the importance of an effective workforce, social work has struggled to recruit and train enough high-calibre staff, it has suffered from a perception of low prestige, and it has been criticised for offering degree courses that provide inadequate training.

This paper investigates the nature and extent of the problems facing the children's social work profession. Last year, there were around 1,350 vacant jobs in this field, many of which were concentrated in certain areas. Despite a concerted effort to tackle this shortage of workers, there are widespread concerns about the skills, competencies and calibre of new recruits to the profession. For example, in 2011 less than 6 per cent of people who started training to be a social worker came from a Russell Group university – social work is clearly not viewed as attractive for these graduates.

This paper argues that a graduate fast-track programme, run by a dedicated social enterprise, could help to address these problems. Drawing on the success of the Teach First scheme, the organisation would provide work-based training for high-potential new recruits. This new programme – Frontline – would help to attract the best people into one of Britain's toughest professions, and in the long term create a movement of leaders to challenge social disadvantage.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the autumn of 2008, news broke of the tragic case of ‘Baby P’, who died following shocking abuse and neglect at the hands of his mother and her partner. This was the latest in a number of high-profile tragedies, including the murder of eight-year-old Victoria Climbié after months of torture, which included being tied up, burned with cigarettes and hit with a bicycle chain. These shocking cases drew public attention to failings by social workers, who could have intervened at an earlier point to protect these vulnerable children.

Subsequent reviews into the children’s social work sector have identified a number of problems that need to be addressed. These include funding pressures, a ballooning workload, poor collaboration with other agencies, and a poorly trained and supported workforce. Added to this, local authorities are facing many years of reduced spending: council budgets have been cut by an average of around 10 per cent this year alone (Crawford and Phillips 2012). Taken together, these problems are putting vulnerable children’s lives at risk.

Addressing these problems will clearly require action in a number of areas. Of particular note is the quality of the workforce, which has been singled out as a problem by a number of official reviews (see for example Munro 2011, SWTF 2009). The sector has historically struggled to recruit enough high-calibre professionals, and the training offered to new recruits has not always prepared them sufficiently for work on the frontline. Given the nature of children’s social work, it will be impossible to deliver a high-quality service without having a high-quality frontline workforce.

This report proposes the creation of a programme to help tackle these problems. It takes as its inspiration the Teach First programme, which successfully raised the number of top graduates working in challenging inner-city schools during the 2000s, and subsequently helped to raise the prestige of the teaching profession. The first chapter of the paper outlines the nature of the problems facing the social work profession. Later chapters present the results of a feasibility study into the creation of a fast-track graduate programme in children’s social work. The paper concludes by suggesting a model for a successful programme of this kind.

This paper is part of an ongoing investigation into the creation of such a fast-track programme. We would welcome views and comments on the proposals laid out in this paper. The next stage will be to prepare a detailed proposal, including costings and an organisational structure, so that this model can be made a reality.

Feedback

If you would like to comment on the proposals set out in this paper, please contact the author, Josh MacAlister, at j.macalister@ippr.org

Box 1: Methodology

This report draws on a number of sources in order to identify the current state of the children's social work profession and to test a proposal for reforming it. These sources include:

- a review of academic literature and government reports on social work
- official workforce statistics and data on university admissions
- in-depth interviews with seven employers and nine university lecturers
- a workshop with representatives from four universities, to design a training programme
- a focus group with eight graduates who had been accepted onto the Teach First programme
- case studies submitted by five local authorities
- informal discussions with 20 employers and university lecturers
- a steering group, which was chaired by Lord Adonis and included representatives from The College of Social Work, the British Association of Social Workers (BASW), civil servants, employers, academics and expert consultants. For full details, see appendix A.

2. THE PROBLEM

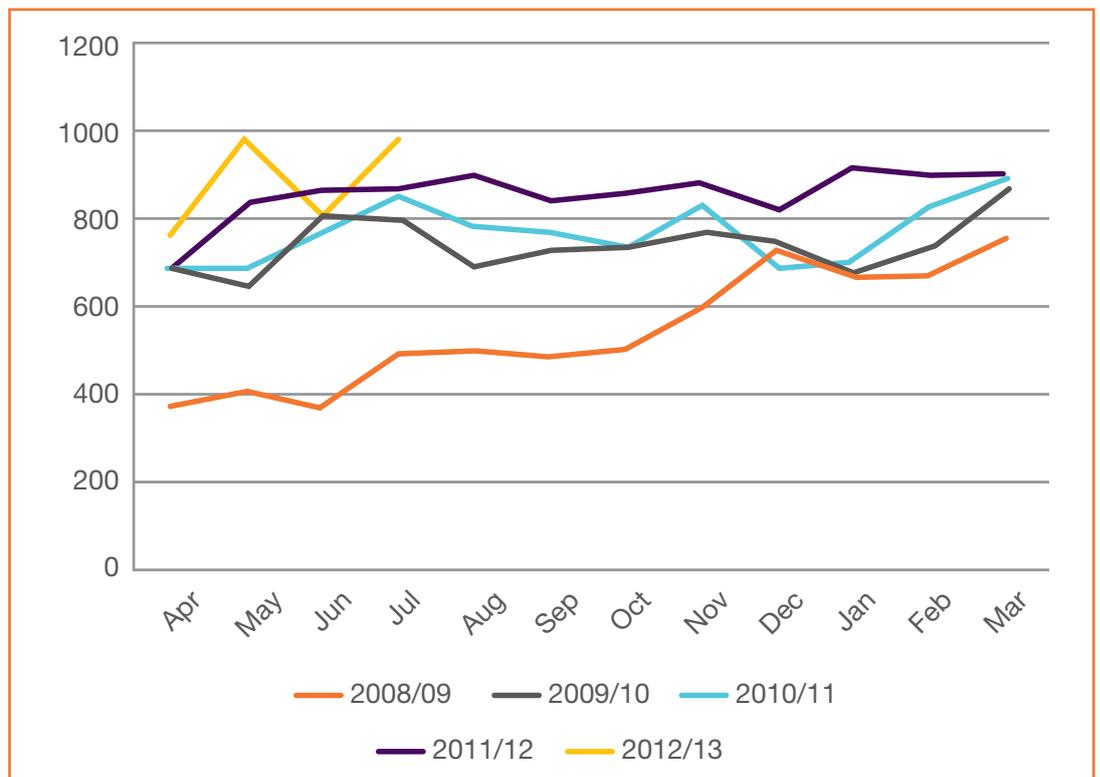
The nature of social work means that it is heavily dependent on the quality of its frontline staff. The effectiveness of a social work service depends on the ability of its staff to form relationships, make difficult judgments, be resilient, and master specialist knowledge and skills. A high-quality social work service cannot be delivered without a high-quality frontline workforce. Frontline children's social work, in particular, requires a demanding mix of sought after skills and attributes.

In this light, policymakers should be concerned at recent trends in the labour market for social workers. Increasing demand for services, high vacancy rates in some areas, concerns over the calibre of new recruits, concerns about the quality of training and financial pressures in local government have all combined to put children's social care services under enormous pressure. The remainder of this chapter outlines the main issues and trends facing the workforce.

Rising demand

The last five years have seen a steady increase in the demands placed upon children's social workers. Growing concern over parental neglect coupled with a string of high-profile tragedies have caused care applications to spiral. Such applications are enormously demanding on the time and skill of social workers. Figure 1 shows the rise in care application since 2008. Between 2008/09 and 2011/12, the number of applications rose from 6,488 to 10,229, an increase of 37 per cent.

