



Education Committee

Oral evidence: [Social work reform](#), HC 690

Wednesday 20 April 2016

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Written evidence from witnesses:

- Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee ([SWR0024](#))
- Association of Professors of Social Work ([SWR0013](#))
- Frontline ([SWR0027](#))
- British Association of Social Workers ([SWR0029](#))

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Members present: Neil Carmichael (Chair), Lucy Allan, Ian Austin, Michelle Donelan, Marion Fellows, Suella Fernandes, Lucy Frazer, Catherine McKinnell, Ian Mearns, Stephen Timms, William Wragg.

Questions 57 – 120

Witnesses: **Samantha Baron**, Chair, Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee, **Brigid Featherstone**, Co-President, Association of Professors of Social Work, **Dame Moira Gibb**, Chair, Skills for Care, and **Josh MacAlister**, Chief Executive, Frontline, gave evidence.

Q57 Chair: We have 45 minutes to examine the question before us. Welcome to you, Josh, Dame Moira, Samantha and Brigid. We are hoping for a quick canter across but not forgetting the details of this important policy area. The focus of this session is on the education, development, accreditation and regulation of children, families and social workers. That is what we are talking about, and those of you who were at our seminar—Samantha, you were there, weren't you?—you will know that this is a follow on from that and we cover some of the issues that that seminar, quite rightly, brought to our attention. We have sketched out a line of inquiry that I think will address the whole issue of social work reform.

Before we start, I would like you to quickly say who you are and who you represent, for the purpose of the listeners. Josh?

Josh MacAlister: My name is Josh MacAlister. I am the Chief Executive at Frontline and I am here on behalf of Frontline.

Dame Moira Gibb: Moira Gibb. I am not representing anyone. I was the Chair of the Social Work Task Force and the Social Work Reform Board.

Samantha Baron: I am Samantha Baron. I am Chair of the Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee and Head of Social Work at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Brigid Featherstone: Brigid Featherstone. I am Co-President of the Association of Professors of Social Work.

Q58 Chair: Frontline has cross-party support, kicked off in 2013 or thereabouts by IPPR, although it is not necessarily welcomed by every sector within social work. The evidence about it is mostly positive. There are some caveats. What is your evaluation, first of all, Josh, from Frontline?

Josh MacAlister: You will not be surprised to hear me say that I think we are very happy with how the programme has gone since its start in 2013. Our ambition is to do a number of things. One is to bring some great, talented people into the profession, which we believe we have been able to demonstrate through the Times Top 100 ranking, and also keeping a high ratio of applicants to places for the programme, to give people a fantastic experience in learning to do a very complex job, and that is child protection social work, and getting a generic qualification—and the Cardiff evaluation has very positive findings on that when looking at the practice skill exhibited by those who qualified from the social work programme—and also to support the system.

As you will see from the memorandum, Frontline is an important contributor to the new routes into social work. It is not the only route. It is never going to be the only route but it can provide some additional talent to some already fantastic social workers in the field. I am very happy with how things have gone so far but lots of challenges ahead.

Q59 Chair: How might Frontline be improved, Samantha?

Samantha Baron: How might Frontline be improved? I think you would have to ask about what social work is as a task and activity to be able to answer that question fully. The social work that we know is quite a complex process. It involves an understanding of human behaviour and its relationship to the social system in which people live and operate. That process of understanding that dynamic of people's lives takes an awful long time to develop and understand sufficiently for a qualified social worker to have a range of assessment tools and intervention tools to be able to intervene effectively. I think some of the limitations of short timescale fast track programmes are that it is very difficult to achieve that. What they are is premised on very defined areas of assessment and tools that suit the training, whereas by comparison HEIs train on a wider set of assessment tools and methods that we would hope, more long-term, will have a more effective intervention and impact upon children's lives.

Q60 Chair: Brigid, do you have anything to add to that and also how we might mitigate against the risks of expanding Frontline?

Brigid Featherstone: I think there is an awful lot of good news in the evaluation. I welcome the fact that it appears a lot of very talented people have come into the profession that might not have done so otherwise. I think there are a lot of questions about why they have come in that are not answered by the evaluation. Was it the bursary? Was it the fast track into the civil service or was it the fantastic and very rigorous recruitment process that I think we have a lot to learn from?

I am concerned about a number of things. One is the method of evaluation of the practice skills. Without getting too technical, it was based on a simulated model so it is how they were able to communicate with actors. I would be very concerned about it, and there is a lot of research evidence to question how well that translates into the real world. Given that these are young people from a very different demographic from what we are getting in social work historically and what the comparator group said—these young people who come from a very particular background—how well are they are going to be able to go out into areas of great deprivation in our cities and in our countryside and translate those skills? So I think there is a question mark over and it is crucial because that is about retention. We are getting good people in but are they going to be able to stay the course?

The second thing is there is a lot of good evidence in this about relationship skills and I work with families all the time. Relationships-based practice is crucial to engagement of service users and I think Frontline has done a great job on that. I was very disappointed by the lack of attention, according to the evaluation, that they pay to research. They do not seem to have integrated it into their teaching, according to the evaluation. Research is the life blood of any profession and their future intention to disentangle themselves from an ongoing relationship with the HEI could mean that their methods of work are not rooted in an organic research base. We learn more and more about people all the time, about families and the challenges for families, and that is through research and through practice. Social work is not a static, rigid activity. There is a lot of good. I am very, very happy about a lot of the work that Frontline are doing but there are risks for me; risks about the future viability of the profession, rooted in a strong, organic research base and are these very, very talented young people going to be able to translate those impressive communication skills into the real world, which is full of deprivation and very complex problems?

Chair: Moira, would you like to add anything?

Dame Moira Gibb: The first recommendation of the taskforce was that we needed to raise the calibre of entrants into the profession, so it is very welcome that there is an alternative route. I know that the anxieties have been about the costs of the route. In Northern Ireland, Northern Ireland had the second highest point score for social work courses admissions after medicine. Whereas it was much lower in England. So it is possible to recruit high calibre people through the mainstream routes. I think the biggest issue for Frontline is to demonstrate that it can have social workers who are retained in the profession. In fact, recruitment wasn't the biggest issue. It was retention when we looked at it. I think an analysis of those who stay will be very valuable.

Samantha Baron: If you look closely at the research, it tested three areas that were tested quite rigorously and had some comparison to mainstream HEI programmes. Of the three

areas that were tested, all students from all programmes came out as good. In one particular area Frontline was at a significant advantage and it was demonstrated significance. I think the question for the Committee is: is that level of significance that was demonstrated in the research, sufficiently significant to continue in this policy direction?

Q61 Chair: We are going to try to answer that during the course of the next few weeks. It is not unusual for us to be asked questions but we do tend to try to find the evidence from you and then we reach our conclusions. One of the points you have just made is relevant to Josh, because you have moved away from universities to in-house training. Can you comment on why you have done that?

Josh MacAlister: Sure. It would be good to pick up on some of those points made a moment ago as well.

Chair: Not too many of them because we only have 45 minutes and we have used 10.

Josh MacAlister: We set out in 2013 to partner with a university to deliver the programme. We also partnered with the Institute of Family Therapy, and the Institute of Psychiatry at King's College London, to start to build a practice model that promoted social work as being about helping families change and moving away from a culture of compliance, process and procedure—which was commented on by Eileen Munro in her review of social work in 2011—and also to promote some particular practice methodologies that give generic skills that can be applied in any social work context. The people who have been recruited and developed through the programme are working in local authorities with all sorts of different contexts and challenges using different practice methodologies so that, even though a local authority might not be using, for example, systemic family therapy, they are able to apply their generic skill there.

We have learnt an awful lot through that. We have also looked at partnerships with Step Up to Social Work and heard some of the early findings from teaching partnerships, and spoken to colleagues at Teach First to think, “How can we scale up the programme and initiative in a big way so that we—”

Chair: Can I interrupt there?

Josh MacAlister: Sure.

Q62 Chair: The key question is: how do you link universities with social work training? How do you integrate the whole process, so that it looks seamless and is seamless?

Josh MacAlister: As we scale up to get to about 450 a year, working across the country, we were either faced with looking at a continued partnership with the universities delivering the academic component and then Frontline holding the relationship with local authorities, which has done a great job to date but, at scale, would be very challenging. So we made the decision to bring the provision of training in-house, partnering with a university to accredit a Masters level degree for the programme, so still working with a university but with Frontline itself employing the practice tutors and individuals to do the teaching. I should say that is not unfamiliar territory in the field of initial teacher training, as I am sure the Committee will know. It is also not totally unfamiliar to social work,

because there are a number of universities at the moment who accredit degrees for other providers doing social work training or education. That was the rationale for it.

Q63 Chair: Before we leave this question of Frontline, does anybody else have something to say about it that they think the Committee should be aware of? I am thinking of Samantha in particular, but Brigid and Moira may want to comment too.

Dame Moira Gibb: If I could just interject to say I think it is important that when we began our work on the taskforce, the relationships between employers and universities were not great. They were in some places but often there were different expectations. Local authorities wanted child protection social workers to be able to work as soon as they came off their course, whereas we are very clear that that is a beginning social worker. They need support and help, but the local authorities had a different perspective on it. Having been a director and a local authority chief executive, it seems to me absolutely essential that, in particular, as the major employer of social workers, we don't leave the development of the next generation of social workers solely to local authorities. It does need to be a joint enterprise between the academics and employers, because it is a profession not simply a job.

