

THE COLLEGE OF  
**SOCIAL WORK**

# Speak Up for Social Work

A Profession of Principles





*“The College of Social Work will raise standards by providing social workers with professional leadership, advice, and a clear voice in public and media debates.”*

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# Introduction

This report launches The College of Social Work's first campaign. We are calling it "*Speak Up for Social Work*" because that's precisely what social workers themselves have done in these pages and what The College will do in the future.

The College of Social Work is a new organisation set up to provide leadership to a profession much criticised for its failings, but whose undoubted achievements often go unrecognised.

We are an independent college, established on the recommendation of the Social Work Task Force with a view to driving up standards in a profession widely thought to have lost its way following the Baby P tragedy.

The College of Social Work is a membership organisation for social workers, and is being developed and led by social workers. We will provide social workers with professional leadership, advice and resources for raising standards, and a voice in public and media debates.

Make no mistake, social workers want to **talk to the media** and **be heard by government**.

In this report we set out what our Prospective Members have told us they want The College to stand for. We find out what social workers feel about their jobs and set out what our Prospective Members want us to do. We are here to speak up for social workers' aspirations and achievements.

## Our Prospective Members expect...

- ✓ **Better supervision:** Social workers cannot do their jobs well unless they receive regular supervision from trained supervisors, with whom they discuss and critically reflect on complex decisions crucial to the future of people who use services.  
*Prospective Members expect every employer to offer high standards of supervision.*
- ✓ **Manageable workloads:** Social workers whose caseloads are too high may perform poorly in their jobs, frequently have low morale, and often suffer from poor health.  
*Prospective Members expect every employer to have a clear policy of limiting social workers' caseloads to manageable levels so that they can achieve excellence in their jobs.*
- ✓ **Professional development:** Social workers need continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities to deepen their knowledge, skills and understanding throughout their careers. These opportunities have often been lacking, so we will introduce a new national framework for CPD.  
*Prospective Members expect every employer to provide social workers with excellent opportunities for professional development and will encourage every social worker to take full advantage of them.*

- ✓ **Raising standards:** Social workers who strive for the highest standards in front-line practice often move quickly into management. A national career framework is being developed to reward good social workers for staying on the front-line.  
*Prospective Members expect good social workers to be encouraged to stay in practice throughout their careers, supported by a Professional Capabilities Framework with which The College will encourage the highest achievement at every stage.*
- ✓ **Professional status:** Social workers are often overlooked by government, underestimated by other professionals, and criticised in the media. We are working with our Prospective Members to create a powerful voice for social work, which will be heard by government and the media.  
*Prospective Members expect the professional status of social work to rise as standards improve. The College will give social work a far more influential voice.*
- ✓ **Reducing bureaucracy:** Social workers have to spend too much time at their computers filling in forms stipulated by government guidance.  
*Prospective Members expect social workers to be freed from unnecessary red tape so that they can spend more time in face-to-face work with the people they are there to support.*
- ✓ **Person-centred social work:** Many social workers see person-centred care and support, in which people have choice and control over the services they receive, as the right way forward.  
*Prospective Members expect qualified social workers to have a major role in the implementation of “personalisation”, which the Government wants to become the norm in adult social care.*
- ✓ **Child protection:** Social workers recognise that overall standards of practice have to improve.  
*Prospective Members expect that social workers will be supported by the Government and employers to implement relevant findings of the Munro Review on the future of child protection.*
- ✓ **Financial cutbacks:** Excellent social workers are vital to the well-being of local communities as the economy falters and demand for services rises.  
*Prospective Members expect employers to continue to invest in front-line services and not allow the cuts to undermine the conditions of good social work.*
- ✓ **Social work education:** All social workers are required to complete a social work degree, but it is recognised that standards in higher education, the academic potential of students, and the quality of practice placements need to improve.  
*Prospective Members expect universities and employers to raise education standards and we will work with them to achieve this aim.*

## We are the modern alternative

Chris Russell, *DipSW*

Social Worker, Worcestershire County Council

*Prospective Member of The College of Social Work;  
Registered with the General Social Care Council*



### My priorities for social work

- ✓ **Build a recognised national voice for the profession to speak out on social work issues.**
- ✓ **Greater emphasis on the practical skills required by social workers, in particular the ability to advise on benefits and financial matters.**
- ✓ **Highlight the strong, ethical foundation on which social work is based.**

“ Social work is in an ideal position to offer a meaningful and modern alternative to the cynical and jaded worldview that exists around us.

We live in a world where unethical behaviour is constantly being exposed within financial institutions, politics and the media, where different parts of our lives are being franchised out to offshore call centres and so on. Social work is one of the few professions left that is based on strong ethical core values that are actually designed to add value to people's lives. I think that is where we should be trying to carve our niche. It is something that the public could really get its teeth into.

As a social worker in adult services, I spend my time conducting reviews of people who are using our services. I enjoy it a lot because I get to meet a really diverse range of people in all sorts of situations, facing up to all sorts of challenges in all sorts of different ways. I find it a very fulfilling job.

Personalisation is a very good way of working, and the person-centred practice on which it is based has always been an important part of social work. The difficulty in the current financial situation is that the ability to be imaginative is more limited than when personalisation was first introduced.