Figure 1
Public law care requests,
England, 2008/09–2012



Source: CAF/CASS 2012

The growing demand for social work services can also be seen in other indicators. Calls about child abuse to the NSPCC helpline have more than doubled in the last two years,

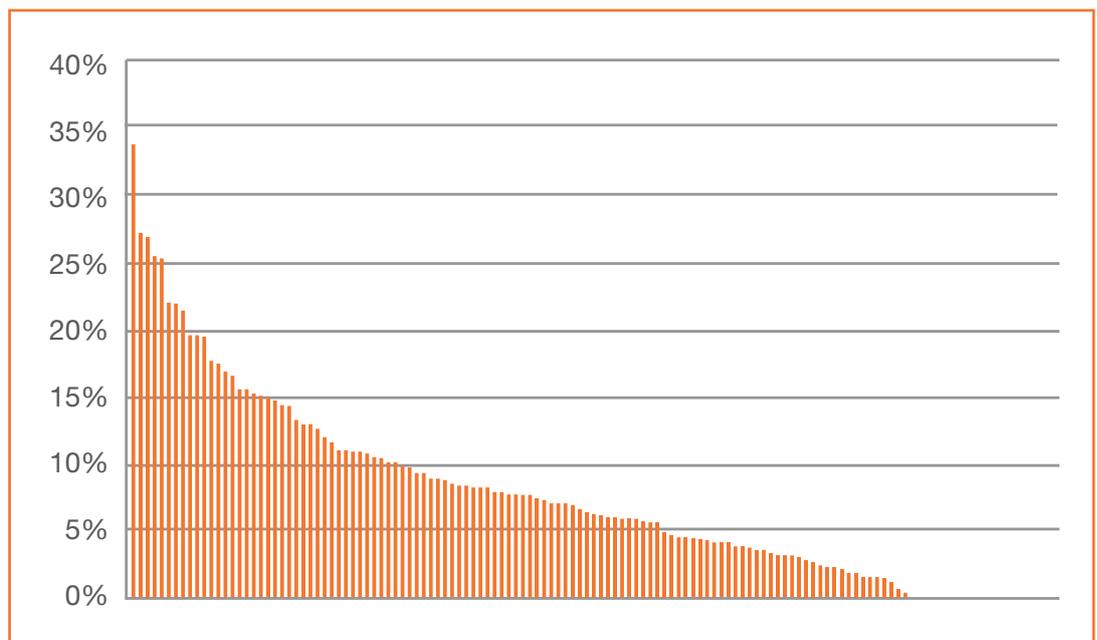
and nearly three-quarters of those calls were deemed serious enough to refer to a statutory body (NSPCC 2012). Similarly, a Department for Education survey in 2010/11 reported that an additional 8,100 children were in need of care compared to the previous year (DfE 2011). Taken together, these figures show there is a record level of demand for children’s social workers in England, which is likely to ramp up pressure on the service in coming years.

High vacancy rates and a reliance on agency staff

Despite recent improvements in the number of people training to be social workers, the profession continues to be listed on the official shortage occupation list and the number of vacant jobs remains relatively high compared to other professions. While data on vacancy rates is patchy, it generally shows that last year around 8–10 per cent of posts in England were vacant and staff turnover was around 10 per cent.¹ This means there were around 2,500 vacant jobs in social work in 2011, and around 1,350 of those were in children’s social work. While this in fact represented an improvement on previous years’ vacancy figures, it remains higher in social work than in many other public sector professions.²

While at a national level vacancy rates are improving, this masks considerable variation across the country. Figure 2 shows the vacancy rate for children’s social work posts in each local authority in England: a number of councils have no vacant places, while in others a third of jobs are empty. The graph shows that in just under a quarter of councils very high vacancy rates persist (that is, over 15 per cent). The problems facing the sector are therefore not uniform nationwide, but there are pockets of the country which still struggle to fill jobs in social work.

Figure 2
Children’s social work
vacancy rates, by local
authority, 2011



Source: Community Care 2011

- 1 There are a number of surveys of vacancy rates in children’s social work, but many of them have low response rates and cannot be relied upon for an accurate picture. See for example McGregor 2011, Skills for Care 2012, SWIF 2012 and DfE 2012.
- 2 By comparison, in November 2010, there were 380 vacancies reported for full-time permanent teachers in publicly funded schools, a rate of 0.1 per cent. There were a further 1,790 full-time posts that were temporarily filled by a teacher on a contract of at least a term but less than one year (DfE 2010).

The high vacancy rates in some local authorities means that they rely heavily on agency staff. In around a quarter of councils, agency staff make up over 10 per cent of the social services workforce (SWIF 2012). This brings with it problems of both quality and cost, as is highlighted by a review of social work jobs in the West Midlands:

‘One of the major limitations of agency social workers was the variable quality of their work and the difficulty finding good quality workers who could fulfil the requirements of a placement in full ... Finally, the use of agency social workers costs significantly more than permanent staff: in some cases more than an additional 50 per cent.’

WMSWRP 2011: 23

While there have been overall improvements in vacancy rates, some councils still struggle to recruit social workers and end up relying on poor-quality and expensive agency staff as a result. This in turn can affect their ability to provide an effective service capable of protecting and improving the lives of vulnerable children.

Quality of recruits

A concerted effort to tackle the shortage of social workers in recent years is beginning to bear fruit. There has been a sharp increase in the number of people studying for a degree in social work in England, with 6,364 starting in 2010/11 (GSCC 2012), and recent graduates are starting to filter out into the workplace. It is worth noting that post-graduate social work degrees are generously bursary funded.

But despite this increase in numbers, there are widespread concerns about the skills, competencies and calibre of people entering the profession. This was summed up by the General Social Care Council earlier this year, when it recognised that:

‘[C]oncerns about the calibre of individuals studying to become social workers have regularly been raised during the lifetime of the GSCC. Often these concerns have focused on the level of qualifications held by those enrolling to the degree.’

ibid: 26

A number of recent reviews have expressed similar concerns. The widely respected Munro review concluded that many newly qualified social workers did not have the necessary knowledge, skills and expertise to deal with the challenges posed by child protection work (Munro 2011: 97). The Social Work Reform Board struck a similar chord when it criticised universities for admitting candidates who did not have the right mix of ‘intellectual and personal qualities’ to succeed as a social worker (TCSW 2012: 8). This is reflected in the low pass rate on social work degrees: only two-thirds of candidates pass at their first attempt, leaving the remainder to resubmit work or defer for a year (IDeA et al 2009: 16).

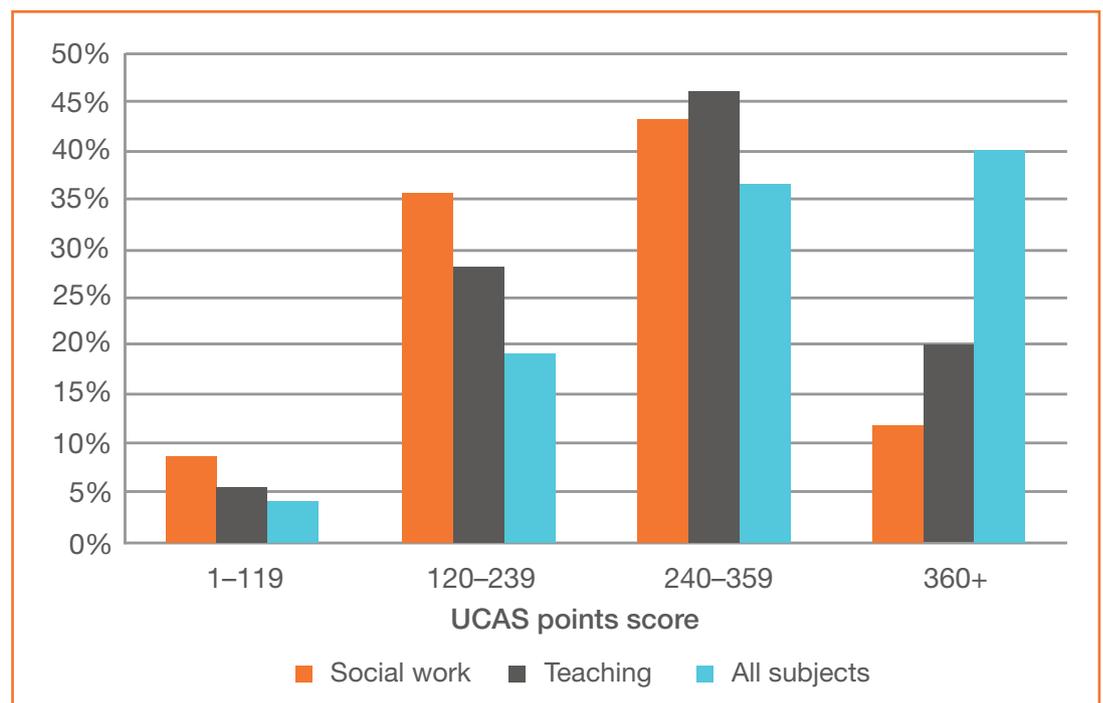
These issues of quality become clear in the academic background of people training to be social workers. While this is a very narrow measure of the calibre of people entering the profession, it is indicative of the knowledge and skills that new recruits bring with them. Of the 2,765 people starting social work masters-level courses last year, only five completed their undergraduate degree at Oxford or Cambridge, among only 150 from any Russell Group university.³ This means that only 5.6 per cent of people who started training to

³ Data supplied by HESA for 2011. Russell Group universities are the University of Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Cardiff, Durham, Edinburgh, Exeter, Glasgow, Imperial College London, King’s College London,

be a social worker came from a 'top university'. Social work is clearly not viewed as an attractive profession for these graduates. By comparison, in 2009, 8 per cent of graduates from Oxford and Cambridge alone applied for the Teach First programme, and more will have trained for teaching via other routes, such as the traditional PGCE (HC CFSC 2009).