Q64 Chair: Do you concur with that, Samantha?

Samantha Baron: Yes. I would also say it is clearly a redefining of the HEI role, the provision of social work education, and the concern and worry is it is moving HEI and universities out of social work training. The minute we begin to do that and locate it much more firmly in employment, we are beginning to challenge the professional basis of social work as a profession and begin to move it towards an occupation. If we move towards an occupation we are then going to suffer experiences of low recruitment, low retention and so on.

Chair: Brigid, one last comment.

Brigid Featherstone: The knowledge base is not fixed. We are constantly learning about new problems and new ways of dealing with them. That takes place both in universities and in practice.

Chair: Thank you very much. We are now going to move on to the financing aspect of this issue and Ian is going to take us into it.

Q65 Ian Mearns: I am not normally someone who concentrates on the cost of something because quite often the cost of something isn't the same as the value of something, as we all know. But there is a problem in as much as the accelerated routes, including Frontline, are twice if not in some cases three times more expensive than the traditional routes through, for instance, the undergraduate route into social work, so the question then is: would the expansion of accelerated routes, such as Frontline, become unsustainable because of the cost?

Josh MacAlister: Shall I start?

Chair: Yes, I think you should.

Ian Mearns: Just for the information of people watching and listening, the cheapest undergraduate route has been priced at about £14,500, whereas Frontline is currently running at £45,000 per person trained. That is a significant difference and, therefore, there has to be a question about that in terms of sustainability.

Josh MacAlister: Yes. It is a question of cost or value for money, as you say, Ian. The report, the cost comparison study, has three figures in it. One has Frontline as being the most expensive route along with Step Up to Social Work closely behind. The other has Frontline and Step Up as the most affordable, because it is a full economic costing. I think there are issues with both of those costs. The first is simply a measurement of how much money it costs to get people through the programme. It does not take account of those leaving early or exiting and attrition, and it does not take account of the benefits accrued to local authorities by the work that is done. The second I don't think is a fair comparison between Frontline and other programmes because it takes account of lost earnings for undergraduates studying social work. I don't think that is a particularly fair way of measuring it. Then there is a third cost measure in the report, which is the net comparison cost. That takes account of everyone who has gone through Frontline or an undergraduate or a postgraduate or Step Up, and the benefits that might be accrued to the agency employing them through their work and time spent there, as well as the numbers that might leave the programme early or drop out. On that basis, Frontline is only 9% more expensive than undergraduate routes.

Then the question is, back to Samantha's point earlier: is that 9% worth the additional cost when the evaluation shows that there is a significantly higher practice skill? I ask that question because there are limitations to the evaluation, but I think it is probably one of the most rigorous evaluations and comparisons of social work education that we have had in England that I have seen. The quality of practice that someone is able to show when they knock on the door of a family for the first time, when they ask the right question, when they intervene at the right time, when they are able to stand in court and give good evidence of themselves and what has happened in the case, when they are able to bring agencies together, small gains in practice skill in those terms have real consequences in how well the system is able to perform with children and families, so I would say that the early indications of Frontline are that it is producing good value for money.

Q66 Ian Mearns: There is one problem, though. Professor Harry Ferguson has written that on current trends the introduction of programmes, like Frontline, could see social work departments within universities closing. That could mean the loss of the important research that Brigid has referred to, so that 9% differential could be very costly if that means we lose the social work research capacity within universities.

Josh MacAlister: I understand Harry's concerns about that. I think his speech is very well put together. But I have not seen and I don't believe there is compelling enough evidence to say you cannot have a system where you have a programme that is about promoting great social work practice among a number of routes that use different methods, co-existing with some great research institutes. There is lots of great research going on out there at the moment that isn't funded through subsidies from undergraduate and postgraduate social work qualifying routes. I don't think you need the subsidy in all those universities to do the research.

Q67 Ian Mearns: Josh has mounted the defence. Anyone else want to comment?

Dame Moira Gibb: I think the issue is about retention. As I say, we have plenty of people who join the social work profession and don't stay. The crucial judgment about that and the question you have asked is about whether those people stay in social work. We don't need people who only do a couple of years at the frontline of child protection. We need people who have long experience and knowledge to pass and share with others.

It does also seem to me that the focus has been overly on the training of the social worker. We were very clear in our taskforce that the opportunity for them was a doable job and not strain them. However skilled they are, if they work in an environment that is not conducive to good practice they will not be able to retain those skills. They will be disillusioned and leave perhaps, but certainly at that point we would not be able to say that it was a good investment. But all things being equality, a variety of routes is a good thing but it is—

Chair: We are going to talk about retention when Stephen asks a few questions. Do you have any more, Ian?

Q68 Ian Mearns: I think it is important because I am sure there has to be some difference of opinion about this.

Brigid Featherstone: We have always had diverse routes in social work. I did a one-year post qualifying course myself in the 1980s. Lots of people have done diverse routes. What we have never had—and it has implications beyond the money, as you have said money is only one indicator—is such an inequality in the student experience as we now have. We have students who are literally on £3,000 a year, if they get a bursary at all, and we have other students on £19,000 a year. As Harry Ferguson's own article suggested, it is creating a range of anxieties across the student landscape. People are saying, "Am I getting a second-class degree? Am I going to be able to get a job?" I think for social work, particularly with its commitment to a fairer and a more equal arrangement for all people in society, to be producing that level of inequality I think it raises some important, ethical questions.

Samantha Baron: First of all I would like to say, on behalf of the mainstream programmes, that we were very pleased to receive that report and pleased to note that undergraduate and postgraduate programmes delivered in HEIs represent excellent value for money, which was the main highlight of that report. In terms of the 9% differential around full economic costs, I think it is important to be reminded about the scale of the Frontline evaluation. It comprised 49 frontline students, so I think it is too early to be making substantive claims around continued investment in that model of delivery at this point in time.

Josh MacAlister: If I could just add that the sample size for the Frontline study was significantly higher than those from undergraduate or postgraduate routes, so it is only half of the cohort, which I accept, but for undergraduate and postgraduate routes the sample size was significantly lower.

Q69 Ian Mearns: The other thing on Frontline is that there is some evidence that it attracts less diverse students than traditional courses. Could that be problematic in the long-term because they need a diverse workforce in order to deal with the diverse set of problems out there?

Samantha Baron: Yes, I think you need a diverse workforce in order to reflect the communities in which those workforces actually live and work within. That is one of the benefits of the Step Up model where people are recruited locally, they have lived locally, and they are trained at an unqualified level within local organisations and local authorities. They then go on and train within that local authority, become qualified practitioners and then work back in communities that they have a substantive knowledge around. Their retention levels and preparedness for practice are very high, and that has been evidenced by three cohorts of research undertaken by the Department for Education.

Brigid Featherstone: The evidence from the Frontline evaluation is that there are different people coming into the profession, and I welcome that but we have to plan across a very diverse workforce. My research with young men, for example, recently—young men in the west of Scotland and young very deprived men in London—suggested that they do appreciate somebody who understands the difficulties that they are facing. They don't have to be a certain gender. They don't even have to be a certain ethnicity, but they do appreciate somebody who has some understanding of the levels of difficulties they are facing on the streets of London or in very industrialised parts in the west of Scotland. I am not saying you don't need very clever people. You do. I am not saying you don't need people who haven't been through Oxford and Cambridge. It is fantastic that those people want to come into social work. I couldn't be happier about it. But you do need a diverse workforce.

Josh MacAlister: I totally agree with all of that, and to Brigid's point the importance of empathy in selecting people to come on to social work programmes is essential and should not just be something that is left to chance down the line or for development. It should be a pre-requirement for people coming into social work courses.

In terms of Frontline's diversity, there are some aspects where we have been able to improve diversity, particularly getting a better balance of men and women on programmes, but there is a lot of work for us to do. I am still not happy that we have enough BME applicants on the programme. I would like to see us more gender diverse. I would like to see more people on the programme who were on free school meals when they were at school themselves. That is work for us to do but I think the people we have recruited are doing some fantastic work with children and families, and that is the most important thing.

Q70 Ian Mearns: You accept there is a problem in terms of recruitment for Frontline? In time, would you let us know what you are doing about that tangibly?

Josh MacAlister: At the moment our selection team go through lots of unconscious bias training and we do active work to do insight days for those who come from under-represented groups, like BME candidates. We held one of them two weeks ago. We target a whole range of universities, as well as Russell Group and Oxbridge. We also target universities that have higher proportions of BME candidates on courses, where the UCAS point entry has got eligibility, and we have recruited a team that is able to do outreach

work. There are an awful lot of things that we are doing. I would not characterise it as a problem. I am saying that I think we need to do more on that.

Ian Mearns: Thank you very much.

Q71 Stephen Timms: The BBC is reporting this morning that the proportion of social work vacancies in England has risen to nearly 20% and recruitment has gone up as well, so there is a worry that people are coming into the profession and then not staying very long. It is obviously early days for discussing the evidence about the impact of accelerated programmes like Frontline, but I wonder what evidence we have so far on two points. First, the proportion of people in training who go on to work in the profession rather than going off somewhere else, and secondly, the retention of social workers in the profession subsequently?