There's no doubt that money is tight, but I think we can get too hung up on the idea that personalisation is just about direct payments and individual budgets. Personalisation is about genuinely working with the person, finding out what is important for them and what they want. So while there may be limitations on the financial side I think there is still an awful lot of room to manoeuvre in terms of really getting personalisation going. I think social workers are in an ideal position to be able to do that because they have always worked in a person-centred way. The success of personalisation may depend on us working with colleagues from other disciplines such as the health service and housing and helping them to work in that way too.

One area of our work that could be improved is in the practical skills we offer within personalisation. We need to get a much better understanding of how the benefits system works so that we can help people maximise their income and make a more practical difference to their lives. Financial matters are sadly neglected within current social work training. But if social workers don't have a real understanding of the nuts and bolts of the benefits system and the various allowances that are available, then I think we are selling ourselves and our clients short. ”

# Building a positive future for social work

We wanted to gain a clearer picture of how social workers feel about their jobs so that we can begin to work with our Prospective Members and with employers to raise standards.

In April 2011, we conducted some qualitative research in partnership with Community Care in order to:

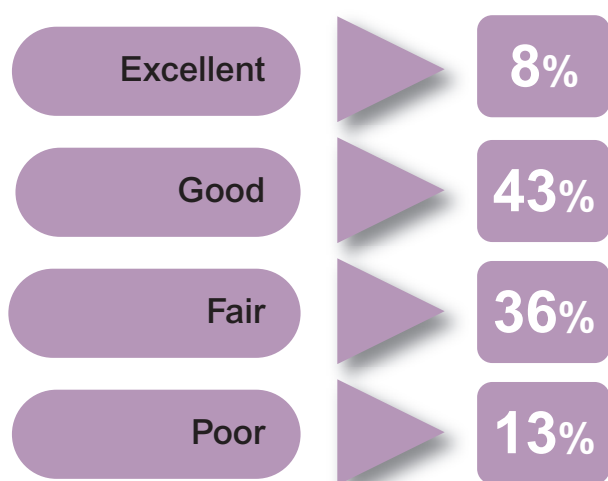
- gain a better understanding of social workers' current attitudes towards their profession
- find out how social workers feel about their employers and the level of support that they are currently receiving
- measure how workloads have changed over time.

While our research revealed significant levels of satisfaction with employers and work conditions, it also flags up appreciable concern about supervision, caseloads and social workers' ability to manage as the financial cutbacks begin to bite.

275 respondents participated in the research. 66 per cent of respondents were employed by local authorities.

## Supporting employers

51 per cent of social workers surveyed rate their organisation as either good or excellent.

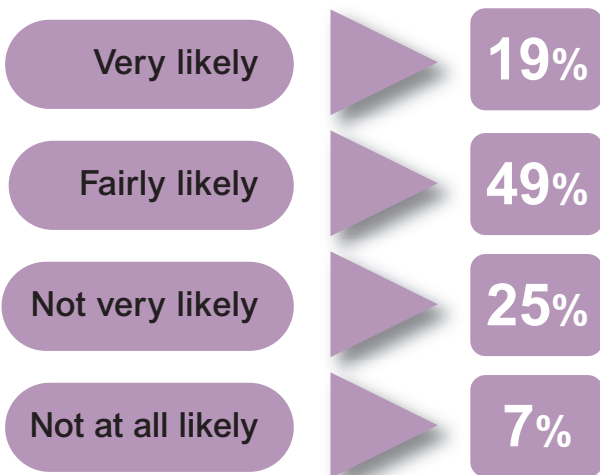


The majority of employers are already supporting social workers to deliver high quality services to people who use services. As part of our ongoing work to raise standards of excellence, we will continue to work closely with social workers and their employers to ensure that they are creating the right conditions for good social work, enabling social workers to reach the highest standards of practice.

What is your overall opinion of the company/organisation that you are currently working for?



68 per cent of social workers said that they are fairly likely or very likely to recommend their current employer to others.



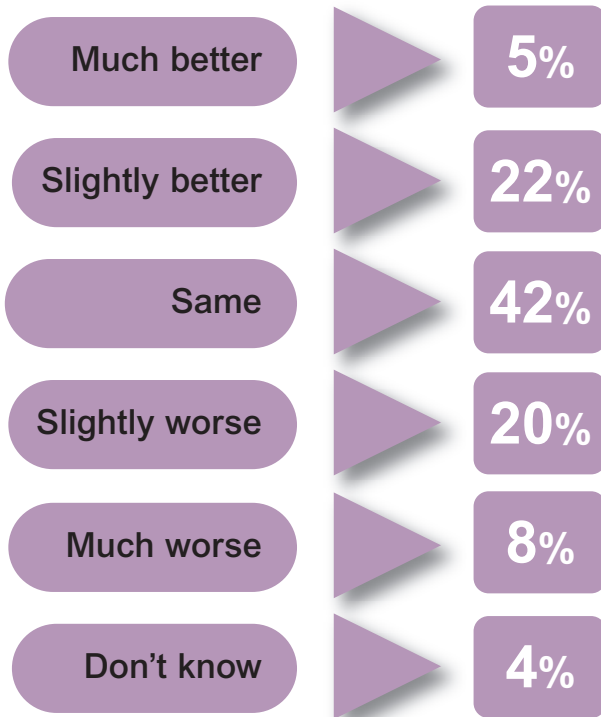
How likely is it that you would recommend your employer to others?

Employers need to be very clear about the role of social work in their organisation so that social workers are able to work to the highest standards.