A similar picture emerges from the academic background of those applying to study social work as an undergraduate degree. Figure 3 compares the UCAS points score for those applying to undergraduate courses in teaching and social work in 2011.⁴ It is clear that those applying to study teaching at undergraduate level achieved much more highly at school than those applying for social work. Only 12 per cent of social work applicants had the equivalent of three A grades at A-level – the same figure is 20 per cent for teaching applicants. The Social Work Reform Board has made specific recommendations about increasing the UCAS point scores of successful applicants to a minimum of 240 (SWRB 2010).

Figure 3
UCAS tariff point scores
of applicants to social
work, teaching and all
subjects, 2011
(% of applicants)



Source: UCAS data
Note: Includes applicants with at least one A level.

Of course, having good academic qualifications is not enough to make a good social worker – the job requires other skills and competencies. Nevertheless, many aspects of the job do require people to have the specialist knowledge, reasoning skills and leadership qualities that are associated with top graduates. What's more, it appears it is precisely these skills that are lacking among new recruits. A survey of newly qualified social workers (or NQSWs, in children's and adult social work) found they had most anxiety over aspects

Leeds, Liverpool, London School of Economics & Political Science, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Oxford, Queen Mary University of London, Queen's University Belfast, Sheffield, Southampton, University College London, Warwick and York.

4 As a guide, an A* grade at A-level is worth 140 points, an A grade is worth 120 points, and so on down to 40 points for an E grade. A score of 360 points is therefore the equivalent of three A grades at A-level.

of the job that are related to academic knowledge and leadership, such as knowledge of child protection, knowledge of mental health conditions, how to deal with hostility, aggression and conflict, assessing risk, and preparing reports for legal proceedings (Sharpe et al 2011).

It seems that the drive to increase the *quantity* of social workers has not been accompanied by a significant increase in the *quality* of recruits. The proportion of people entering the profession from top universities is particularly low. This has led some employers to complain that they are unable to appoint new members of staff because the applicants are unsuitable (SWTF 2009: 16). This opinion was mirrored in interviews conducted for this paper.

Policymakers need to pay more heed to ‘quality not quantity’ when planning the future of the children’s social work workforce.

Quality of training

As well as concerns about the suitability of candidates being admitted to social work degree courses, the quality of the courses themselves has come under sustained criticism. Most recently, the Munro review criticised the inconsistency of social work degree courses in terms of content, quality and outcomes, and argued that crucial aspects concerning child protection were missing (Munro 2011: 97). The Social Work Task Force also argued that requirements governing the content of the social work degree were not clear enough, and that there were certain areas of knowledge and skills which were not being covered in sufficient depth. These neglected aspects included assessment frameworks, risk analysis, communication skills, managing conflict and hostility, and working with other professionals. The taskforce also questioned the quality of some tutors and lecturers (SWTF 2009: 18–19).

A recent survey found that 70 per cent of 600 social workers said that NQSWs were entering the profession without sufficient skills and experience to begin practising (Liquid Personnel 2012). This view from professionals has been shared by employers interviewed for this report.

A particular problem has been identified in the way social work degrees mix theory and practice. The Munro review noted a failure among new social workers to align what was taught in the education setting with the realities of contemporary social work practice (Munro 2011: 97). While there is support for social workers in their first year in post in the form of the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE)⁵ starting this year, there is not enough support for practical training while on degree courses.

Low status of the profession

While the general public value the work that social workers do, they do not generally view the profession as having the same status as other public sector jobs such as teaching and medicine. High-profile child social care tragedies have further corroded trust in the profession. In a recent Ipsos MORI survey, 60 per cent of respondents said they would trust social workers to tell the truth. This was similar to trust rates for the police (63 per cent) but considerably lower than for doctors (88 per cent), professors (74 per cent), teachers (81 per cent) and judges (72 per cent) (Ipsos MORI 2011). This is an indication of the public’s dim view of social work, perhaps evidenced by the low proportion of graduates from Russell Group universities starting social work masters courses.

5 For more, see chapter 3

The problems identified above together present a major challenge in the future of social work. The sector faces a perfect storm of local government funding pressures, rising demand and a frontline workforce inconsistently prepared in terms of knowledge and skills. These challenges are not uniform across the country, but there are some local authorities that face very severe pressures. In an attempt to get a clearer picture of the situation in these areas, we invited a selection of local authorities to provide information on their current workforce. We present here one case study from a large metropolitan area.

Box 2: Workforce case study – ‘local authority A’

The children’s social work team has faced a persistent problem finding suitable staff for frontline work. Vacancy rates are currently at 19 per cent, and all of these posts are covered by agency staff. When posts are advertised, the applicants are described as being ‘of variable quality’. Those applicants who have undertaken statutory fieldwork placements on frontline social work teams as part of their training usually do well at interview. However, those who have not had this frontline experience can struggle.

NQSWs joining the team often complain about the content of their degree course. They generally comment on the lack of understanding that academics have about the social work world in practice. Academics are able to teach the theory in abstract but if they have been out of practice for some time they may not be up to date with practice requirements and issues. They cannot, therefore, bring the theory to life and relate to the current social work tasks.

Source: Information submitted by Children’s Services department

Summary

This chapter has outlined the challenges facing some local authorities in delivering an effective social work service. Rising demand for social workers in combination with funding reductions has put the sector under enormous pressure. This has been compounded by problems with the recruitment and training of frontline social workers. Despite a recent trend of more people entering the profession, some councils still face staff shortages. There have also been widespread concerns over the quality of social work degree courses and the calibre of people studying for them – the profession is generally not attractive to top graduates and many degree courses do not provide sufficient practical experience.

3. CURRENT POLICY CONTEXT

The problems facing the social work profession have not gone unnoticed. Over the last few years there have been a number of reviews into these issues. The Social Work Task Force, established in 2009, noted that the quality of recruitment and the training on offer in child protection needed improving. These findings were mirrored by the independent Munro review in 2011, which called for higher-quality training and argued that children's social workers need a mix of high-level skills to perform well. The government largely accepted the findings of these reviews, which represented a recognition that they were keen to find ways to address these problems.

The work of the Social Work Reform Board has also been important in setting out a long view of the changes needed. The reforms suggested in this paper are very much in line with the reform board's 'direction of travel', with a particular focus on children's social work. The work of both the taskforce and the reform board has been important in developing our proposals.

Following these reviews, there have been some changes in the sector. Recently established, The College of Social Work has been developing the professional capabilities framework for social workers, which builds career progression routes within the profession. This will enable frontline social workers to view their job as having a long-term career path.

Another reform has been the introduction of the ASYE programme, which should improve support upon entry into the profession.⁶ This will ensure NQSWs continue their professional development beyond completion of a social work degree (at which point they receive their official certification).

Finally, there has been some experimentation with recruitment into the profession. The 'Step Up to Social Work' programme was created in 2010 to attract people to change careers and retrain for social work. It offers a shorter training programme of 18 months, as opposed to social work degrees, which generally last two years, and has proved popular.

The remainder of this report explores another new way of addressing the problems facing frontline children's social work. It runs with the grain of recent reforms in the profession and so is designed to complement them, adding further improvements in workforce quality and a focus on leadership in social work alongside schemes already in place.