Samantha Baron: I will comment on retention of those in the profession. There is quite a lot of research undertaken about how to keep a confident, capable and experienced workforce in place for social work. That primarily rests on three core areas. One is about receiving good supervision at all levels when you are in practice. One is having a very clear CPD framework that leads to career progression and career opportunities around conditions of service. The third area is around protected caseloads as people progress through their different levels of experience. Those are the three core aspects I think that keep retention and will keep people in role. What we are missing in social work is a national CPD framework. We had one previously called the Post Qualifying Framework. That has now been disbanded and we now work to local arrangements. Very much as a profession, we want to work towards a national generic CPD post qualifying programme that is very well funded. Because what we know about the impact of austerity on local authorities is that one of the first budget restrictions will be around CPD training and, because it isn't mandatory, in order to keep people in the work then people focus more on their workloads rather than their own professional development and their own development of their professional identity.

It would be positive to move towards something like an NHS model who have ringfenced funding around CPD training and also if the national CPD programme is a mandatory requirement. At the moment we have the first stage of entry for the protection of newly qualified social workers, called the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment. That is a voluntary programme that is funded and that funding is under threat. So, even at the point at which we are devising a CPD framework, we know that there is still some uncertainty in the system around the one aspect that we have some national agreement on.

Brigid Featherstone: Unfortunately, I do think we know an awful lot about retention. Sadly, we have become a profession that is the opposite. We should be a profession that is hard to get into, which has a lot of the great selection procedures that Frontline and Step Up use to get the best people but that is very easy to stay in and we are at the opposite at the minute in some parts of the country. It is easy to get into and you leave too quickly.

Apart from what Samantha says, I want to draw attention to the research that has shown the impact of a broader cultural set of conversations on social work. One is the impact of Ofsted. If there is a bad Ofsted, captured in a word like "inadequate", you have people leaving in droves. That is a really serious issue, if you have a climate of risk and blame, a climate around, say, a particular death where there is a big moral panic. I think it is tragic that we don't seem to have developed a really good capacity to have proper grown-up

conversations in this country about blame and shame. I am not of the belief that when a child dies that social workers should say, "It's not our fault". I am of the belief that we should have a proper conversation about what might have happened there and what could have changed things, and that we are very careful and thoughtful about these terrible tragedies. But unfortunately I have seen, time and time again in my career, good social worker students being put off by very negative publicity, and there are particular impacts for organisations when you have poor Ofsted's and where you have a very big climate of risk aversion. I think, apart from the actual things we can do, we need to have a broader, cultural discussion about some of these issues.

Q72 Stephen Timms: I was asking Josh about this point: I think you have both called for an impact assessment of the effect of changes to social work education and how those changes might affect recruitment and retention. What would you hope for that impact assessment to provide?

Samantha Baron: I would like an impact assessment where the Government takes a strategic overview of the different delivery models that it is attempting to develop and implement, and begin to look at the impact of delivering different models on other delivery models, the impact that has on recruitment into social work training programmes and then to follow that through right through to retention into the workforce.

Brigid Featherstone: And some proper risk modelling as well. For example if, as is widely rumoured, we abolish the bursary, which is a feature across the piece anyway, what will the impact be on MA programmes? It will not have the same impact upon undergraduate courses. Because of Step Up and Frontline and Think Ahead, there are already very, very good alternatives for students in the MA world. They are also loaded down with debt from their undergraduates. This year we are already seeing a reduction in applications to MA programmes. They often tend to be concentrated in Russell Group universities, research-intensive universities, the very ones we say we want to encourage to keep in the social work world, so it is that kind of thing that we want.

What has happened is we have brought in things piecemeal and we haven't looked at what the consequences might be across the piece.

Q73 Stephen Timms: Thank you. Josh, are you able to comment on those two points about the proportion going into the profession, having done their training, and their subsequent retention in the profession?

Josh MacAlister: Yes. The conversion rate of those who have started a programme and then become an ASYE in a local authority with us is about 93%, which we believe is very positive. That compares to about 73% for postgraduate routes and that is lower if you look at the average across postgraduate and undergraduate routes. So we are very happy with that. But that is a reflection of Frontline being a relatively new initiative. We haven't seen anyone finish the two-year programme yet, so I recognise that time will tell on retention figures.

Frankly, this is not a challenge just for Frontline. This is a system-wide issue. I agree very firmly with Dame Moira's point about the need for local authority conditions to be good enough for people to want to stay. I think that is probably one of the biggest influencing factors, so the ability for social workers to do the work that they came into the profession

to do is absolutely essential. If they are spending a lot of their time away from families, managing the system and not feeling like they are able to intervene and help families change, they will probably not stay around very long.

Another reflection is: if you compare social work to the teaching profession, you can stay in teaching for a number of years and make progression through being a head of department, an assistant head, all the way up to being a head teacher, and still have a class to teach. The same is not true everywhere in social work. So, from having been a social worker, honing your skill, becoming really great at your work over five or six years, you can become a team manager and not hold any direct case work. I think that is a problem, so in looking at the long-term direction of travel for the career structure, there should be a widespread default for those moving up the social work career path to hold cases and have case holding responsibility. I think that would help with retention.

Q74 Stephen Timms: One more question, Chair, if I may, particularly for Moira. I wonder how you think the Government ought to improve workforce planning, in particular in discussion with employers and education institutions.

Dame Moira Gibb: I am by no means an expert on workforce planning but I do think it is currently inadequate. It does seem to me that the problem with workforce planning is we are again focused on the entrants rather than on the retention aspects, which seem to me to be more important. I think it is vital that we focus on the continuing development of social workers. I don't think that people thought that newly qualified teachers—when I was one—were fully formed, but people somehow or other make the assumption that a newly qualified social worker is fully formed. It is absolutely essential that the Department continues to invest in ASYE. The Government should encourage local government, as the principal employer, to work harder at it but it needs to do it in partnership with others as well but, as I say, my own advice would be that the focus must be on retention and support, particularly in the early years.

Chair: Thank you, Stephen. William, assessment and accreditation.

Q75 William Wragg: Yes, so straight on with it. The new accreditation system that has been trialled currently, could I ask what the benefits of that are and perhaps start with Brigid, please? The benefits of the new scheme that is being trialled at the moment.

Brigid Featherstone: Yes. The benefits are that it opens up the possibility. Social workers are very clear that they do need to progress their skills. They are very clear that they do need to demonstrate excellence throughout their career and not just at one point, so it does open that conversation. However, at the moment in the way it is designed, it seems to be a one-off approach that is not linked to ongoing support.

So can I remind you of what Samantha said about post qualifying support and CPD, continuing professional development? The way it is designed at the minute—and it is in its early stages and it is only a pilot—it seems to me that it is a one-off examination with different modules to it and social workers see it without any prior preparation for or without any feedback. Well, they will get feedback. I do think at the moment it is limited but can I also say I am not absolutely sure. It has been designed to support public confidence in the profession and we have had a lot of measures like that. My own belief is that what we need is not just public confidence but public education. We need to educate

the public, including all of us, about the complexities of the kind of job we seek to do when we seek to protect children. It isn't a job that has a "Yes" or a "No" answer or that can be answered by just knowing the law. It is tradeoffs in a democratic society around the privacy of the family.

It is a complex job. I am not saying it is easy but it will not be solved by a one-off examination. Having said that, if the one-off examination opens up possibilities for CPD and PQ, and opens up those kinds of conversations, that will be excellent.

Q76 William Wragg: In terms of what can be done to improve it, would you say that the integration of the CPD within that accreditation system as well—

Brigid Featherstone: Absolutely, and the experience of HEIs in delivering CPD in partnership. I think that would be excellent.

Samantha Baron: I think to improve the system for system accreditation is to decide what it is. There is a lack of clarity about what it is. What we know is it is trying to target three areas. There is an assumption that in the workforce there are three areas that need strengthening: leadership, supervision and practice. If we are looking at strengthening leadership, we have just embarked on a principal social worker role, which is actually a leadership role that is just beginning to embed. We have to question why that is being developed. We know supervision does need strengthening across all sectors. What is it about supervision that needs strengthening? Is it the concept of supervision? Is it training people to supervise others or is it the context in which people operate and giving people time as supervisors, so it is giving people time? The biggest question is about the role around strengthening practice, the accredited child and family practitioner role.

I was at a briefing session last week with the Department for Education on the proof of concept idea around this. What has happened is that they have designed a process and an operating model, and a method of organisation for it to be developed nationally. What they have not decided is what the role will be and where it will be located in practice. It seems a little bit chaotic to have designed a system of assessment and a system of organisation that tests that assessment, without knowing what level of staff or where it is going to be positioned within an organisation, so I think that needs further clarity.

Once we ask the question what it is they are trying to achieve, whatever it is they are trying to achieve needs to be located, as Brigid said, in a wider CPD framework.

Brigid Featherstone: If I can just point out as well that this is not insignificant in terms of money. £2 million has been spent just on this stage of it and, again, we do have to ask questions. Given that some local authorities do have a tradition of direct observation and of continuing support. You have heard from people like Marion Russell in Cornwall about the kind of work they do post qualifying. I do think in the current climate, in the context of austerity, more economically sustainable ways of developing our workforce might have been looked at without the punitive ethos of an assessment and accreditation. Even the term "assessment and accreditation" signals maybe a more punitive ethos than maybe support and continuing professional development ethos might.

