



The College Consultation Online Questionnaire: Findings May-September 2010

The College of Social Work has been engaged in a major consultation exercise about the proposed purpose and values of The College. The consultation included 12 events covering England with social workers and Social Work managers, an online questionnaire, and an extensive qualitative consultation with people who use Social Work services, including children and young people, and carers.

This summary report provides information about the 730 completed online questionnaires received by The College between May and September 2010.

Introduction

Who replied?

A total of 920 questionnaires were undertaken, of which 730 were completed and have been used for this analysis. The questionnaire included a number of optional questions. The percentage results for each finding are based on the total number of respondents to each question. For the optional questions the base figure used for calculations varies according to the number of respondents. Unless otherwise stated, the results are for the 730 completed questionnaires.

About the respondents

The respondents were not pre-selected, but freely chose to complete the questionnaire. A diverse range of backgrounds and specialisms were represented:

- 75% of respondents were frontline social workers, Social Work students, and Social Work managers; the remainder included practice teachers, social workers in higher education, and social workers no longer in direct Social Work practice.
- 87% of respondents said they held a Social Work qualification.
- 90% of respondents said they were registered with the GSCC and 6% with another body.
- 4% of respondents were not registered with a regulator.
- The majority of respondents – 70% said they were not a member of any professional body.

- 24% of all respondents were BASW members and 48% of respondents were UNISON members. Furthermore 6% of the respondents who answered this question were members of both BASW and of UNISON. (Optional questions – Based on 658 respondents).
- Of the overall 60% of respondents who said they belonged to a trade union, 81% said they belonged to UNISON. (Optional questions – Based on 658 respondents).
- 73% of respondents said they work for local authorities – workforce data suggest that more widely 70% of social workers work for local authorities.
- Respondents came from all over England. Very few responses were received from the devolved countries of the UK: 10 from Northern Ireland, 13 from Wales and 14 from Scotland. These numbers are too low to enable any valid analysis of the responses by devolved country.
- 65% of respondents were female; whereas 75% of the wider Social Work workforce is female.
- 80% of respondents said they were white British (this is higher than in the wider population of social workers where 17% of people describe themselves as being from black and minority ethnic backgrounds).

What we learnt

The responses show very high levels of support for the proposals set out in the 'Purposes and functions' consultation document, which was written by the Development Group and formed the basis of discussions for the consultation exercise.

Proposed ambitions for The College of Social Work

There is huge support for the ambitions proposed by the Development Group for The College:

- 95% said it was very important or important that The College will bring coherence and clarity to the profession.
- 94% said it was very important or important that The College will work collaboratively with allied professions, and with organisations affecting the profession.
- 97% said it was very important or important that The College will be independent and willing to challenge when necessary.
- Almost 100% said that it was very important or important that The College be led by the profession: The College will mobilise the considerable expertise of the profession/members to inform all College activity.
- 97% said it was important or very important that The College will build on existing good practice in the UK and overseas.
- 93% said it was very important or important that The College will provide leadership to the profession.
- 98% said it was very important or important that The College will enable and guard excellence in the profession.

- 95% said it was very important or important that The College will have pride in, and bring pride to, the Social Work profession.
- 91% said it was very important or important that The College will actively seek partnerships with people who use services and their carers, and should promote partnerships that empower service users¹.

Proposed functions for The College

The survey findings provide a very clear picture of the priority functions for respondents.

There was overwhelming support for The College to take the lead for the profession in policy and media work:

- 98% agreed that The College should represent the Social Work profession in discussions with policy makers, the public, the media and other professions.
- 98% of respondents said that it was essential or valuable for The College to improve media coverage of social workers and Social Work. (Based on 638 responses).
- 98% said that it was essential or valuable for The College to improve media and public understanding of the variety of reasons why people use Social Work services. (Based on 641 responses).
- 99% thought that The College should improve policy makers' understanding of Social Work. (Based on 638 responses).
- 93% thought that The College should improve relationships between Social Work and other professions. (Based on 639 responses).
- 96% of respondents agreed that The College should act as an advocate for the Social Work profession, building relationships and developing policies with other professional bodies on issues of common interest (e.g. occupational therapists, nurses, probation officers).