6 For more on the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment, see <http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/social/developing/b00211051/asye>

4. THE CASE FOR CHANGE: LESSONS FROM TEACH FIRST

Chapter 2 set out the challenges facing the social work profession, in particular:

- a lack of high-calibre recruits training for frontline social work
- the low level of prestige associated with the profession
- degree courses offering inadequate practical experience.

The remainder of this report explores how these problems could be tackled by creating a new social enterprise to encourage the recruitment and training of top graduates for social work. It takes as its inspiration the Teach First programme, which was founded in 2002 in response to very similar problems – the low status of the teaching profession and the shortage of high-quality applicants for teacher training places.

Teach First was established as an independent charity to address the recruitment of teachers in disadvantaged schools in England. The programme is highly selective, choosing graduates on the basis of their potential to lead and inspire. While the programme initially targeted recent graduates, it now also recruits people wanting a change of career later in life. Indeed, this year over 10 per cent of people starting the Teach First programme have been out of university for more than five years.

Teach First students complete ‘a short, sharp and tough’ residential training programme of six weeks, after which they are placed in a challenging school. The graduates teach for a fixed time period of two years in the same school, in a manner similar to most employers’ graduate fast-track training schemes. During this time they work with higher education institutions and teachers to continue their training; after successful completion of their first year, they gain a PGCE qualification, making them fully qualified teachers.

Teach First is a two-year programme, and graduates are not committed to remain in teaching after those two years. This is crucial in attracting graduates to the programme, especially those who would not otherwise consider teaching, as they are free to go into other professions. However, contrary to initial concerns that this would lead to low retention rates in the teaching profession, Teach First’s long-term retention rate (those remaining in teaching five years after starting training) is 54 per cent, which is comparable to the 57 per cent retention rate for standard postgraduate training routes (HC Education Committee 2012). It appears Teach First has been successful at attracting people who would not otherwise be working in the teaching profession.

Teach First was designed to build on previous reforms to the teaching profession. From the late 1990s onwards there were a number of programmes to try and make teaching more attractive. In 1998, the Graduate Training Programme was introduced, which allowed teachers to train on the job. In 2000, the Teacher Development Agency launched a new advertising campaign and introduced a ‘golden hello’ payment for teachers in certain subjects. This was followed in 2001 with the government-run Fast Track Teaching programme, which aimed to identify some of the most talented serving teachers and the highest quality new graduates and career changers and to provide them with the support they needed to progress rapidly and become leaders in the profession. Teach First built on the work done by these programmes, drawing on their best practice and learning from their mistakes.

Teach First has been a huge success. It initially placed 160 participants in London secondary schools in 2003, and over the course of its first 10 years has placed 2,520 participants in primary and secondary schools across the country. Ofsted’s review of the programme in 2011 rated the quality of training as Outstanding in all 44 categories,

despite some early concerns from teacher training providers that reducing university-based training to six weeks would compromise quality.

The status of teaching as a profession also seems to have increased since the inception of the programme. In 2002, less than 3 per cent of all Russell Group graduates went on to apply for any sort of teacher qualification course after university. In 2009, Teach First received applications from 8 per cent of Oxbridge graduates alone (HC CFSC 2009), and it is ranked seventh in the *Times* Top 100 Graduate Employers.

The benefits of Teach First have not just accrued to the teaching profession. It has also enabled certain groups – those in the graduate professions – to gain a better understanding of the society they serve. As Nick Pearce has argued:

‘[Teach First’s] success rests not simply on the impact it has on education, but on the lessons it teaches the teachers. Its graduates develop a commitment to state education, an ethos of public service and an awareness of the educational needs and ambitions of low-income students. It therefore performs a broader societal function of schooling elites. Its model should be expanded into new areas of public provision, such as children’s social work, early-years learning and community regeneration.’

Pearce 2012

There are several parallels between the state of teacher recruitment in 2002, when Teach First was launched, and the state of recruitment into children’s social work today.

Table 1
Professional parallels:
teaching in 2002 vs
social work 2012

Teaching in 2002	Social work in 2012
Teaching was experiencing problems with recruitment. In 2000, there were 1,143 vacancies (Hobson et al 2005). There was a shortage of students applying for teacher training in certain subjects, such as science.	Social work is experiencing problems with recruitment. Children’s social work continues to figure on the shortage occupation list. In 2011, there were 2,500 vacancies.
There were pockets of the country facing particular problems recruiting teachers, such as in challenging inner-city London schools.	The shortage of social workers is concentrated in certain local authorities.
Teaching was not considered to be a high-status profession. In 2000, only 2 per cent of Oxbridge students went into teaching after graduation.	Social work is not considered to be a high-status profession. Last year, only 0.18 per cent of Oxbridge graduates went into social work.
There were concerns about the quality of trainees: the pass rate of the PGCE qualification was only 88 per cent and only 59 per cent of new teachers were still in the profession a year after they started (Smithers and Robinson 2003).	There are concerns about the quality of trainees: in 2007, the pass rate of the social work masters degree was only 62 per cent, and turnover among frontline staff is high.
There was a growing acceptance that there should be a wider range of routes into the teaching profession. For example, the Graduate Teacher Programme was launched in 1998 to encourage people to switch to a teaching career and train on the job.	Different routes into the profession have slowly come to be accepted, with a shift to postgraduate rather than undergraduate training and specialist schemes. For example, Step Up to Social Work was launched in 2010 to encourage people to switch career and train on the job.
The government had accepted that there was a problem with teacher recruitment, and had introduced with mixed success a number of reforms, including the ‘golden hello’, a training bursary, and a new, national Fast Track Teaching programme. Teach First was introduced to build on these previous reforms.	Reforms have recently been introduced in social work to improve recruitment, with mixed success. These include the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment for NQSWs, the Step Up to Social Work programme and the launch of The College of Social Work.

This comparison shows that social work currently faces very similar challenges to those which Teach First was designed to address. Teach First addressed these concerns by creating an 'elite entry point' into the profession for graduates, targeted to specific areas of need. It is therefore worth exploring whether a fast-track training programme of a similar kind could be created in the field of children's social work. As box 3 explains, a similar idea is already being piloted in children's welfare services in New York.

Box 3: Children's Corps, New York

In August 2011, a small pilot project was launched in New York, called Children's Corps. This project was based on the premise that welfare services could learn from the successful Teach for America scheme, which recruits top graduates for challenging schools:

'The challenges of creating a qualified and stable child welfare workforce are strikingly similar to those of the education system-attracting candidates for positions, training and retaining high-quality workers, filling a leadership vacuum, and finding ways to improve and alter the public image of the profession.'

CSSP 2009: 3

The programme is a collaboration between Columbia University and the group Fostering Change for Children. It is designed to emulate a number of features from Teach for America: that it targets top graduates, that it is a mission-driven organisation distinct from government, that it provides an alternative route to traditional certification, and that participants are placed on an intensive summer training course before their placement starts. When it was introduced, the scheme faced a degree of resistance from traditional training providers. Nevertheless, the first pilot received 335 applications and 25 of those were selected to participate. The scheme is being repeated.

Source: CSSP 2009

5. TESTING THE PROPOSITION: CAN A FAST-TRACK SCHEME WORK IN CHILDREN'S SOCIAL WORK?

The previous chapter of this report suggested that a fast-track training programme, similar in principle to Teach First, could be created to address some of the challenges facing the recruitment of children's social workers – the remainder of the paper tests this proposition. It is based on interviews and focus groups involving representatives from four key groups – recent graduates, employers, training providers and policymakers – supplemented with a review of the relevant literature. It identifies the features that are required for a fast-track programme to be successful, and the barriers that will need to be overcome to put it into practice.

What would attract top graduates?

For a fast-track scheme to be successful it must appeal to graduates, both recent and those in an existing career. A focus group with recent graduates⁷ and graduate surveys (High Fliers 2012) have revealed five features that are essential to make a programme attractive.