Dame Moira Gibb: Could I add?

William Wragg: Yes, please do.

Dame Moira Gibb: One of the recommendations of the taskforce was that social workers should be licensed, and that was exactly Brigid's point about confidence in the public. We were in the post BBP aftermath, but when we moved into a reform programme development we did not do any work on licensing. We were encouraged to consider that it would be extremely costly, and in the present times that is a vital consideration. It seems to me that, again, there is a slight obsession from the entrants from the Department, rather than on the group that we already have in the profession doing work that have been trained, when I think training wasn't as good as it is now but needed help to ensure that they were. So they need investment in before they are tested, I suppose. It seems to me rather important that we do that and help local authorities do that as well.

Josh MacAlister: I think there are some real potential benefits that it could bring. It is early days. I believe it has been piloted in a number of local authorities. I don't know what the outcomes of that pilot are, but one big benefit could be helping the system to define what great social work practice looks like. I still think that is widely disputed and in many senses it should be a question, so nailing it down and understanding what is great and good enough social work practice.

There is a big benefit of it not simply looking at a paper or bureaucratic process for measuring whether someone is good enough. There is an assessment made of the practice skill demonstrated by someone in the process. I think that has lots of potential and, as Samantha said, it puts emphasis on supervision, practice and leadership, and I think there is some benefit in it not simply looking at practitioners as well. Our experience through delivering a programme for team managers, called First Line, is that the role of supervisors in the system is absolutely critical and often overlooked. There are lots of conversations about initial qualifying routes and people joining the profession. Lots of conversations about directors at the top, but the engines of the systems, those managers, assistant team managers, advanced practitioners, are absolutely critical.

Q77 William Wragg: Taking on that theme of the relationship between the proposed new model and the existing Professional Capabilities Framework—it is a leading question—how clear is that relationship at the moment? I am guessing from what you just said it is not very clear at all, so how would you integrate those two? Is it possible to integrate the two?

Samantha Baron: I think we need to question what the status is of the Professional Capabilities Framework, because an enormous amount of work was put into developing the Professional Capabilities Framework from all the stakeholders within social work. Once we had started developing it we saw it to be quite an effective framework that met all the CPD levels for the workforce. Since the college is no longer in existence then the status of the PCF is questionable. It is sitting with our professional association, the British Association of Social Work, and employers and HEIs are continuing to use it. However, it is not clear what the relationship is between the PCF and also both chief officers for social work knowledge and skills statements, for example. What we do not have built into the assessment and accreditation process is any acknowledgement of the PCF. What we have is a knowledge and skills framework that will link to this, so that does question where that sits.

Brigid Featherstone: Yes. Josh is correct that it is being piloted, so we don't know what the feedback will be. We still don't know an awful lot about it but, unlike the PCF, I am not aware that it does have the developmental aspect that Josh rightly identifies around the different levels. I think it is much more limited than the PCF was. Samantha is absolutely correct, there was both buy in from the stakeholders but, crucially, a lot of feedback that it was working well and people were using it in practice.

Again I come back to money. These are very expensive things. We have done a lot of work on things. Why are they just jettisoned in favour of untried models? I repeat, earlier on I said the value of this, what is called OSCE, which is an observation of clinical expertise in a simulated environment, as distinct from our tradition of going out and looking at what people do with families in the real world. The value is contested in the research literature. It is used in Canada, admittedly, because they don't allow direct observation of practice, and it is used in medicine. They need more work, but we do have well tried models of looking at how people do the job and they are not as expensive as some of what we are trialling at the moment.

Chair: William, thank you very much. We will move on to Lucy Allen who is going to be talking about qualifications.

Q78 Lucy Allan: We have talked in some depth already about CPD and particularly in the context of retention. A point that has come across very clearly is this is a profession and a profession needs good CPD. I think we have taken that on board as a Committee. Should assessed and supported year in employment be mandatory and should it be funded by the DfE?

Samantha Baron: Absolutely, yes, on both accounts. It is simple that one.

Lucy Allan: Brigid, is that a straightforward answer for you as well?

Brigid Featherstone: Yes.

Q79 Lucy Allan: All right. Samantha, could I ask you, in terms that you were talking about the Career Progression Framework, could you drill down a little bit more what that framework should look like and how it should be funded?

Samantha Baron: Yes. First of all, it should be nationally agreed and it should cover both children and adults. I think they should not be separate, as the current developments are indicating. A nationally agreed structure should be then locally implemented and it should always be a mandatory structure that is credited. That is a key point at the moment that, to raise the standards of a profession and give a profession standing, it is essential that any framework is credited and academic awards are given as part of that. I think it is very important in our framework, in terms of where we have developed from and where we want to go to, that within that framework we have specialist roles, because that has been missing historically from our CPD frameworks. So specialists' roles, for example, in specialist practitioners or advanced practitioners who are over specific practice areas, for example, in dementia or, for example, end of life care so that we begin to build in. What would also be helpful to build in that is the idea of a consultant practitioner role, which is something that paraprofessions have around that that we don't have.

In terms of the funding, what we do know is that funding for statutory CPD social workers is very much dependent on the funding for the local authority. At the moment that is variable across the country. What we need is a central system that the NHS has, where it has a central budget, which is quite significant to promote professional development but is managed through regional networks. In my area it is at Health Education North West that then disburses that. I think if we were to come to a model similar to that, where we had identifiable resources to build into a nationally agreed CPD.

Q80 Lucy Allan: Brigid, could I ask you to add to the points that have already been made about preparation for accreditation? What learning resources do you think are needed and how would they best be delivered?

Brigid Featherstone: For the current accreditation?

Lucy Allan: For accreditation.

Brigid Featherstone: Again, the research evidence suggests that it is not a one-off event. I think we have moved away from the Munro idea, which I thought was really, really important, that a good social worker has a good environment in which to be a good social worker in and that the context in which you do good social work is absolutely essential. You are not like a dentist with your tools or even a doctor with your stethoscope looking at the patient in front of you. The time you get to think about the work, the context in which you can admit to mistakes, you can say, "I didn't ask that family that. I was frightened by that man. I went out without asking that crucial question", the whole way in which we can deal with near misses, so you have to build a reflective culture so that people can genuinely be assessed and encouraged to do their best in a dynamic and proactive way. I do think that whole idea from Munro about the organisational culture and removing the blocks to good, safe practice, we have lost that a bit. We seem to be promoting a model of the social worker as an individual with their knowledge and skills in their heads, almost like a bag of tricks that they can then take into whatever setting. I don't think that will work.

Lucy Allan: That is a very interesting analogy. Thank you.

Chair: Any more questions?

Lucy Allan: No.

Chair: No. Lucy, you have the last one and it could be the most important.

Q81 Lucy Frazer: Yes. Building on what you said, Brigid, you said we need to build a reflective culture. Samantha, you have mentioned the importance of supervision. Dame Moira also said you need to focus on retention and support and Josh said supervision is critical. So you have all talked about the importance of supervision in the role. There was an article in the Journal of Social Work Practice about retention and recruitment, which talked about the importance of working group discussions. Do you think that working group discussions are important and, if so, what do they bring?

Brigid Featherstone: I was a team leader myself and I think they are a fresh pair of eyes on the one hand. One of the things that we know, again from the evidence, is that people

get stuck with a case. They get stuck in thinking in a particular way: that family does pose a risk. That family doesn't pose a risk. That family support case, or whatever. In good quality team discussions you can get people to rethink their biases in whatever direction. As you probably know, there is this whole idea of confirmation bias where you decide a particular way of thinking about something and you screen out everything that will contradict your belief. That is what we do as human beings all the time, so a reflective culture is absolutely essential for you to be able to interrogate your beliefs about something. It is also, more than that though, a way in which you can be supported around the difficulties of the job, so that you are able to talk about your fears and anxieties. We need to be able to acknowledge the fact that sometimes it can be very difficult talking to people about painful stuff; that we are scared and we don't always do the best things when we go out. Good quality team cultures can provide the right kind of challenge and support. It has to be challenge as well of course, but there has to be support.

Dame Moira Gibb: I think it is important that the practice of social work is discussed in the hierarchies of the organisation. We had for a time a place where people got away from the difficult stuff of working with really demanding individuals and situations. They did not have to talk about it and they distributed the cases and they did not need to understand it themselves. Departments need to be much better designed to support the discussion of practice, the focus on practice and, again, social workers themselves need to be more willing to talk about their own practice and encouraged to discuss it, because that is how you learn.

Josh MacAlister: The model we use on Frontline in the first year is placing participant students in groups of four with a trained consultant social worker to share a group of cases together for that first year. On reflection of the point that you have made, which is that the ability to look at cases from different perspectives and to deliberately remain in a position of safe uncertainty, to be curious and generate competing hypotheses about what might be going on with a family is critical and very difficult to do if you are not doing it with other people. As a method I think it is well worth promoting more widely.