The Social Work Task Force published its overarching definition of the social work profession in its final report *Building a safe confident future* in 2009 and work is now being undertaken in England to develop a clear definition of the social work role.

## Supporting standards

Of those surveyed 69 per cent expect their professional standards to remain the same or get better by the end of 2011.



In your opinion, how do you expect your professional standards which you are working towards to change by the end of the year?

We are working with the Social Work Reform Board to develop a Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF), which will be used as a national benchmark for practice, training and career standards for the social work profession in the near future.

Social workers who strive for the highest standards in front-line practice often move quickly into management. The national career framework will reward good social workers for staying in practice and in addition to this, we will encourage high achievement at every stage by reinforcing the standards set by the PCF.

We are also working closely with the General Social Care Council (GSCC) and with the Health Professions Council (HPC) who will take on the regulatory function of the social work profession from 2012. We will make sure that only those who are properly trained and committed to high standards are able to practise social work.

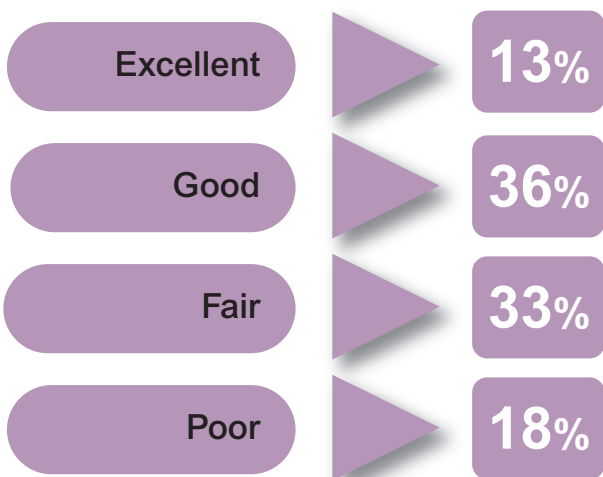
Excellent:

“Best line manager I have ever had - knows her stuff, clear about what she wants, helpful feedback, supportive and able to be challenged herself”

Survey respondent

## Supervision

Of those surveyed, 18 per cent considered their current level of line management supervision to be poor. 72 per cent rated it as fair, good and excellent.



What is your overall opinion of the supervision you currently receive from your line manager?

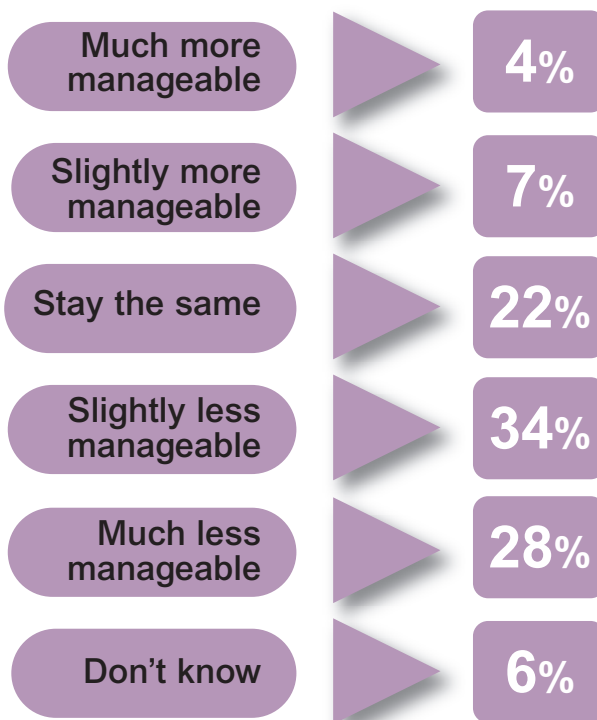
We recognise that social workers cannot do their jobs well unless they receive regular supervision from trained supervisors, with whom they can discuss and critically reflect on complex decisions crucial to the future of people who use services.

“It is regular and I get good support as well as answers to queries. I have also been able to discuss directives and in many cases have been able to influence changes. I also get good feedback: positive and negative”

Survey respondent

## Expected workload by the end of this year

Of those who responded to the survey 33 per cent thought that their workload will stay the same or become more manageable. A further 62 per cent thought that it will become less manageable.



Which one of the following would best describe how you expect your workload to be by the end of the year?

Social workers with high caseloads may perform poorly in their jobs, frequently have low morale, and often suffer from poor health. We will work with social workers and their employers to ensure that employers have a clear policy on limiting social workers' caseloads to manageable levels so that they can achieve standards of excellence.

## Let's seize this moment

Jackie Fender, *CQSW; MBA*

Independent Social Worker, Equality Builders Ltd

*Prospective Member of The College of Social Work;  
Registered with the General Social Care Council*



### My priorities for social work

- ✓ **Guaranteed provision of high quality, reflective supervision. Emphasis should be on quality rather than quantity.**
- ✓ **Replace onerous performance indicators with quality measures that have real practical value.**
- ✓ **Improve regional and national collaboration to find new ways of working.**

“ There's no doubt that there are huge challenges ahead for the social work profession. But at the same time, those challenges can be drivers for change that may allow us to really shape our own destiny and carve out a strong identity for social work that perhaps we have been missing in the past.