1. It must provide a break from university education and the opportunity to take on real responsibility in a job. While the participants did express interest in working towards further qualifications such as a masters degree, they wanted this to be work-based and linked to a career. This is supported by a national survey, in which graduates ranked 'having genuine responsibility from day one' as one of the most important motivations when applying for a job (ibid: 65). It is also important that the scheme is paid and offers a competitive starting salary.
2. The work must be socially valuable and provide the chance to 'make a difference in the world'. Participants complained that there are few graduate programmes that offer a social mission, apart from Teach First. These motivations are borne out in graduate surveys which show that the elements that job-hunters rated as very important include 'being challenged and stretched on a day-to-day basis' (50 per cent) and 'a job that allows you to give something back to community' (29 per cent) (ibid: 65).
3. It must be nationally recognised with a prestigious reputation. Graduates are prepared to undertake work that is sometimes frustrating and depressing so long as there is prestige associated with the scheme. One of the attractions of Teach First is that it is backed by major corporate recruiters, which makes it different from traditional teacher training courses. The opportunity to progress into other graduate professions on completing the scheme or to receive professional development from these supporters is a key attraction, even if many of the participants do not actually end up leaving the profession.
4. Graduates relish the chance to fulfil leadership roles. This notion of leadership can be broadly conceived and is not limited to taking on management positions, but it does mean having responsibility in their work and leading groups through change. Graduates expressed an interest in being able to set goals, propose their own solutions, collaborate with different groups of people and influence change. This is reflected in the design of Teach First, which includes a leadership development programme for its participants.
5. Graduates are keen to progress to positions of responsibility relatively quickly. They were attracted to short, sharp and intensive training programmes that get them onto the frontline without undue delay. They were not attracted by the idea of a lengthy training course that took more than a year to complete.

⁷ A focus group was held with eight recent graduates who have applied for the Teach First programme this year. All graduated from Russell Group universities.

The focus group participants also identified two key barriers that will have to be overcome if a fast-track programme is to be successfully introduced in social work.

One was the **lack of public understanding about the job that social workers do** – unlike with teaching, where everyone has been to school and so is familiar with the demands and responsibilities of the profession. By contrast, not everyone has come into contact with children's social work, and so a graduate scheme looking to attract people into the field would therefore need to explain and educate the profession to potential applicants. One suggestion for achieving this would be to surprise people with a marketing campaign that listed the varied tasks involved in frontline work and ask 'Could you do it?'

Another barrier to attracting graduates is the **perception of social work itself**. When we asked the graduates to describe the images of social work they used words like 'frustrating', 'depressing', 'gruelling', 'underpaid' and 'scapegoat'. Members of the group suggested that the marketing would need to surprise people into considering social work. When challenged about whether even a good marketing campaign could persuade them to join, they all agreed that if the scheme was sufficiently prestigious and effectively explained the highly skilled, challenging and socially important nature of the work then it could attract people. All but one of the group said that they would have considered applying for a scheme that was like Teach First but focused on children's social work.

Key points

If a fast track scheme is to appeal to graduates it must:

- offer real 'on the job' experience
- have a sense of 'social mission'
- have a prestigious reputation that sets it apart from traditional recruitment
- develop leadership qualities
- place them in positions of responsibility relatively quickly
- educate graduates about what social work involves.

What sort of people should be selected?

Social work is a demanding job that calls for 'a particular mix of analytical skills, insight, common sense, confidence, resilience, empathy and use of authority' (SWTF 2009: 17). It is clear that having a good degree is not enough to become a good social worker – other attributes are also required. Defining the qualities, values and knowledge that makes an outstanding social worker is therefore a crucial step in designing a scheme that recruits and develops the best people for the job.

A number of reviews and academic studies have identified the expertise and attributes that are required to make a good social worker. For example, the Munro review identified the importance of analytical thinking, critical reflection, the use of evidence, the ability to present a case to a wide range of audiences, communication skills and emotional intelligence, in addition to core knowledge of child development and law (Munro 2011).

A recurring message from social workers in this study has been the specific demand for new social workers who have 'life experience'. While this quality should be spotted in any application process, it is difficult to assess. Indeed, it is often used as a proxy to describe new social workers who have the right values, empathy and emotional maturity.

It should also be accepted that bringing in new talent at the beginning of the workforce supply chain is necessary to growing experienced practitioners. As a result of these two points together, we recommend that career switchers as well as new graduates who meet the demanding requirements should be targeted for the programme.

Indeed, employers and policymakers stressed that a fast-track programme should not just be open to recent graduates but also to those wanting a change of career. The experience gained in a different career can be invaluable to new recruits in social work. This is consistent with the current Step Up to Social Work programme, which has successfully targeted career switchers as potential applicants. It is also consistent with the Teach First programme, which originally targeted people leaving university but has since broadened its appeal. Last year, only 40 per cent of the Teach First intake came straight from university: 35 per cent had been out of university for 1–2 years, 14 per cent were young professionals who had been out of university for 2–5 years, and 11 per cent could be classed as ‘career switchers’ who graduated at least five years before.⁸

In order to more fully understand which sort of people should be selected for a fast-track programme, we conducted a content analysis of key studies into what makes an effective social worker.⁹ The results suggest that any programme should select people for the following 10 qualities:

1. Compassionate: respectful of people and able to empathise
2. Motivated: committed to the ‘mission’ of social work
3. Resilient: can pursue goals even in challenging circumstances
4. Confident: able to challenge and use authority
5. Reflective: able to make judgments
6. Analytical: able to assess complex situations and information
7. Leadership skills: can influence others to act
8. Collaborative: able to work in teams and across agencies
9. Knowledge: able to learn specialist areas such as law and child development
10. Communication: able to explain and justify decisions to a range of audiences

Many of these qualities are found among graduates, but academic achievement on its own is not sufficient to screen participants for a fast-track programme. Many lecturers and employers stressed this point in interviews and focus groups. The selection process will therefore need to assess applicants against these broader criteria. This would be done through a rigorous assessment centre, as is common in many graduate recruitment schemes, including Step Up to Social Work.

Key points

The selection process for a fast-track programme should:

- target top graduates and suitable career switchers
- include a much wider range of assessment criteria than having a degree, to screen for appropriate values and qualities such as confidence, resilience, empathy, motivation, leadership skills and communication skills.

⁸ Teach First data

⁹ This included the Munro review (Munro 2011), the Professional Capabilities Framework created by The College of Social Work (TCSW 2012), the government’s Children and Young People’s Workforce Strategy (DCSF 2008), the statement of skills developed for the Step Up to Social Work programme (Penna 2011), the report of the Social Work Task Force (2009), and a meta-analysis of articles on leadership in social work conducted by Holsoko (2009).

What would attract employers to the programme?

For a fast-track programme to be successful, it must be attractive to employers, as their buy-in will be essential in order to secure enough high-quality work-based training placements. The employers we interviewed for our research generally recognised the problems with the quality of new recruits to the profession, and were often critical of the training provided by universities. As one director of children's services told us: 'though there are high application rates for vacancies, the quality isn't always guaranteed and the overall quality of our workforce isn't what we want it to be'.

As a result of these concerns, the employers we interviewed were generally supportive of the idea of a fast-track programme designed to bring high-potential graduates into social work. The main benefits to employers were the opportunities to raise the prestige of the profession, recruit highly skilled members of staff and develop future leaders in the field.

Employers stressed their preference for a programme through which a new recruit was placed in the same local authority for the duration of their training. This would allow employers to develop a proper relationship with their recruit. It would also enable the new recruit to develop a detailed understanding of the service team's processes and approach, which would ensure they could take on greater responsibilities over the course of their training – if they were allowed or required to move between services, then they would have to constantly learn new processes.

Despite this support, employers did raise a number of concerns. First, they did not want to invest in training a new recruit for two years, only for them to move on at the end of the programme. A fast-track programme should therefore be designed to encourage the retention of staff in frontline posts, for example by offering clear progression routes into leadership roles. This could provide employers with a cohort of staff that could be nurtured to take on middle and senior leadership positions, where there are currently serious recruitment difficulties.

There is also a role here to educate employers about the success Teach First has had in retaining its participants in the profession. It is also worth noting some of the figures about the current turnover of first-year graduates employed in social work: 'a quarter expect to start looking for another job within the next two years, and around one in 10 are already looking' (Sharpe et al 2011: 9).

Second, there would have to be a sound financial case for employers to take part. The employers we spoke to were not keen to pay a salary for trainees, especially as new staff are not able to take on statutory cases. However, they would be prepared to share the cost, for example by paying the salary for a participant in the second year of a fast-track programme, once they had gained sufficient experience and certification to contribute more to the work of the team. Employers have said they were prepared to make investments in increasing the future quality of frontline teams, provided these costs were shared.