Samantha Baron: Just to answer that, I think as a profession they are very good at supervision. They always have been. We have different models, whether it is one to one or—we would call it—group based supervision that you are referring to. I think the question is that we have to find a way to support social work organisations to have the resources in time to allow supervision to occur. We have the knowledge and skills. We are very good at it as a profession. People in the profession know how to supervise. They know how to be supervised. What we need to do is find a way for those organisations to create the time and space to allow that process to happen.

Q82 Lucy Frazer: If each of you could make one recommendation to improve the children's social work reform agenda what would that one recommendation be?

Dame Moira Gibb: My recommendation would be not to introduce lots of new things but to support the broad programme that was set out—the reform programme had huge support across all parts of the profession and local authorities were supportive—and to let things bed down and to evaluate them consistently and to support the outcome they anticipated, to be more objective.

Samantha Baron: Mine would to slow down, work in partnership and take us with you. We are very good at working in partnership. We don't—

Q83 Suella Fernandes: Who is the slowing down addressed to?

Samantha Baron: The Government: the Department for Education, the Department of Health, slow down, work in partnership, take us with you. We showed through the reform board and the taskforce that all stakeholders and social workers genuinely want to make this a better system for children and families and for adults. We want to work in co-operation and bring us with you.

Brigid Featherstone: I would absolutely agree with Dame Moira, the reform process was a process that was bought into at every single level. People were very honest and I remember lots of discussions about our shortcomings as well as our strengths. I am still bewildered about why all the developments within the reform process seem to have been systematically overturned. I find it disappointing.

Josh MacAlister: I don't think you can overstate the challenge of shifting perceptions about the profession as a career prospect for people. Frontline has had some early success in putting social work into the Times Top 100 graduate list. Step Up to Social Work has done some great job and lots of the social work degree courses have as well, but still social work is seen as one of the least prestigious career choices for people in this country; 70% of graduates have never considered the career whatsoever, which compares very poorly with other professions and, when asked about social work compared to other professional routes into other professions, social work comes out on the bottom. So there is a job of work to do, not just for Frontline but for everybody—as a witness here today and for central government—to boost and shift over the next 10 years the image of social work so that it becomes the most attractive career choice for people in this country. If you compare what the Government has done on the big Get into Teaching campaign, there should be something similar with big cross-party support, long-term funding and commitment to make sure that the best people in this country choose an amazing profession.

Chair: Thank you very much. I am going to have to conclude this session now but that is a good point to end on. All of you have made some very useful contributions to this discussion, so thank you very much indeed.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Dr Ruth Allen**, Chief Executive, British Association of Social Workers, **Annie Hudson**, former Chief Executive, The College of Social Work, **Marc Seale**, Chief Executive and Registrar, Health and Care Professions Council, and **June Thoburn**, Emeritus Professor of Social Work, University of East Anglia, gave evidence.

Q84 Chair: Good morning, Marc, Annie, Ruth and June. Welcome to this second session. You have been in the earlier one as spectators, so you will know the direction of travel that we are in, but if you could say who you are and what you represent for the purposes of those listening from afar. Marc?

Marc Seale: Good morning. My name is Marc Seale and I am the Chief Executive of the Health and Care Professions Council.

Annie Hudson: Good morning. I am Annie Hudson, former Chief Executive of The College of Social Work, which now no longer exists, and I am also a former Director at Children's Services.

Dr Allen: Ruth Allen, Chief Executive of the British Association of Social Workers.

June Thoburn: June Thoburn. I am also a former Vice Chair of GSCC, a member of the College of Social Work Faculty and a researcher, but I am particularly interested at the moment in the voluntary sector.

Chair: There is nothing wrong with being former provided you bring experience, judgment and good value to this Committee, which I am sure you will, so thank you. Catherine, you are going to kick off with recruitment and retention.

Q85 Catherine McKinnell: Yes. Good morning, thank you for coming. There was a very timely report on the BBC about retention and we have obviously explored the issue with the previous panel. I thought it would be helpful to start off—obviously not repeating each other, and if you do agree then say so—with what do you see are the main reasons why there seems to be so many social workers leaving the profession?

Dr Allen: We know that there are many, many pressures working in social work at the moment. As a professional association we provide member advice and representation, so we have a lot of day to day information about that coming through about the changing workforce conditions. Many of the points that were made earlier are very important: about the nature of the work, about the workplace, about working conditions, about the support to staff, about whether when people are coming in new to the profession they are getting the right support in those early years. The ASYE scheme, which was mentioned earlier, was there to offer some protection and to offer that stepping stone into the profession. We are finding that it is being undermined, I think, in some ways by financial pressures but also by the pressures on local authorities and other employers. It is not enabling our social workers to find their feet in the way that the reform board was hoping would be the case.

The other thing is we are losing experienced staff as well. People are not coming, consolidating and staying. They are also leaving, often because they are picking up work that is coming their way because other staff have gone off sick, there are high levels of stress and there is quite a lot of evidence of that as well. What was also interesting in the BBC report that came out today is there is a lot of variation. There are some authorities—and this is about local authorities—that are having success in providing good conditions, in having good recruitment campaigns, and perhaps growing their own and in keeping their staff and others are not. There is a lot of variation there, and I think we need to learn from local authorities and other employers who are achieving retention and able to recruit.

Just one last thing is that we also know from the association that people are moving out of conventional types of employment arrangements. They are moving out of conventional types of employment arrangements. They are moving out of staying in one authority or one organisation long-term. They might be moving between authorities to find better places to work and that is important and something for employers to learn from.

They are also going into independent practice and they are going into agency working, which has some benefits perhaps for those individuals in many ways but changes the nature of the workforce landscape. It is sometimes very hard for employers to recruit permanently because the employment opportunities with agencies and independently now outstrip what can be offered or what is being offered in a very pressed public sector.

June Thoburn: Can I just come in about recruitment and retention? They do go together. I think retention is far more important than recruitment and I would like to say something about value for money and Moira's last comment about change. Any change needs to be justified at this point in time, when we know we are desperately short of cash for all the things that we want to happen in local authorities and in the voluntary sector. We have to make best use of whatever money is available. That is an overarching comment.

I totally agree with Josh's last comment. I would love to see a Government recruitment campaign, not just for Frontline but for the whole of social work, as the Government has done for nursing and teaching, into all the routes. I would like to see us going into the schools with recruitment. I used to work for a social work education recruitment agency a long time ago, and we used to go into schools. We do need to keep the undergraduate route, the postgraduate mainstream route and fast-track routes. Getting the balance between those three is a really interesting question. How much of each do we need at the recruitment stage? We can go into the schools. Frontline has been very good at going into the universities. Let us go into the schools and say, "Social work is a really exciting job". Let us do it regionally. Let all the courses go in together and say, "You want to help people? You might want to be a nurse, you might want to be a social worker or you might want to be a teacher". There are exciting ways of doing that.

On retention, if I can quickly add to what Ruth has said, there are too few experienced social workers out there now. That is one of the reasons why people are leaving. They are not getting the support. There is not the wisdom around when they have these team meetings or group meetings. They feel unsupported. You have to have a balance among the 50 year-olds, the 30 year-olds and the new recruits. You have to have new recruits who are older and experienced already, life experience.

Just quickly on the PCF, the value of PCF is that it is a framework. Knowledge and skills are a curriculum. We can add curricula to frameworks. We have a framework. It allows the social worker to plot their way through, perhaps ending up as an educator, perhaps as a manager, perhaps as a policy-maker or perhaps as a commissioner, an important new role. The PCF is a framework for plotting your way through. It gives power to the individual worker to say, "That is the route I want to take. That is the module I need to take. That is the place I want to do it". If I want to be a social worker with the deaf, I am not going to go to the University of East Anglia. I am going to go to a specialist university that does that.

Annie Hudson: Three slightly separate points. First of all—I think reference was made by Brigid earlier on—the organisational context, the organisational climate within which people are working is absolutely crucial, but what has not been explicitly mentioned this morning is the importance of leadership. That is not just the managerial leadership, the leadership from politicians and chief officers and so on, but it is also about professional leadership. We do now have the role of Principal Social Worker, which the College previously supported and BASW is now, and that is a real opportunity that we need to

build on. It is about somebody within the organisation who has a particular role and priority of focus on determining, shaping and defining good practice.

The second thing is around professional development but also the team in which people are working. There was reference—I think from Josh—to the importance of first line managers and I absolutely would endorse that. The quality of practice is absolutely determined by the quality of your frontline managers, because they are the ones who every day take oversight of and sometimes make the very crucial decisions about children and families. We need to invest more in that cadre of practitioners. They are a bit like consultants in a medical world.

Thirdly, this whole issue about the public's understanding about social work. While I agree a Government-sponsored recruitment campaign could have some value, we do need to remember it was done before by the previous Government. As important is helping the public to understand what social work is about, particularly in the context of child abuse tragedies. It is really giving the truth about what social workers can and cannot do.

Some years ago in Bristol, when I was Director there, we had the BBC come in and do what was a very successful series about child protection work. The thing that was most astonishing to us and indeed the producers was how poor the understanding of the public was about what social workers really do. They have a very stereotypical, prejudiced image and we need to do much more to help people understand what social workers do. Everybody knows what teachers do and everybody knows what doctors do, because we all have teachers and we all have doctors. Not many people have social workers, and particularly childcare social workers. That is a really important way in which we can help to give some pride back to the profession and an understanding of it.