Obviously no-one would welcome the financial cutbacks that we are all having to deal with. But I do think that this climate allows us to start mentioning some of the elephants that have been in the room for a long time. One of these is cooperation with the private sector.

A lot of people in social care are negative about the private sector. But the current climate means that we have to be a lot more creative in finding solutions and building partnerships. A lot of the logistical problems that we face in the public sector have already been solved in the private sector. Look at Tesco and Asda. They are world leaders in logistics.

Personalisation is a good example of where it pays to understand the market. At the

moment the success of personalisation depends very much on where you are in the country. When it's been properly embraced according to the underlying principles and philosophy of treating everybody as an individual, then it has been a huge benefit to people's ability to live independent lives. In other areas, however, there has been a slash and burn philosophy and it's been used more as a way of forcing down costs. This sort of attitude means you don't get the market development in local services that you need for personalisation to work.

I'm not a naive, roses-around-the-bowl idealist. But I think that personalisation is about supporting people to do what they want to do with their lives. When it is done properly then it does do that.

I have worked in social care for over 30 years, captivated ever since a volunteer came into my school to talk about the profession. I have worked in youth work, residential care, hospital social work, child protection, fostering and adoption, management and coaching.

For the past three years I've been working as an independent social worker, travelling across the country doing everything from working at the front end helping adult service users make better use of individual budgets to writing strategy documents. I also work as a support advisor to local authorities on children's workforce development.

From a personal, business point of view, I am worried about the future and where the work is going to come from. But for the profession as a whole, I am very optimistic. I think that in times to come, we will look back on this moment and realise that this was the moment when we really began to define what social work is all about. ”

# Your priorities, your college

Earlier this year, The College of Social Work consulted its Prospective Members on their views about the future of social work. In over 600 replies, a vibrant picture emerged of a workforce faced with many challenges, but one that is determined to stand up for its profession and the people it supports. This document is a summary of those replies.

## Building a stronger profession

Social workers are proud of their profession and are committed to driving up the quality of the service they provide. Asked how they would build a stronger profession, our Prospective Members overwhelmingly opted for measures that they believed would improve practice.

Better training, stronger managerial support and the provision of regular, reflective supervision were all seen as essential to achieving a more valued and respected profession. Personal issues such as pay and prospects, while still important, were seen as secondary to the core values of providing strong social support to people who use services.

For many social workers the primary route to raising standards is through improved education, training and continuing professional development (CPD). Many respondents called for more stringent entry requirements onto social work courses. The courses themselves should be made more relevant to the day-to-day practice of social work and placements should be chosen to offer genuine, practically applicable skills. Several respondents called for statutory placements to be made a mandatory part of social work training.

Good management is seen as crucial to the delivery of high quality social care. This means controlling the caseloads of front-line staff, providing adequate administrative support and offering regular, reflective supervision by trained supervisors.

Social workers have welcomed GSCC registration and the requirements for CPD. These are seen as raising both standards and the credibility of social work, putting it on the same footing as the health and education professions. However, there are doubts as to whether this raised credibility is reflected in an improved professional status. Many social workers in multidisciplinary teams complain of feeling like poor relations to their colleagues in health and education.

The poor public image of social work is another bugbear with the profession. Social workers feel they are held in low esteem, primarily because the public remains ignorant about what they do. While a critical media is partly to blame for this misapprehension, the lack of a clear 'voice of social work' leaves the profession at a distinct disadvantage. Several respondents drew comparisons with the Royal College of Nursing, which held a feisty annual conference during the time this survey took place. Social workers looked on enviously as the RCN took a robust stance against government cuts and proposed NHS reforms. In contrast, social workers feel their voice in the debate is struggling to be heard.



## Key points

- • **Training and education** – raised entry requirements and more relevant placements will boost the quality of the social care workforce.
- **Professional status** – social workers should be on an equal footing with health, education and law professionals.
- **Public perception** – action required to help the public understand the role of social workers.
- **Management** – improved management will raise front-line standards.
- **Bureaucracy** – paperwork and tick-box culture must be reduced.
- **Professional body** – needed to voice social workers' concerns.

Victoria, social worker

*“Students do not 'become' social workers by getting a degree. There has to be more critical analysis and challenge in the process of learning the skills of the profession.”*

Nimal, practice manager

*“We need to invest in front line managers and re-motivate them to remember what reflective practice feels like.”*

Beverley, Approved Mental Health Professional

*“Social work must see itself as a strong profession in its own right with a discrete body of knowledge and its own methods of intervention. Social workers should be supervised by other social workers who understand what the job is about and the stresses involved.”*



## Safeguarding children

Social workers in children's services are crying out to be unchained from their desks and to spend more time with the children and families they see it as their duty to serve. They view quality time with the families of vulnerable children as an essential part of safeguarding. Unfortunately, this time is increasingly being cut short.

When our Prospective Members were asked how they would improve the safeguarding of children, almost unanimously they called for a reduction in the bureaucracy that keeps them away from face-to-face contact with their clients. This bureaucracy (literally) comes in many forms. Respondents complained of unnecessary and repetitive administrative tasks, a box-ticking culture, slow and unwieldy computer systems and a deference to timescales and performance indicators that flies in the face of high quality care.

Many social workers now feel that the procedures they are obliged to follow reduce their ability to act instinctively and to use their professional judgement.