Key points

To attract employers, a fast-track programme should:

- place new recruits in the same local authority for the duration of their programme
- be designed to ensure high retention rates, for example by linking a trainee role with progression routes into leadership positions
- provide financial support for employers, for example by sharing the salary costs of participants.

What should be the balance between work-based and university-based learning?

As noted in chapter 2, university courses in social work have been criticised in recent years. The Munro review, in particular, criticised the inconsistent content, quality and outcomes of university courses, and the inability of new social workers to link what was taught on their course with the realities of social work in practice (Munro 2011: 97). These concerns were echoed by many of the employers we interviewed for our research. This suggests that a training programme should involve more frontline practical experience, something that was also supported by our research with graduates, who are keen to be given real 'on the job' responsibility.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, this view was not always shared by university lecturers. They argued that academic rigour and an understanding of social work theory cannot be compromised (a similar view was expressed by teacher training providers in 2002 when Teach First was proposed) despite little consistency in the content of courses at present. They also raised concerns about the quality of placements that employers can provide for new recruits. This problem was acknowledged by some of the employers we spoke to, who accepted they often do not have the time and resources to give adequate support to students on placements. This suggests that social work teams need to create capacity to support any on-the-job training.

There will inevitably be conflicting views among employers, university lecturers and graduates about the design and content of a fast-track programme that is predominantly work-based. Despite these differences, in our interviews and focus groups it was possible to build consensus around three key principles for designing such a scheme.

1. The scheme must 'blend' university education and on-the-job training. This will allow a continuous cycle of academic theory-based learning, practical application, and reflection and evaluation. One way to achieve this could be through setting students academic tasks related to their day-to-day work. This sort of problem-based learning would allow participants to gain an understanding of core knowledge and theory while practising skills such as interviewing and drafting court papers. This is the approach adopted by Teach First, where participants complete university assignments that are related to their day job in schools, as a core part of their training.
2. There must be a genuine partnership between employers and universities. It is essential that employers are committed to the programme and take joint ownership with a university mentor for designing, delivering and evaluating the training on offer. This will mean designing a scheme that allows maximum opportunity for learning and development. These concerns will be largely addressed by having participants embedded in the frontline teams from the start of the programme. There will also be an inbuilt incentive for the employer and training provider to fully develop the new social worker. For example, employers will need to ensure that participants are given sufficient time for supervisions, reflection and development.
3. Rigorous standards and certification must be maintained. It is important that any fast-track programme meets the standards set by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) and leads to a nationally recognised certificate, awarded by established universities. The planning of a training scheme must raise the game of social work training and not simply meet minimum standards. This would ensure that the participants gain a recognised and useful qualification. It would also help employers by guaranteeing the quality of new recruits.

A number of barriers will need to be overcome to ensure a work-based training model is effective. A key barrier is universities' willingness to change their social work courses in a way that is appropriate to this model of training. They will need to change the way they deliver courses, so that participants can complete their learning alongside their day-to-day work in frontline teams.

As part of our research, we conducted a workshop with representatives from four leading university social work departments. Despite some initial scepticism, they were able to design the key features of a programme that 'blended' work-based learning and academic study. Appendix B of this report outlines how this programme might look, covering the use of online tutorials, holiday assignments, written reflections on day-to-day practice, and a demanding routine for participants.

Another challenge will be whether employers have the capacity to support and develop their new recruits. Many employers admitted that they are not good at doing this with students at present. This will require a cultural change across social work teams, as one manager told us: 'A barrier is the capacity in front line teams to develop people but this is something that needs to change in the authority – we need to be better at this.'

Key points

A fast-track training programme should have the following features:

- primarily work-based learning that is blended with university education – this can be achieved by setting students academic tasks that are related to their day-to-day work, to be completed alongside their job
- a genuine partnership between employers and university lecturers, who both take responsibility for the development of new recruits
- an excellent programme resulting in a nationally recognised certificate, awarded by a higher education institution and regulated by the HCPC.

What should be the length and focus of the programme?

Perhaps the greatest disagreement among the people we interviewed was over how long a fast-track programme should take to certify participants to practise as qualified social workers. Our research into graduate motivations showed that they are keen to be given frontline responsibilities at an early stage. This supports a model akin to Teach First, where participants take part in an intensive 'summer school' before being placed in a real working environment for a year. They are then awarded a PGCE qualification before continuing in their placement school for a second year. Our focus group with recent graduates clearly showed that they valued this fast-track approach and would be put off by a programme in social work that took longer to complete.

On the other hand, some of the university lecturers we interviewed questioned how quickly social work training could be delivered. The masters degree course in social work takes two years to complete, although recently the Step Up to Social Work programme adapted this to be delivered in 18 months. Some lecturers and employers argued that a shorter training scheme might compromise quality. Others were more concerned that a 12-month programme would add pressure to their current workload; one lecturer, for example, complained that 'academic staff would not have the summer to do their research if teaching these participants.'

While there was resistance to a 12-month programme in some quarters, there was recognition among a small number of university staff that training could be tailored to a

year-long programme, provided that participants committed to long hours, including evening and weekend sessions. By recruiting candidates who have sought-after attributes and competencies, focusing the training on knowledge and skills for frontline children's social work practice, and raising the quality of training provision, it is possible and preferable to design a programme that certifies participants as social workers after 12 months.

The certification to practice would come in the form of a postgraduate diploma that meets the HCPC standards of proficiency (the HCPC have confirmed that this could be done) and The College of Social Work's expectations of training. This would be done on the basis that the scheme would be recruiting outstanding graduate candidates. This would then be supplemented with ongoing training in year two (the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment) that could include credits towards achieving a masters degree with a focus on leadership in social work. One university has indicated already that they would be prepared to run a 12-month training scheme.

Key points

A fast-track programme should:

- start with an intensive national summer school to give participants initial training and help generate an ethos for the programme
- demand a two-year commitment – the first year would lead to a qualification, to be supplemented with further learning in the second year
- focus on the field of frontline children's social work, with specialist training in practice skills.

How would this programme fit with other changes to the profession?

Chapter 3 of this paper outlined the current policy context for children's social work. It gave details of recent reforms, including the creation of clearer career paths in social work, the creation of an Assessed and Supported Year in Employment to help NQSWs transition into the workplace, and the launch of the Step Up to Social Work programme.

A new fast-track programme could build on these positive reforms. For example, clearer career paths could help to attract and retain graduates on a fast-track programme, as they could see and take opportunities to progress. Similarly, a work-based training programme would go with the grain of the ASYE, which acknowledges the need for greater support for new recruits. Indeed, the second year of a fast-track scheme could form part of the ASYE.

A fast-track programme could also build on the success of the Step Up to Social Work programme. This programme was launched in 2010 and the first cohort completed their training this spring. The programme is focused on people who want to switch careers into social work, and allows them to complete their masters course in the workplace. Employers group together to commission a university to provide the training and are therefore able to ensure that trainees are 'fit for practice'. The programme was originally funded by central government via the Children's Workforce Development Council, and future funding is currently under review. While Step Up to Social Work has been successful at attracting high-quality new recruits into the profession, it has struggled to change the perception of social work itself. Many of the applicants to Step Up were planning careers in social work already and picked Step Up for financial reasons, and it has not made in-roads in terms of graduate recruitment in the way that Teach First has. This is partly because it is not a dedicated organisation. Step Up does not have any staff or institutional

support behind it, and is therefore contingent on the commitment of individual employers and higher education institutions in different areas. Some of these are successful, but there is significant national variation in the quality of the programme.

We propose that a scheme with the ambition of making social work a career of choice and creating catalytic improvements for vulnerable children needs to have a dedicated and mission-driven organisation behind it. A social enterprise model, similar to the one underpinning Teach First, is the best way of guaranteeing this. This charity would be able to implement a large-scale recruitment scheme, commission and quality-assure a national training programme, and help to establish a culture of leadership in the profession. Crucially, a third sector model provides the opportunity to create a movement of social work leaders who are dedicated to tackling social disadvantage. This is essential for a programme that wants to achieve catalytic change in the profession.