Marc Seale: Yes, I would reiterate that the working environment, particularly in child and family social work, is absolutely critical in trying to resolve this problem. However, it is very interesting to look at the rest of the UK in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, where we do not have this sort of problem. Comparisons need to be made between the four systems.

Q86 Catherine McKinnell: One of the issues is whether Frontline and Step Up will help in terms of recruitment and retention. I don't know if anyone wants to comment briefly on that.

Marc Seale: From the perspective of a regulator, we should be facilitating different routes into the profession, whether it is part-time people coming in, mature candidates, international applicants, and people on short programmes, NSCs or BSCs. We need a variety of routes onto the register. That is very beneficial.

At the same time, when we are looking at that, we have to balance the cost of training those individuals and, more importantly, what the impact is if those individuals only stay in the profession a very short time. Not only does it drive up the cost of those individuals but it also has a big impact on the university system in that you have to have a bigger capacity because people do not remain in the profession a very long time. Again, it is another one that collectively we need to resolve.

Dr Allen: I absolutely agree that we need innovation in education. We need different opportunities to bring different groups of students into the profession. Anything that raises the attractiveness of social work to a more diverse group of potential applicants and people with different kinds of high-level skills, academic achievement and so on, is good. We need to be talking about how we support the rest of the system. Support has been worked through quite a lot already in the presentations earlier. It is about showing confidence in the quality of the more traditional or the mainstream programmes.

The evaluation of Frontline was really interesting and it did show certain aspects where the Frontline students came out well. Skill acquisition was clearly happening in those areas. It was not a full comparison of all of the benefits of doing a three-year degree or a two-year Masters course, in a more conventional sense, against Frontline. It did not evaluate that. That is really important. We need to talk about what the value is for students to go onto those more mainstream courses and, through that, build the confidence of those students who are coming in through any route. What we do not want are students who are coming through the new routes feeling confident that they have the right package and people coming through the other routes feeling that they have not, where there are a lot of different kinds of value in perhaps doing a longer course or a more mainstream MA.

Annie Hudson: Yes, I would endorse that. One of things in what is quite a febrile debate at times about the different kinds of programmes is that we need to clear that we learn from the best. For example, I observed one of the days when Frontline was recruiting participants and I was very impressed with the rigour of that. I know that other courses have similarly rigorous ways of selecting people but there is something there about sharing that evidence, how you select the right people to go onto the programmes.

The second thing is there is this risk of decoupling the production of research and the generating of knowledge from the delivery of social work programmes. I am going to slightly embarrass one of your advisors here who is a professor at Bristol, which of course was my local university when I was DCS. One of the things about programmes that have a lot of researchers and people who have written and looked in depth at issues over time teaching social work trainees is that they then develop a really good understanding about the importance of evidence-informed practice. I am not saying Frontline does not do that but we do need to have a bit of concern about the decoupling, as I say, of the production of knowledge and research from the delivery of training.

June Thoburn: Can I reinforce that point about the evidence base? I have elsewhere said that the big problem for Frontline and indeed Step Up is selling good people short for a long-term career in social work. The knowledge base is hugely important. Frontline is very good on skills and indeed on empathy—we have seen from the evidence—but a big part of the social work role is decision-making: deciding whether a child should be placed for adoption, deciding whether this child should be removed into care or deciding whether huge amounts of resources should be given to a family with a disabled child. In order to make that decision, you have to balance the evidence. Balancing evidence means starting off with a broad base of knowledge, which the traditional courses have.

I would like to see how many of the Frontline and Step Up people go on to do the Masters part of the course, because they can go off after the 13 months with their certificate, go somewhere else and they are qualified social workers. They do not have to do what I think

is absolutely essential in year 2, which is making sense of research and knowing how to use it.

One of the things in my career that I have been most proud is Making Research Count, which is a way of local HEIs and their local partners trying to help people to make sense of research. Indeed, practitioners are hungry for research evidence. You sometimes hear, “They are not interested”. Of course they are. They need the time to do it.

Basically, I would like to see whichever route is being used not undervalue the role of the knowledge base. That goes on into what I hope we will talk about, teaching partnerships.

Q87 Catherine McKinnell: I am conscious we are going to run out of time. I can tell the Chair is about to come in and tell us to be a bit more smart. One of the things that everybody seems to have mentioned in all of the evidence given this morning is that the image of social work needs to be elevated. Could you say what the most important thing is the Government could do to try to make social work look more attractive? Everyone agrees it needs to be done. There are very few suggestions on how it can be done, as far as I can see.

Annie Hudson: Part of the difficulty is that a lot of the discourse about social work is delivered through the lens of when things go wrong, whether that is child deaths, whether that is scandals in children’s home or whether that is whatever—the death of an adult. It is something about trying to get a view across about social work and what it achieves. It is not easily measurable sometimes. It is not like you can present a whole set of fantastic GCSE results or A-level results, or reductions in death from cardiac disease. It is much harder to get the evidence of impact.

One of the things that we really have to do is to work harder at finding ways—this is not just the Government’s problem, I recognise—of talking up the achievements of social workers, of individual social worker and of the profession, and indeed of children’s services departments at voluntary organisations. That has become even more difficult, partly because we have had a much more rigorous Ofsted regime, which in some ways is better because it is more focused on what the experience of children and families is in a way it was not in the past. It is about looking at the value added by social work and talking about that.

Marc Seale: Yes. Based on my experience with the other 16 professions that we regulate, the missing player in this picture is that we do not have a particularly strong and vibrant professional body. It is making great strides but I think it would be worth considering giving it very targeted, very quite mean grants to build up its expertise in terms of its body of knowledge and its relationships with students. We have to have a professional body that is the go-to organisation when you are talking about standards, when you are—

Chair: We will come on to that subject in a short while. Ruth, you are going to be answering my questions later on that subject so you do not need to answer now.

Q88 Catherine McKinnell: Ruth, I was going to ask you the next question anyway so if you were able to include very briefly a short suggestion on what the Government could do, that would be helpful. I know that the Association has suggested that we need to control

and limit the hours and workloads of social workers. Can you say how the Government could do that or what the Government could do to achieve that?

Dr Allen: This is about how Government is working with the employers, with Adass, with ADCS and with other employers, and about expectations of the work conditions. The Employers Standards document and framework that came out of the social work reform process was intended to help bridge that and there is little accountability for organisations in using that now. There is something like that framework that Government might use in conjunction with the employers and their employer bodies, LGA and so on. Maybe to resurrect that in a new form would be important.

If the ASYE programme was indeed mandatory—and the conditions for newly-qualified staff within that to have reduced caseloads was mandatory—those sorts of frameworks would come into play. If there are going to be new regulatory arrangements and if we are going to have a new CPD framework for social work, within that we need to be thinking about what time for CPD social workers can be expected to have from their employers. That will then have a knock-on effect on how their workload is managed because they will need to have that time for that professional development. Those are some of the ideas.

Chair: Good answer. Thank you very much.

Q89 Catherine McKinnell: Just one final. Do any of you have any suggestions on how former social workers could be tempted to come back into the profession?

June Thoburn: Regional working together is important, for instance going back to the role of HEIs in running training courses and day conferences, drawing in their former students, who do hang around. That is one way. In other words, the regions and the localities are really important. I do think DfE is doing too much micromanaging at the moment. Putting much more planning of all of this into the localities, the HEIs, the partnerships—we have been very good at partnerships in the past and they will have some very good ideas about how to do that.

Chair: Thank you very much, June. Thank you. That is excellent. Thank you, Catherine. We are going to have to move on to the next bit, which is Marion, who is going to be talking about workforce planning.

Marion Fellows: Apparently very quickly.

Chair: Yes.

Q90 Marion Fellows: Can I just ask, without any preamble, who you think should be responsible for workforce planning for social workers and what role you think the Government should play? Marc, do you want to start?

Marc Seale: Central Government has a very important role to play. That is based on my understanding of how the system runs in health. It needs to be centrally co-ordinated but it needs absolute support from the employers, the educators, the regulator and the professional bodies to make sure they have the right data. We as the regulator hold a lot of data in terms of historic information and we do a lot of forecasting for university programmes and things like that. Again, we are always happy and willing to share that information.

Annie Hudson: I would agree. It is a partnership. The employers have a huge interest in this. Government has a responsibility; the professional associations, the regulator and so on. We have not done good workforce planning. Dame Moira said this earlier on. It has been rather haphazard, a bit ad hoc.

What is also quite difficult, particularly in children's social work, is that the definition of what is needed shifts and changes hugely. You can have an authority that has had quite a stable workforce and if they get hit with an "inadequate" Ofsted suddenly they are looking at 40% vacancies, 40% agency staff and so on.

We have to get much smarter at it as a profession and there needs to be some investment in some good-quality workforce planning that is based on the needs of regions. I remember one of the things that was in Sir Martin Narey's report about social work education two or three years ago was how the supply of qualifying social work students varied enormously from region to region, so that in one area you had two or three times the number of people being produced as were needed to be employed and in another area there were not enough. That is where June's point about regional partnerships is so very, very crucial because we know this is very localised, as indeed I think it is in health and teaching.