Unmanageable caseloads remain a major problem within child protection. The knock-on effects of this include reduced time with each family, increased stress on individual social workers, more time off through sickness and problems with retention and recruitment of staff. In turn, the consequent understaffing results in even bigger caseloads for the staff that remains. The quality of service inevitably suffers.

The spectre of cutbacks looms large in children's services. Most social workers feel the service is already overstretched and cannot cope with any further reduction in resources. The commitment of many local authorities to protect front-line services from the worst of the cuts means that administrative staff are to be pared to the bone. Ironically, this means that front-line staff are now spending even longer at their desks carrying out tasks that would previously have been done by the admin teams.

Multi-agency working is seen as essential in child protection. Indeed social workers are keen to ensure that other agencies – in particular education – offer a much greater contribution to child protection cases and are properly trained to do so. Too often, child protection is seen as 'the social workers job' and vital early signs are missed. Once again, many social workers feel that their professional opinion carries less weight than that of their colleagues in health and education. Raising the status of social care would enable social workers to 'demand' the information that can be essential to making a thorough child protection judgement.

## Don't call me baby-snatcher

Kathy Murphy, BA (Hons) Social Work

Child Protection Social Worker, Middlesbrough Council

*Prospective Member of The College of Social Work;  
Registered with the General Social Care Council*



### My priorities for social work

- ✓ **Action to ensure caseloads are safe and manageable.**
- ✓ **Entry requirements for the profession to include 'life experience'.**
- ✓ **Local authorities to actively promote a positive image of social work.**

“ By rights, child protection should be regarded as one of the most vital jobs there is.

Every day I am out there protecting vulnerable children from neglect and abuse, dealing with dysfunctional families, with problems of alcohol, violence, poverty and drug abuse. It's a tough job. Not many could or would want to do it. But to me it's a passion. I am totally committed.

Yet to the public at large, I'm a 'baby-snatcher'. People seem to think that if I'm not stealing children from loving parents, I'm handing them back to a paedophile.

I don't think the local authority does enough to combat these negative stereotypes. They have a magazine that comes out every month, full of all the good work they are doing in the parks and the gardens and suchlike. But where are the articles about social work? I know there are issues of confidentiality but surely they could do more to make it known that I am the face of child protection in this city. I'm not the face of breaking up families.

Negative stereotypes also affect the way child protection is viewed within the profession. A lot of people just see it as a step on the career ladder. You do your two years and then are ready to move on to something nicer like adoption, or go and work for a charity. But not me. Maybe it's because I had a difficult childhood myself. This is what I want to do.

I do worry about burn-out though. Caseloads are a huge problem and I've seen colleagues with what I'd consider dangerous levels of cases. This results in a poorer standard of service, higher stress levels among staff, increased sickness absence and problems with retention. It's also a false economy because large caseloads mean you often don't have time to close cases off. Our turnaround would be much higher if our caseloads were reduced. Supervision is tied in with caseloads. If our caseloads were reduced then there would be more time for supervision.

I'd also like to see better mentoring of people coming into the profession and more emphasis put on life experience as an entry criterion. At the moment we are taking 21-year-old girls fresh out of college and expecting them to go into the house of a 50-year-old, alcoholic, ex-drug user with four or five kids going bananas about the place. They're absolutely petrified and we end up doubling up on home visits to give the proper support.

I'm 44 and qualified two years ago. So I've come into the profession with huge life experience, having left school with no qualifications. I'm not as frightened by these sort of situations and I know exactly why I am there. I am there for the kids. ”

## A profession based on ethics

**Linda James**, BA; CQSW;  
 MA Advanced SW Practice & Planning: AASW.  
 Workforce Development (Social Care),  
 Suffolk County Council

*Prospective Member of The College of Social Work;  
 Registered with the General Social Care Council*



### My priorities for social work

- ✓ **To ensure social care is staffed by the right people, in the right place, with the right skills, in the right numbers, at the right time.**
- ✓ **To make statutory sector placements a mandatory part of social work training.**
- ✓ **To ensure social work managers have the knowledge, skills and time to provide practitioners with robust support and guidance.**

“ If you had asked me two or three years ago whether the negative image of social work was a problem for recruitment, I wouldn't have hesitated in saying yes. However, more recently I do think that things have changed for the better, probably as a result of the good work put in by organisations set up to support social work. There's still a long way to go, but interest in social work as a profession is undoubtedly growing among young people of a very high academic standard.

I am a workforce development manager, so I am responsible for ensuring that our children and young people's service has the right amount of people, with the right skills, at the right place at the right time. This means I am involved with recruitment, retention and what used to be known as training but what we now think of as complete, continuing professional development.

The current financial climate presents many challenges in these areas. Salary freezes certainly don't help us with recruitment and retention. Financial cutbacks are being felt right across the local authority. We will not be cutting back on front-line staff, but may have to make changes in the way they are managed. It is crucial that we are able to do this in a way that maintains sufficiently robust structures to support front-line teams. High quality front-line managers are extremely important, not only to support the practitioners, but also to keep top-line management informed so that we can respond to issues at an organisational level.

In terms of training provision, the proposed public health responsibilities for local authorities could certainly add to our workload. We've yet to hear how these will be financially supported.

We recruit a lot of newly qualified social workers in Suffolk and it's clear that many of them haven't had the kind of placements that allow them to hit front-line practice running. This means that their first year is spent learning those skills under close supervision rather than consolidating skills they have already learned. I'd be in favour of making a statutory placement a mandatory part of social work training.