Similarly there was huge support for the role of The College in training:

- 95% said it was essential or valuable for The College to improve the quality of post-qualifying training (higher education and practice-based). (Based on 639 responses).
- 78% agreed that it was important or valuable for The College to help them to find the right training. (Based on 639 responses).
- Furthermore 98% of respondents agreed that The College should build relationships and develop policies with the academic community including researchers, lecturers and teachers.

Comments included:

¹ Base data used to calculate statistics for this section varied from ambition to ambition. Out of all respondents an average of 556 provided responses to this section and base data varies from question to question because these questions were optional.

Develop links with universities to work towards the goal of people who deliver Social Work training by maintaining their own practice i.e. lecture and practice.

Social Work needs a very high standard of academic research in order to have public acceptance.

Responses also backed real endorsement of the role of The College in supporting professional practice development:

- 95% said it was essential or valuable for The College to keep them up-to-date with practice, policy, research and management issues. (Based on 634 responses).
- 94% said it was essential or valuable for The College to provide them with professional guidance. (Based on 640 responses).
- 92% wanted The College to provide practical tools and advice to support and improve practice. (Based on 638 responses).
- 93% of all respondents also agreed that The College should establish links with similar organisations overseas in order to learn from and share good practice in supporting Social Work.

Geographical remit

72% of respondents wanted The College to cover the UK in its remit. (Based on 657 responses).

Trade union function

The majority of respondents (67%) wanted The College to have a trade union function, as is the case of other colleges for other professions. (Based on 607 responses).

Proposed activities of The College

There were very high levels of agreement with the activities proposed by the Development Group.

Providing a strong voice for, and leadership to the profession

- An overwhelming majority of respondents (99%) agreed that The College should influence the development of national policies that impact Social Work and social workers, acting as an advocate for the profession.

Defining the values and purpose of the Social Work profession

- A similarly large majority of respondents (96%) agreed that The College should set out and uphold the values and purpose of Social Work, including its commitment to placing people who use Social Work services and their carers at the heart of the process.
- 97% of all respondents agreed that The College should define and promote the reserved functions of Social Work (i.e. the activities which only qualified social workers can undertake).

Developing, upholding and supporting standards

A huge majority (97%) agreed that The College should agree, establish and promote professional standards for good practice. This should include clarifying the personal responsibilities of individual social workers and what these standards mean in a range of different work settings².

Providing guidance and support to the profession and allied professions

- 96% agree that The College should provide national guidance to clarify what good practice means in difficult situations at all levels of the Social Work profession.
- 98% agree that The College should provide up-to-date information and guidance on issues affecting the profession.
- 96% agree that The College should collect and disseminate knowledge, evidence and examples of what works.

Shaping training and development

- 97% agree that The College should agree, establish and promote standards for the quality of training.
- 97% agree that The College should influence the development of a more coherent approach to the initial selection and training of Social Work students, continued learning when they are in practice and the ongoing training and development of the profession.
- 95% agree that The College should be the source of expert advice to government on workforce planning, working in partnership with the sector skills councils, employers and training providers.

² The College will need to work with the Health Professions Council who will have the responsibility for setting standards for public protection and holding social workers to account for meeting these standards once this responsibility transfers from the GSCC.

The College will have a key role in supporting and enabling social workers to meet high quality standards. Similarly, The College will play a key role in supporting and enabling employers and training providers to meet standards that ensure social workers are supported to work to the best of their ability.

Approve and promote the provision of Continued Professional Development (CPD)

- 96% agree that this is an activity for The College³.

What people would pay for membership

Respondents were asked how much they would be prepared to pay for membership to The College if it were to provide the range of benefits provided by other colleges for their respective professions, and to provide the range of functions that they had prioritised.

The responses suggest that the majority (63%) would only be prepared to pay £50. Furthermore, the comments suggest that if a category suggesting a lower membership fee had been part of the questionnaire this might well have been a popular option.

Comments made included:

£50 per year seems excessive. Other professional bodies are paid more and can therefore afford their own representation. £10 per year is more acceptable and realistic.

There should be joint membership with trade unions.

Other colleges charge amounts varying from £150 a year to £366 a year, so these findings represent a major business challenge for The College.

Conclusions

There is overwhelming support for the proposals for The College of Social Work suggested by the Development Group. The Interim Board are now considering the responses of all of the consultation activities and will soon finalise the vision, mission and purpose for The College. A finalised document, clarifying the future business model for The College will be produced and circulated in early 2011.

³ This work will need to support and enhance the registration and CPD requirements of social workers.