Dr Allen: I would like to draw attention to the fact that we have been talking a lot about children's social work. It is one profession. It is regulated as one profession. One of the issues with some of the training programmes that have come on-stream, the fast-tracks, is that they are part of seeing that split. If you are talking about workforce planning going forward, we need a social work workforce. There are 90,000 registered social workers—I think that is about right, in the last count—in England. It is a big profession; it is not a small profession.

You need people to be able to move between different parts of the profession. That is about full workforce flexibility and it is also about the knowledge and skill base and the real needs of people. People are children, then they are adults and then they are in families. All generations of people are interconnected. In terms of professional practice we are losing some of that clarity—that this about the whole of people and it is a whole, one profession, with specialisms in it—and we are also losing workforce flexibility in that as well.

Q91 Marion Fellows: This is a subject we have heard before. Could I ask how you think a social work supply model would work in practice?

June Thoburn: Just a quick point about choice and specialism. While I totally agree that we need to start as a generic profession and I am very keen on regional planning, nevertheless there are some people who want something special. I think of the deaf, I think of forensic social work. We have to allow for some specialisms within the HEIs so that people can make those choices, which tend to be on more of a national basis. While it is generally regional planning, let us not forget national issues, specialist issues.

Q92 Marion Fellows: Thank you. How do you think the availability of high-quality social work placements can be improved? Do you think teaching partnerships are the answer?

June Thoburn: I do. Start with that. It is the most productive of the Government's proposals. What I am not sure is the way it is being rolled out as a sort of competition. You have to fill in the form and get the right answers and then you will get it or you will not. I speak as somebody from East Anglia. I do not want the whole of East Anglia to be without a teaching partnership just because we got our questions wrong or filled in our form wrongly. Having said that, I do think we have always had partnership working.

I am concerned about the various uses of funding but given I have already said that, let us think about how best to use whatever is available. Putting some funding into these teaching partnerships, both for the qualifying and post-qualifying, and placement, feels to me like the best way forward so long as it is done carefully and across the country.

Q93 Chair: Does anybody have a specific answer to that question?

Dr Allen: Just that we need to think about where these placements are and not have this narrowed too much to only local authorities. We need to think about integrated services and social work placements within the NHS, and whether they are covered adequately within the teaching partnership arrangements as we go forward with more integrated care.

Annie Hudson: It is not just about supply, it is about the quality of practice education when they get there. It is absolutely crucial that people have good experiences working in statutory contexts when they are in qualifying programmes and they have access to really good-quality supervision. You only get that when you have strong, robust relationships between the employers and the providers in the universities.

Marc Seale: I very much support those three points. Teaching partnerships is an excellent idea. It works very well in health. Secondly, it is about the qualities of those placements. There is a problem in the sector with not enough good-quality practice placements and if you do not get those, you will not get good-quality social workers.

Chair: Okay. Well, Mark, you are going to be in the spotlight now because Suella is going to be asking about regulation. You can ask the others.

Suella Fernandes: Yes. I think it is mainly focused on Mark.

Chair: You can only add if you have something really valuable to say because you are the one to check.

Q94 Suella Fernandes: The Professional Standards Authority issued a very damning report about the HCPC last year saying that the regulation was not fit for purpose, that it was outdated and incoherent. The Narey Review has been critical in the assessment of courses. The Law Commission also issued a report asserting that the HCPC had been breaching the human rights of its social workers and radical overhaul has been recommended. What do you think?

Marc Seale: Fortunately I have absolutely no idea what you are talking about. The PSA has given us very good reports from its conception. We meet all the standards of the PSA. The Law Commission work is about all regulation. The Government is moving forward, I believe, in consultation. I am sorry; I am completely dumbfounded in terms of where you got that information from.

Q95 Suella Fernandes: There is a report from the Professional Standards Authority about the regulation of social work and it is a damning report that says that there is a need for overhaul. We also have the Narey Review, which says that the assessment of courses is generic and insufficient.

Marc Seale: Again, I cannot answer that question because I am very familiar with the PCSO. We work with them on a very close basis, I met their new chair just a few days ago and there are no problems with HCPC in relation to the PSA. I notice a number of your colleagues at the back looking at each other. Could you tell me which report you are referring to?

Q96 Suella Fernandes: Yes. I am referring to Community Care, a website that has referred to the Professional Standards Authority last year in a 2015 report, which has criticised the HCPC.

Marc Seale: I know there is a journalist from Community Care behind me. There is a report from the PSA that was published a number of months ago looking at the whole of the concept of professional regulation. It was not about us, it was about regulation in total and it very much threw up a range of suggestions. I think you might be referring to that but it is not about the HCPC in particular.

Chair: It does say that HCPC met all 24 of the standards for good regulation in 2014-15. They said, “We do not believe that improving education standards across the board should be confused with the primary role of regulation, which is to protect the public by ensuring that the standards are being met”. That is what it said and that is what Suella is referring to.

Q97 Suella Fernandes: Yes, it said that but it has also recommended an overhaul of the regulation of social work because there are shortcomings. We obviously disagree on this.

Marc Seale: No, I am just dumbfounded. Again, I know the PSA has very strongly recommended that the regulation of all professionals in health and social work should be looked at and that has been fed into the Department of Health consultation, which is coming out in October. Should we move on?

Q98 Suella Fernandes: Sure. I am happy to move on to another aspect of criticism with the HCPC. I want to put these points to you.

Marc Seale: Of course.

Q99 Suella Fernandes: Sir Martin Narey in his review assessed the way that courses are assessed and he found that the assessment set a low standard, that the standards were generic and not specific to social work, that it did not provide value for money or reassurance to Ministers or the public that these courses were being accredited sufficiently. Again, do you agree with those findings and that there is a need for reform at the heart of assessment of courses?

Marc Seale: If there is a criticism of the quality of any particular programme that we are responsible for, we as a statutory regulator need to do something about it as soon as

possible. We have very strong powers. We can have directed visits. Whenever there is a concern that we can identify, we would go and visit those university programmes. What Narey said has been raised a number of times and we have very specifically—and also with the Department for Education—gone back to these authors and said, “Right. Could we have the names of the programmes you are referring to? I will organise a directed visit within the next 24 hours”. We have repeatedly asked that question and every time we have asked we have been told, “We do not have that information”. Where are these examples?

The second thing is that we have just completed a thorough review of all the programmes for social workers in England and roughly 26% of those programmes that we inherited from the GSEC are no longer in operation. In addition, we are currently embarking on a review of the standards for social work. Again, we are very much looking forward to people like Narey or the Department for Education responding to that consultation to tell us where those standards should be improved. We can then implement them fairly rapidly.

We keep on getting these vagaries and as a regulator we go back to people and say, “Tell us which university you are referring to. We will do that. That is our job”. They will not tell us.

Q100 Chair: June was going to make a comment.

June Thoburn: A very quick point. As the former vice-chair of the GSEC I know why it was moved to the HCPC. I was opposed to it. I have rung around and people now feel pretty satisfied with HCPC. I do not know whether the issue is around just accreditation of social work education or whether the plan—it is all terribly vague—is to take over the whole of regulation, fitness for practice and conduct, in which case it will be very expensive. I know that from my experience at GSEC. I am not sure that I would be thinking that this is the best use of scarce resources at this time.

Q101 Chair: Would you like to say something?

Annie Hudson: There is a bit of irony that what is being proposed seems to be a reinvention of the GSEC. However, I probably will differ from Marc on this in that I think social work has to have its own regulator. It has very large numbers of people. It needs to have very specific and explicit standards that people know about, understand and abide by. The difficulty of being in a much more generic regulatory body is that that can get lost and the specific needs are not fully adhered to.

The other thing I would say is that in this business about regulation of social work, there are at the moment a lot of kids on the block. There was previously the College—no longer—and in terms of social work education providers, we had a voluntary endorsement scheme. Sometimes we would be doing visits at the same time as the regulator was doing theirs. We did not always come to same conclusions about courses. I need to say that. There is a need to sharpen and tighten up the regulatory framework for social work.

Q102 Chair: We need to be more forensic and more purposeful in assessing courses. That is what you are saying?

Annie Hudson: Yes. Indeed around the whole individual regulation stuff, there is a very strong argument for social work having its own body, notwithstanding some of the costs and notwithstanding that we did use to have the GSEC.

Chair: Yes, point taken. Any further questions, Suella?

Q103 Suella Fernandes: What do you think would be the right balance and work in terms of a new regulatory model?

Annie Hudson: In terms of what it would be regulating?

Q104 Suella Fernandes: Yes, and what kind of standards? There is a need to drive up standards. How should that be facilitated through regulation?

Annie Hudson: I think Josh was saying earlier on there is not a consensus about what makes a good social work practice and the things that go along with that, like supervision, organisational support and so on. All of the parties—in the way that did happen through the Social Work Reform Board and the Social Work Task Force—need to develop some collaborative consensus about what those practice standards should be. Then it is for the regulator to uphold those standards, whether that is about social work education providers, whether that is about individuals or whether that is about organisations. Ruth made this point about the health check—sorry.

Q105 Chair: We are getting a bit pressed for time at the moment so, Ruth, it has to be quick.