The negative public image of social work comes, in part, due to prejudices against the sections of society we work with. Social workers tend to work with people who are on the fringes of society, who have been ostracised and oppressed. I think that as a profession we need to make it clear that we do this from a very strong ethical standpoint. As a profession, these are our core values. ”

## Key points

- ▶ • **Bureaucracy** – needs to be significantly reduced for safeguarding children. Fewer forms and systems, more administrative staff, better computer software.
- **Time with families** – face-to-face work is crucial and needs to be protected.
- **Caseloads** – must be limited to manageable levels.
- **Timescales** – reduce the adherence to rigid timescales and performance indicators.
- **Professional judgement** – social workers must be trusted to use their judgement.
- **Staffing** – understaffing must be tackled, recruitment and retention improved.

Oliver, social worker

*“Procedures have created a distance between workers and clients and become an obstacle to sharing the humanity that we have in common.”*

Jenny, social worker

*“The media response to child abuse cases has terrified many social workers who may have previously worked in safeguarding children.”*

Sheila, social worker

*“When I first started working with children I spent 80 per cent of my time with children and their families. Now I spend 20 per cent of my time with children and the rest on paperwork.”*

## Working in mental health

Social workers are determined to ensure that social care continues to be offered alongside the medical model of mental health care. They believe that only social workers can offer the rights-based, person-centred, social perspective that people who experience mental distress (when actually asked) say they want to receive. Without social workers to champion their rights and look out for their interests, people with mental health problems can too easily become submerged in a service where they are defined in terms of their symptoms and response to treatment. Social workers see it as their duty to ensure that this does not happen.

To be effective champions, however, social workers feel they need a firmer professional footing. There is a need for an influential professional body to campaign on mental health issues, to lobby government and represent the profession during consultation over mental health legislation.

Responses to our consultation make it clear that social workers in mental healthcare see themselves as ‘on the patient’s side’. Most now work in multi-disciplinary teams where the health professions dominate. Many are employed by the NHS. Nevertheless, there is a strong commitment to the core values of social work where the rights of the individual must always be considered, even if these run contrary to the goals of medical care.

These values are encapsulated in the principles of personalisation. However, there is a broad range of views among social workers on how, or even if, personalisation should be applied within mental health. Most agree with the principle of empowering service users to make choices on the kind of care they wish to receive. However, there is deep concern that many local authorities are using personalisation to reduce the social care workforce without ensuring the proper safeguards are in place. There are fears that some of the most vulnerable people in society could be left with little or no support.

There are also concerns over the lack of continuity of care for people with life-long mental health problems. Poor communication between different agencies and the gulf between children's and adult mental health services often results in a disjointed approach.

The medical model dominates mental healthcare largely because it has a strong evidence base. There is, therefore, a need for more academic research into the social aspects of mental health and the benefits that social care can bring.

## Key points

- ▶ **Service users' rights** – it is up to social workers to ensure that rights of people with mental health problems are always respected.
- **Social model** – social workers must continue to resist the dominance of the medical model of mental health care.
- **Personalisation** – while most agree with principles of personalisation and giving people choice and control over their services, key concerns remain over implementation.
- **Continuity of care** – better cooperation is needed between agencies and between children's and adult mental healthcare services.

Amanda, mental health lead

*“For the personalisation agenda to be taken forward in mental health, local authorities and care trusts need robust partnership agreements setting out the expectations for service users and acknowledging that this takes time.”*

Martin, lecturer

*“We need to develop a stronger evidence base for social work and social care practice in mental health.”*

Robert, social work lead

*“The social perspective on the cause and treatment of mental health problems being derived from social and environmental factors needs to be preserved, protected and championed.”*

## Working in the disability field

The huge range of opinions delivered by our Prospective Members regarding personalisation almost certainly reflects the disparate way this radical policy has been implemented across the country and between specialties. Many social workers remain solidly in support of the principle that service users should be allowed to pick and choose services according to their needs and from a range of providers.

“It’s a fantastic opportunity for people who are ready for change and autonomy,” said one respondent. “The key to promoting greater choice and independence,” said another.

But many are finding that the implementation of personalisation is not living up to its promise. “Personalisation does not recognise the vulnerable in society,”; “It has become a funding stream expectation,”; “Personalisation promised much, but we battle with financial systems that seem to govern our work and are rigid.”

In general our survey suggested that social workers who are working with the physically disabled have had a more positive experience with personalisation than those working with people with learning disabilities.

Inevitably, concerns about personalisation are bound up with fears over financial cutbacks. In particular, some social workers are deeply uncomfortable with the ‘internal broker’ role they have been asked to take on since the advent of direct payments and individual budgets. They feel compromised in having to administer reductions in service users’ individual budgets at the same time as offering advice on how to contest these cuts. Some feel there should be a separate brokerage service that is independent of social care.

Many social workers advocated a more holistic approach to the care of the disabled, with multidisciplinary teams and better inter-agency working seen as the key to achieving continuity of care.

Social workers remain adamant that front-line services should be protected from cuts. At a time when many disabled people are making more autonomous decisions there is a risk that the vulnerable will be open to exploitation and abuse. Experienced social workers are able to monitor these situations and offer protection and support. Any reduction in the numbers of front-line staff could mean that those who remain will not have the time to develop the one-to-one relationships that are the bedrock of good social care. Cuts to administration staff and management could have the same effect by removing staff from the front-line in order to carry out backroom tasks.