Key points

A fast track programme should:

- incorporate the ASYE
- be linked to career progression routes, so participants are incentivised to remain in social work on completion of the programme
- be run by a dedicated social enterprise, giving the programme an organisation and staff to guarantee that it is mission-driven, able to oversee quality on a national scale and a champion for the profession.

An emphasis on social work as leadership

As well as being an essential, if undervalued, quality in frontline children's social work, leadership could be a theme that attracts graduates and employers to a fast-track programme. Conceiving of social work as a leadership role is an important aspect of any training programme: social workers are required to lead service-users out of crises (Holsoko 2009) and often to lead a range of multi-agency professionals to agree on a plan of action which is in the best interests of children. Establishing and sharing a vision, influencing and collaborating with others, and creating positive change are part of the day-to-day work of social workers. We should not be afraid to call it leadership.

It is also an attractive attribute to promote for employers. Many social workers will rise to positions of leadership within social work organisations (Stoesz 1997) and therefore they need the right attributes to be successful. A number of the employers interviewed for this report stressed the need to bring new social workers into the supply chain who were suitable for leadership positions, given the vacuum at this level that currently exists in many authorities. Annie Hudson, a prominent director of children's services in Bristol, has argued that the leadership experience in frontline practice is transferable to leading organisations:

'My personal career experiences, together with observations of colleagues over the years, has demonstrated to me that many of the skills that you utilise as a social worker prove to be extremely transferable to leadership in broader contexts. Specifically, some of the skills and aptitudes are excellent communication skills (made up of listening, analysing and engaging), resilience and managing emotions, and working across professional boundaries to achieve change.'

In interview, 2012

In order to fulfil the longer-term aims of this programme it is important to find ways of fostering a movement of social workers who aim to lead change. The scheme could act as a catalyst for long-term change in the profession, and as a way of creating a network of high-achievers who could tackle social disadvantage well beyond the two-year commitment. Leadership should be an explicit and central component of any new fast-track scheme.

Key points

The fast-track scheme must:

- assess from the outset the ability of participants to lead
- explicitly develop transferable skills and knowledge that allow participants to lead change with the support of private and third sector partners
- provide clear leadership opportunities within children's social work after the two-year commitment is fulfilled
- design an organisation that sustains a network of leaders who can bring about catalytic change.

6. FRONTLINE: A MODEL FOR A FAST-TRACK PROGRAMME IN CHILDREN'S SOCIAL WORK

This report has presented the results of an examination into the feasibility of creating a fast-track graduate recruitment programme for frontline children's social work. It has identified the core elements that are needed for such a programme to be successful, and a number of barriers that need to be overcome. As a result, it is now possible to sketch out the key design features of a successful fast-track programme.

Box 4: Frontline: Change lives through social work

- Frontline will be an independent social enterprise with a simple mission: to attract the best people into one of Britain's toughest professions. It will create an elite route into frontline children's social work so that some of the most vulnerable people get the best care and protection.
- Frontline will be a two-year training scheme for graduates – both those who have left university recently and those wanting to switch career later in life. Applicants will complete a rigorous recruitment process that includes high academic entry requirements and a thorough assessment centre to test a wide range of competencies, such as confidence, empathy, communication skills, resilience and motivation.
- Successful applicants will attend an intensive summer school to receive initial training and prepare them for the world of social work. The summer school will enable the programme to build a unique ethos and culture.
- On completion of the summer school, participants will be placed with a local authority frontline team. They will complete a work-based training programme tailored towards children's social work practice. The programme will focus on practice skills, analytical thinking, legal knowledge and child development. Training will be of a high quality, delivered on the job, and will be supplemented with academic study. The training will be delivered in partnership between a university and the employer.
- After this intensive 12-month training scheme, participants will receive certification to practise. This will be followed by work in year two to achieve a Masters in Leadership in Social Work.
- The cost of the programme will be shared between the social enterprise and employers. Frontline will pay the wages in the first year while the graduate is still in training. The local authority will pay the wages in the second year, at which point the graduate is certified to practise and can contribute fully. By the end of the first 12 months, participants will have been on placement in a frontline team in the local authority and will therefore be able to 'hit the ground running' in year two (their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment).
- Upon completion of the programme, participants would be incentivised to remain in social work through established career progression routes. However, they would be free to leave the profession if they wished, confident that they could take their skills and understanding of society with them into the world.
- Frontline would be run as a social enterprise, independent from government and employers. It would recruit top graduates, commission and quality-assure the training, and develop a network of social work champions across the profession. It would develop formal relationships with other charities and corporate supporters. The long-term objective would be to build a movement of social work leaders who could tackle social disadvantage.

7. CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

Social work is a vital role which – when done well – can help to protect and secure the lives of the most vulnerable children in society. The job of a frontline children’s social worker is a highly demanding one, requiring people with an extraordinary mix of specialist knowledge, analytical skills, authority, compassion and the ability to communicate with a wide range of audiences. An effective social work service cannot be created without a high-quality frontline workforce. In short, we cannot adequately protect children and challenge social disadvantage in Britain without the best and the brightest joining the profession.

Despite the importance of the workforce, social work has historically struggled to recruit and train high-calibre staff. This problem has been compounded in recent years by an increase in case referrals and requirements following high-profile tragedies, such as the death of ‘Baby P’. In particular, there are three problems that need to be addressed: a lack of high-calibre recruits training for frontline social work; the low level of prestige associated with the profession; and degree courses that offer inadequate training.

This paper has argued that a graduate fast-track programme, run by a dedicated social enterprise, could help to address these problems. Drawing on the success of Teach First, the programme would provide work-based training for high-potential new recruits. This organisation – Frontline – would help to attract the best people into one of Britain’s toughest professions and, in the long term, create a movement to challenge social disadvantage.

This paper makes a case for change to the profession and the government. It is not inevitable that social work remains one of Britain’s least appealing careers, when in fact it is one of the most demanding and important. A scheme like this could transform perceptions of social work and contribute to the huge task of tackling social disadvantage in Britain.

Next steps

The next stage in our work will be to outline in detail the practical elements of this scheme. We will be drawing up more detailed plans for the content and composition of the training programme, the design of the Frontline social enterprise, and the cost involved in creating the scheme. We would welcome any feedback on this proposal as we take this forward.

Feedback

If you would like to comment on the proposals set out in this paper, please contact the author, Josh MacAlister, at j.macalister@ippr.org

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APPENDIX A: THE STEERING GROUP

This group of people agreed to offer advice and support for the project. They reflect the different interest groups involved in children's social work, the acknowledgment of the problem, and the initial appetite for this solution.

Lord Adonis (chair)

Andrew has chaired the steering group and given ongoing support for this project since an early stage in 2010.

Andrew has formerly served as minister for schools, head of the Number 10 policy unit under Tony Blair, and senior Number 10 adviser on education, public services and constitutional reform. Andrew pioneered many of the key public service reforms of the Blair/Brown Labour governments. Within education, as adviser and then minister, he developed the academy programme. He also helped to pioneer the Teach First scheme that provides direct lessons for any pilots resulting from this study.

Dr Mary Baginsky, Social Work Workforce Team, Department for Education

Mary has worked in academic, public, voluntary, independent and private sectors as a researcher and senior manager. Most of her career has been spent in research and evaluation, specifically in law, education and social work.

While working at NSPCC, her work provided the evidence that underpinned the society's education programme. While working at CWDC, she was seconded to support the work of the Social Work Task Force, where she led the social workers' workload survey, conducted in collaboration with King's College, University of London. She is currently working at the Department for Education.

Dame Lorna Boreland-Kelly, Social Work Academy, children's services, Croydon

Dame Lorna is on the steering group representing The College of Social Work. Currently, Dame Lorna is a strategic advisor and head of the Social Work Academy, Children, Families and Learning service at Croydon council, in which role she is responsible for developing training, recruitment processes and the professional development of social work staff. Among other College responsibilities, Dame Lorna chairs The College of Social Work's professional capabilities framework advisory implementation group.

In 1998, Dame Lorna was recognised in the Queen's birthday honours list, as a dame of the British empire. Other significant awards include the Network for Black Professionals' 2008 Award for Leadership in Race Equality, and the Federation of Black Women Business Owners' 2004 award for lifetime's work in the spheres of education and child protection. In 2010, she received the Peter Hayward-Brewer special recognition award from Croydon council for her work in setting up the Social Work Academy and developing the recruitment strategy, pulling together a targeted approach to training which has benefited the department.