### Key points

- ▶ • **Personalisation** – most social workers agree with personalisation in principle, but there are significant doubts about its implementation, particularly with more vulnerable clients.
- **Time** – social workers want more time with clients, less spent on bureaucracy.
- **Holistic service** – there is a need for better inter-agency and multidisciplinary working.
- **Front-line services** – must be protected from cutbacks.
- **Safeguarding** – stronger procedures are needed especially in light of the greater autonomy offered by personalisation.

Sylvia, senior social worker

*“Often people with physical disabilities have a very complex home environment, which needs an expert social worker to help them maintain a family life.”*

Lorraine, practitioner

*“When services are cut, the risks of isolation, neglect, crime and abuse rise for people with learning disabilities. Experienced staff are required to be able to monitor and support individuals to be safe and keep themselves healthy.”*

Giles, safeguarding adviser

*“No one notices what I do until I don’t do it.”*



## Working with older people

Older people deserve the best that any care system can offer. Too often, however, their needs are considered only as an afterthought. Older people’s services have long been described as the Cinderella service of social care.

Fighting the corner of these underfunded, overlooked service users is a committed band of social workers who are prepared to challenge the status quo and who will not stand by while older people’s services take the brunt of the government’s austerity measures.

Our Prospective Members have vividly described how financial cutbacks have already begun to affect the quality of service offered to older people. The creeping rise in eligibility criteria, closure of day care services, outsourcing of residential and domiciliary care and the use of direct payments and individual budgets to cut local authority costs are all making it more difficult for social workers to offer the standard of service they feel their clients deserve.

Social workers are prepared to be creative to address these challenges. They have embraced the principles of personalisation and are working hard to offer older people greater choice and more autonomy. Several respondents spoke of an increased need for social workers to get involved in ‘community development’ so that services and resources can be provided at a lower cost to the public purse. The proposed transfer of public health responsibility to local authorities is viewed positively in the hope that it may offer new ways of working with older people.

## CASE STUDY

# Social work values don't end at the UK border

Meena Enawalla, *B.A; DipSW MA*

Operations Manager, Children and Families Across Borders (CFAB)

*Prospective Member of The College of Social Work;  
Registered with the General Social Care Council*



## My priorities for social work

- ✓ **Social work education to include proper training on the safeguarding of children across international borders**
- ✓ **Setting up of a multiagency central unit within the Department for Education to lead on international safeguarding issues**
- ✓ **To ensure that social work practice is more research and evidence based.**

“ It is important that all of us working in social care recognise that the values and ethos of social work do not end at the borders of the UK. As globalisation increases, more and more areas of social work practice are taking on cross-border and international dimensions.

These may be seen across a broad range of issues - from the detention of asylum seekers, to the trafficking of children; from private fostering to the imprisonment of mothers tricked into becoming drug mules; from abandoned or separated children to displaced families splintered across several different countries.

There are also cases where better consideration of extended families abroad could improve the prospects for children in care. However, there is currently a distinct lack of awareness among UK social workers about international issues. This can mean that the children and families caught up in international situations receive inadequate social work support.

There are also circumstances when ignorance of international laws and regulations can put individual social workers at risk of legal action or even imprisonment. For instance social workers who travel abroad to carry out an assessment may be in breach of that country's laws on who can or can't practise social work.

I believe there should be a review of social work training to ensure that social workers are better equipped to deal with these international situations. Obviously these are not everyday issues for most social workers, so there also needs to be a better, more centralised source of information and support that social workers can go to when these situations arise. I'd like to see a cross-agency unit, a bit like CEOP (child exploitation and online protection centre), set up within the Department for Education to lead on international safeguarding.

At CFAB we offer professional resources and specific services for practitioners. We also do casework. As operations manager, I manage a team of inter-country social workers that shares vital information on child and adult welfare issues across borders and can refer individual cases between countries. We also run a number of projects, offer training and lobby on international issues regarding the protection of children and families.

One thing that would help all our work would be better data. For instance we currently estimate there are over 5,000 children privately fostered in the UK, but there are no official figures. Better data would help us ensure that all our practice is evidence based. ”

## We must take ownership of our profession

**Priscilla Dunk-West**, BA (Hons); BSW; MSW;  
PhD Candidate

Senior Lecturer, Coventry University

*Prospective Member of The College of Social Work;  
Registered with the General Social Care Council*



### My priorities for social work

- ✓ **Incorporating scholarly pursuits and a 'sociological imagination' as central to social work.**
- ✓ **Research becoming more central to social work practice.**
- ✓ **Tackling negative stereotypes of our profession.**

“ One of the first things I tell my social work students is that you have got to take ownership of this profession. It is up to you to decide what you want your role as a social worker to be. I think that probably goes for the profession as a whole. There is a collective desire to find a strong voice that speaks out for social work.

Obviously, there can never be a single 'voice of social work' and people will have different views based on their own perspectives. But I think there are common core values that can be articulated to give a strong professional identity.

Raising the image of social work is important, particularly in this country. When I came here from Australia 11 years ago I couldn't believe how appalled some people seemed to be when I told them I was a social worker. In Australia and the US social work has a slightly more clinical focus than it has in the UK, which may be why it is held in higher regard.