Maggie Challis, education consultant

Maggie's current project is to set up the quality assurance infrastructure for continued professional development for The College of Social Work.

Maggie's background is in higher education, adult learning, and professional development. Much of this has involved working with professionals to develop their teaching and assessment skills. She was largely responsible for the early developments around portfolio-based learning and assessment for general practitioners and paediatricians. Maggie was also associate director at Foundation Degree Forward, which was set up to lead developments around employer-led higher education qualifications.

Chris Hogan, assistant director of children's services, Hounslow

Chris Hogan is the assistant director of children services and lifelong learning in the London Borough of Hounslow, and in her career has managed and lead on the full range of specialist services, including safeguarding, special educational needs, children in care and youth offending.

Chris is the lead for Step Up to Social Work programme on the West London Alliance (a group of eight local authorities) Social Work Development Board. She has been instrumental in making Step Up to Social Work a successful programme within the alliance. In May 2012, 31 graduates from this programme started social work posts across the alliance in frontline teams, and there are a further 26 trainees in the alliance's current programme.

Chris brings considerable experience in dealing with workforce issues and partnerships with higher education institutions to the steering group. Chris was also the lead on the higher education workstream of the West London Social Work Project. Chris continues to oversee the work of the West London Placement Coordinators Network and champions partnerships with higher education institutions within the alliance.

Julian Le Grand, professor of social policy, London School of Economics and Political Science

Julian has been the Richard Titmuss professor of social policy at LSE since 1993. From 2003 to 2005, he was seconded to Number 10 as senior policy adviser to the prime minister.

He is currently chairman of Health England, the national reference group for health and wellbeing for the Department of Health. In 2007, he was chairman of the Social Work Practices Working Group for the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

Julian is the author, co-author or editor of eighteen books, and has written more than 100 refereed journal articles and book chapters on economics, philosophy and public policy. He was one of *Prospect* magazine's 100 top British public intellectuals, and one of the ESRC's 10 Heroes of Dissemination.

Bridget Robb, acting chief executive, British Association of Social Workers (BASW)

Bridget is a registered social worker and acting chief executive of the British Association of Social Workers. Her career includes experience as a social worker in Nottinghamshire and Oxfordshire county councils, where her interest in education led her to becoming training manager. She had also been a lecturer at Coventry Polytechnic and head of the social work department at Oxford Brookes University.

Bridget has been a member of BASW throughout her professional career, representing them on England and UK committees and boards concerning social work education and training issues. She was a member of the Social Work Task Force in England.

Steve Titcombe, former director of children's services

Steve's career in social work spans 37 years working in a number of local authority children's services departments. He has experience at practitioner, operational manager and strategic leadership levels. As a service director of children's social care for many years, the recruitment and retention of effective social workers was a continuing challenge.

He has been involved in a diverse range of working groups. Steve has headed up regional initiatives to promote improved outcomes for children and young people. He led on the local safeguarding children agenda as a service director. Since retirement in 2010, he has undertaken independent work on social work reforms.

APPENDIX B: DESIGNING THE LEARNING PROGRAMME

This following document was the result of a workshop with representatives from four leading university social work departments, held over the summer of 2012. It outlines the key principles and design features of a fast-track programme. It is a useful guide for policymakers as to where consensus can be found over the design of a fast-track programme.

Design of 'Frontline' social work course

The programme designed to prepare participants for frontline children's social work posts needs to aim for excellence, learn from the best practice that exists and use imaginative and creative forms of delivery. The design of this training programme is an opportunity to test existing assumptions about social work education and offer something that prepares exceptional graduates to be outstanding social workers.

The overview below has been developed in consultation with a number of higher education institutions and provides an initial framework for how the training for Frontline participants might be delivered.

Approaches and principles

- **Partnership:** It is essential that employers and training providers jointly design, deliver and evaluate the teaching and learning of participants. This will mean that there is a sophisticated programme designed to allow maximum learning opportunities on placement and when undertaking university work.
- **Blended learning:** The programme will be underpinned by a 'blended learning' approach that sees placement and university-based learning running in tandem. This should be designed to allow a continuous cycle of academic theory-based learning, practical application, and reflection and evaluation. Theory and practice should be seen as mutually dependent.
- **Responsibility:** There will need to be high expectations placed on participants, universities and employers. In particular, the programme will demand that participants are highly motivated, honest about their areas of development, and well organised. An ethos of independent learning and curiosity will need to be developed among participants so they can maximise their learning opportunities.

Expectations of universities

The overall expectations of the role of universities will be to offer excellent, consistent, rigorous and in-depth learning for participants. Below are some of the features that will help achieve this:

- **Innovation:** In order to meet the time pressures and as a way of enhancing learning opportunities, universities should make full use of distance learning, available technologies and group learning. The course should be structured in an imaginative way to promote integrated learning between practice and academic work, and as a way of completing the certification within 12 months. There should be openness to the value that external experts can provide in supporting the education.
- **Problem-based learning:** This method of teaching should be central to the programme as a way of allowing participants to develop and demonstrate key practice skills, such as interviewing and drafting court papers. It should also be used as a way of developing key knowledge about the interrelationship between issues and different agencies in working with families.

- **Blended learning:** Ensuring that different learning opportunities are exploited is as important as designing a programme that fully blends academic learning with work-based experiences. This could include the use of social media, networks of participants sharing experiences from different employing authorities, direct observation of participant practice, and the direct input of professionals into the training scheme. All learning should be directly and regularly linked to work in the field.

Expectations of employers

- **Ownership in training participants:** It is essential that employers are invested in the programme and take joint ownership with the educating university. This should mean regular communication between employers and training providers, and joint involvement in the design, delivery and evaluation of the course. The relationship is an equal partnership.
- **The role of practice educators:** The scheme will see a central role played by the practice educator. This role should be undertaken by an excellent, qualified, expert practitioner who has protected time available to mentor the participant and offer professional wisdom to the programme as a whole. This could be an opportunity for someone in a frontline children's social work team to work towards the professional educator outcomes as part of the new professional capabilities framework (PCF). This would give the programme even wider scope in terms of professionalising the work of social workers.
- **Conditions for participants:** There should be a clear and universal partnership agreement between Frontline, the universities and employers to include:
 - protected time for reflection and learning
 - regular supervision and mentoring meetings with the practice educator
 - agreed times away from practice for university-based training and other learning reduced and protected workload
 - clear guidance about roles that participants can complete during the first year of the programme.

Expectations of participants

- **Ethos of independent learners:** At the recruitment stage, participants will need to demonstrate the motivation, independence and curiosity to take ownership of their own learning. This will be established at the start of the programme through a Frontline institute and reaffirmed throughout.
- **Resilience for demanding course:** There will be clear expectations that this route is not suitable for everyone. It will be incredibly fast-paced and demanding. It will require resilience and ongoing motivation from participants, as well as a high level of academic ability. As well as time in practice, participants will potentially have regular evening and weekend lectures, and they will need to organise their own learning.
- **Ability to seek support:** It will be essential that participants have the humility to seek support throughout the scheme so that they can get the most from it, and the skills to recognise when such support is needed. While there will be a focus on quality and leadership in the scheme, it will be important for participants to understand that they must seek help when needed.

Structure

- **Certification in 12 months:** The aim of the training should be to certify participants to practise within 12 months. The drivers for this include needing to attract high-

calibre entrants with a challenging fast-track option and the need of employers to have well trained and highly capable new professionals on the frontline of practice. These 12 months of training should be awarded with a postgraduate diploma (120 credits) in social work that is recognised by the regulator as meeting the standards of proficiency.

- **A two-year programme of development:** The diploma credits should be taken into the second year to allow participants to complete a masters degree. This could be an opportunity to further develop leadership skills in the programme and it should have a meaningful link to the new Assessed and Supported Year in Employment. This could also offer an opportunity for external partners to support the scheme, for example through a leadership development programme involving private sector backers.
- **A national cohort:** The programme should be designed around the mission of Frontline and should make a deliberate effort to create a community within the cohort. This should involve national aspects to the training provided.