There's no doubt that social work in this country is standing at the edge of exciting changes. We are already seeing a shift in the role of the state. Social work is one of the few professions that is ideally placed to engage with the levels of social change that are already taking place.

I think all social workers have a duty to challenge the systems that they work in, perhaps in the tradition of the radical social work of the 1970s. Social work needs to respond to society's changes in a creative way, to embrace the opportunities that are on offer to inhabit non-traditional areas of practice. If we can do that then I am extremely optimistic for the future and the profession's ability to come together to effect change.

But we need to be thinkers as well as doers. I would like to see greater emphasis on research and scholarly work within social care. Not only will this allow us to ensure our practice is more evidence based, but it will also give the profession greater credibility.

There have already been some positive developments in this direction. For instance the protected title for social workers and the more stringent GSCC requirements for social work courses are both very welcome.

If we can continue to build the evidence base for our profession, ensure that this theoretical basis is embedded in the core values of our profession and grasp the opportunities we have to bring about change then I am sure that social work will find the confidence to make its voice heard. ”

Unfortunately, budgetary and bureaucratic barriers currently stand in the way of many social workers' best efforts. Respondents to our survey describe how the use of personal budgets can involve ploughing through mountains of forms. Social workers want to spend more time with their clients and less time at their desks. Waiting lists, delays and glitches in the system create frustration among service users and professionals alike.

Funding through individual budgets is often not sufficient, with the result that an increasing number of older people are struggling to live within the community without the necessary level of support. There are also serious concerns for the safeguarding of older people as the resources dry up and trained professionals become thinner on the ground. If only for this reason, it is imperative that front-line services are protected from the funding cuts.

## Key points

- **Cuts** – while some cuts are inevitable, the profession must be prepared to fight to ensure they do not disproportionately affect services to older people.
- **Personal budgets** – the process needs to be simplified and made less bureaucratic. Budgets must be sufficient to provide for service needs.
- **Carers** – their needs should be better recognised.
- **Bureaucracy** – social workers should spend less time on paperwork, more time with clients.

Kirstie, social worker

*“A large proportion of older people are not interested in managing their own services. They just want to be cared for.”*

Mo, lecturer

*“Social workers have a vital role to play in working with older people with high support needs who remain all too often disenfranchised and marginalised.”*

Anita, social worker

*“My experience with personalisation is that most social workers 'get it' and they are excited about it. It is the bureaucracy that hinders their role.”*

Sandra, joint care manager

*“The eligibility criteria means that by the time a person is referred for a service, they are in desperate need of formal support, with their own health and abilities deteriorating and their carers/families at breaking point.”*

## Social work and public service reform

Social workers are strident in their opinions on public service reform and extremely well informed. So why is their voice so seldom heard?

Our Prospective Members have made it clear that they feel the social care profession should have far greater influence in helping shape the policies and legislation that govern the way they practise. Social workers support the most vulnerable, disenfranchised people in society. If they do not speak up for their clients, no one else will.

Social workers are not naïve. They know that cuts are inevitable and reorganisation is one of the few constants in the public sector. Nevertheless, they feel that there is much more the profession can do to influence exactly where the axe will fall.

The outsourcing of social care services is seen as one of the key issues. While most social workers are deeply suspicious of local authorities' motives in selling off services, many agree that there are circumstances where it may be appropriate. There should, however, be clear and enforceable regulations to safeguard the quality of service.

Who should be running these outsourced services is a matter of opinion. By instinct, most social workers seem to favour voluntary organisations over the private sector. The profit motive is seen as contrary to the core principles of social care. However, if there is one sector that is likely to feel the force of government cuts more acutely than the public sector, it is the third sector. There are real doubts over the ability of charities and voluntary organisations to offer long-term funding for high quality services. In these circumstances some social workers accept that the role of the private sector is bound to grow.

Of course, there is a danger that the private sector will simply cherry-pick those services where they feel they can make the most profit. Services for the most vulnerable and those with the most complex needs are the least likely to attract private sector interest. It is vital that adequate provision for these service users remains within the public sector.

### Key points

- • **Campaigning** – there is a strong feeling that social workers should be more active in fighting their corner and that of their clients. A strong, campaigning and lobbying voice is needed to ensure reforms move the profession forward.
- **Outsourcing** – views are mixed. Outsourcing is generally viewed with suspicion although a number of social workers accept that it may be appropriate for some services.
- **Private sector** – many social workers feel that profit motives have no place in social care. Others see some involvement as inevitable and a minority feel there may be lessons to be learned through closer cooperation.
- **Role of voluntary sector** – viewed as a more acceptable partner than the private sector. However there are serious concerns that cuts have reduced the third sector's capacity to provide a quality service.

Elaine, senior social worker

*“We preserve our standards by campaigning, networking, lobbying support and giving voice to users and carers.”*

Peter, senior regional development officer

*“Whether services are run by a local authority, large charity, GP consortia or other private and voluntary sector organisations, this should not be the primary consideration. That should be whether service users are getting the best possible service.”*

Susan, social worker

*“Some services might be more appropriate for outsourcing but I strongly believe that services for the most vulnerable should be provided by the state and should not go to the highest bidders.”*



We are fully committed to creating a college that speaks up for social work in public and media debate, emphasising the enormous value that social work brings to our society.

**Join us today by visiting**  
**[www.collegeofsocialwork.org](http://www.collegeofsocialwork.org)**

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