Dr Allen: Yes. There has to be collaboration with the professional association and with the profession around what these standards are. We are not going from a blank sheet of paper. It is not that we do not have clear ideas about what good standards are within the profession. It must be worked out with the profession, otherwise there is going to be completely unnecessary tension between the Government system of regulation and public accountability, and the profession. That will continue and that is not necessary.

Marc Seale: What I would just like is that the day after the announcement was made we received a joint letter from the Department of Health and the Department for Education confirming there were no issues with us as a regulator. This decision was not related to our performance as a regulator, which is a clear indication that we are an efficient and effective regulator.

Q106 Chair: I think the question is more what you are regulating, rather than whether you are regulating it well enough. That is the point we have to rest on.

Marc Seale: This is an important misunderstanding between the College and what it was trying to do. The key thing is that if you do not have consensus and you try to be conscious perhaps that those standards will not work.

Q107 Chair: Right. We are going to move on to that question. Suella, I take it you have concluded your interesting line of questioning. I am going to ask the question, and this is really directed to Annie first. College of Social Work, no longer with us. Does the Government's proposal meet your expectations and requirements?

Annie Hudson: It is very clear that the proposal—I think it is not fully fleshed out yet—is not about reinventing a college. It is about an arm’s-length regulator. That is needed and there is some reform needed in that direction. The College set out to be something very different. It set out to be a College of Social Work in the way that you have medical colleges and clearly we were not successful in establishing that in a sustainable way.

Q108 Chair: You have said several times in this session that you want some kind of professional body.

Annie Hudson: Absolutely.

Q109 Chair: If it is not something like the College because that did not succeed and it is not going to be a revamped regulator because that is not what you think is correct, what do you think we should have?

Annie Hudson: BASW is the British Association of Social Workers—

Q110 Chair: Yes. It is the first time I have heard it pronounced quite like that but we will go with it.

Annie Hudson: They have taken on some of the functions that we had, including ownership of the professional capabilities framework and the support to the PSWs network. They have taken on some of the functions. It will be interesting and important to see how they evolve and change over time and whether they can or will want to take on some of the functions that the Social Work had about being a professional college, which is about being a centre of excellence and upholder of professional standards.

If there is a new regulator then my understanding is that they may well take on the responsibilities we would have liked to have had and I think we should have had, which is about post-qualifying training and endorsement of post-qualifying training. That is what most medical colleges do and other health professionals do. That moment has passed so we now have to be quite pragmatic and be clear about what a regulator does and what a professional association does. That is a debate for the profession.

Q111 Chair: Okay. Ruth, you are in a good position to comment on that briefly.

Dr Allen: Yes. The Association has been growing in numbers in the last few years. Since the closure of the College it has grown more but its upward trajectory was already steep. We are now in a position to say that we do have direct membership of a considerable proportion of social workers across the whole of the UK, and we of course work across the whole of the UK, which gives us an advantage in understanding some of the differences and the learning from across the different countries of the UK.

I was also very involved with the College and I worked very closely with Anne when I was working, in a voluntary capacity, as a member there. There is an awful lot of learning from what happened within the College. Although the College has failed as an institution, an awful lot of its work is continuing, and BASW has been now in the position of taking on some of that work, not PSW networks but the CPD scheme, the PCF, the work of the faculties, and so the intellectual property that was developed within the College. A lot of

that has come over into BASW and we have some good programmes going forward to develop that.

What we want to do is establish the Association's position in this landscape in a different way. What is the Association's role going to be in the future in—

Q112 Chair: Can I interrupt you there and ask you this question? Do you see the Association effectively replicating most or at least some of the College's function?

Dr Allen: The Association can certainly replicate some of the functions. It is constituted differently and its purpose is different. It has other functions that the College did not have and it actually a bigger enterprise in a sense because it is UK-wide. A lot of the professional standard, professional definition, research, policy, consultation and collaboration activities of the College, the Association can definitely do and is already doing, actually.

Q113 Chair: Right. I get the sense that you want and perhaps we all want a professional body but we have not yet rested on the solution. What I would invite you to do is write to us with some thoughts on that, because we really want to get this right. One of the key recommendations I hope we will be able to make is what kind of body would replace or reflect the objectives of the College, first and foremost, but also how the Association might evolve. That would be a very useful contribution and we do not have time to listen. You have to do this justice because this is the moment when you can really set out your stalls.

My last question on this subject, which does require a clear answer, is that there is an assumption that the College did not succeed because of its business model. What was wrong with its business model, in a word or two?

Marc Seale: Can I jump in on that? Looking at the other professional bodies that we engage with in the health area, the professional body has to be owned, driven, the heart of the profession. It needs to be built up from grassroots. In my view the College was doomed from day one because it was given a sack-load of money, it was never really supported by the individual members and it went off and did its own thing.

If you look at other professions that have gone through the same problems, paramedics would be a good example. Basically it was four or five people in a kitchen. They got it together very slowly, they built up the membership and now essentially when you go to university you join that professional body. Unless it is built up from the grassroots as BASW has been—we have a solution. We support BASW and that becomes the centre of the body of knowledge for the profession. It is the one that is helping with the standards. We have a solution, we do not need to create any more bodies and if Government goes and does another version it will end up with the same waste of taxpayers' money.

Q114 Chair: If you were to write to this Committee, you would be talking about building up the Association.

Marc Seale: Support BASW. It is doing a great job. It is a bit like a child on a bicycle. They are heading off, we need to give it a good shove and they will do a good job.

Q115 Chair: Right. When do you think the stabilisers can come off? It was your metaphor.

Marc Seale: I think they are already removed, actually. I took them down to Oxfam.

Q116 Chair: Right. We will have to move on, I am afraid.

Annie Hudson: Can I just—

Q117 Chair: It has to be quick, Annie.

Annie Hudson: I do not disagree with all of those points but I do think part of the problem, the root cause is that there was never a really clear mandate from Government, from employers and from the profession about what the College should be about. There was a contest, really, about what it should be doing and that was hugely—

Chair: Right. Look, we want to be reading your letters, lengthy letters with a bit of evidence, a bit of vision and a bit of real thinking. Okay?

Michelle, you are going to have to be quick.

Q118 Michelle Donelan: Thank you. Very quickly, will the new assessment and accreditation scheme overall, do you think, improve career progression for children's social workers?

June Thoburn: Not on its own. There is something about formative assessment and summative assessment. This is about summative assessment. That is a test. The thing that improves practice is the assessment that goes in day out, the supervision and the formative assessment, yes, with some assignment. If I think of what HEIs do, you have assignments, you give the student help in putting them together, you read them and then you discuss them. That is formative assessment. We need both. I fear that there is perhaps too much emphasis on this test that people sit. It is making sure that that happens, but also that all of that is done cost-effectively. We are very short of resources, both money and skilled social workers. We must use them as best we can in the way we go forward.

Dr Allen: It has to fit with how employers are employing, developing and progressing their staff. Employers have to find this useful so that they use it as a way to embed good practice, to motivate their staff and to deal with staff who perhaps struggle to get through. What are we going to do? What is that approach? It is only going to be as good as the employers' attention to progression, support and career opportunities for staff. You cannot divorce it from that.

Annie Hudson: I agree with everything everybody has said. Two additional points: first of all, it has to be strongly rooted in a coherent and national CPD post-qualifying framework. Secondly, this accreditation system is about working in children's social care, it is not about adults. There is the point Ruth made earlier, that we are one profession.

Q119 Michelle Donelan: Secondly, the knowledge and skill statements. Do you think they include everything or do you think there are still huge gaps in that that need tackling?

Marc Seale: Could I briefly come back to the previous question? When you are looking at those you really need to divide it up into two sections. There is the whole concept of post-registration qualifications, that if you are working in a higher-risk area you should only do that if you have that qualification. We do it in the current professions that we regulate.

There is a second issue about lifelong learning. The heart of professionalism is the concept that you continue to learn, but you also have to work in an environment where that concept and that professionalism is supported. Setting a test like that is confusing because it is not saying this is a post-registration qualification that you have to have and at the same time, it is not a supportive culture to say to professionals, “This is how to commit to making sure you retain your skills and knowledge”, and then build them up. I think it is the wrong solution.

Dr Allen: One of the tasks of BASW is to develop the PCF. We hold it. We own it. We hold it on behalf of the profession. It was developed with the profession. How do we go forward with it? We are still getting a lot of messaging from the sector that it is found to be useful, and actually it can be used as a workforce development tool as well as a professional development tool. The KSS is not about that. To my mind, the KSS is a bit of a curriculum that you think you might need to teach. There may be good reason for many elements of that at a point in a career, and maybe to ask for it for that.

The PCF is trying to do what Mark was referring to. It is part of what that that was referring to. It is about how you progress through a career, deepening your practice, including the decision-making within complex situations, which is a matter of maturity, reflection over time and learning over time, as I think June was referring to earlier.

Annie Hudson: Yes. No, I will not. It has been said. Sorry.

Q120 Michelle Donelan: Then lastly, because we are short on time, a question directly to Ruth. BASW inherited several key functions of the College of Social Work. How is it taking these forward?

Dr Allen: We have posts that are in process for the ongoing development of the PCF. There is work going on with a PCF group from the College within BASW about how we further develop the PCF, because it is not necessarily a static thing, but also how we show support for it, enable organisations to continue to use it and test its relevance. We have to keep testing its relevance, given that the landscape keeps changing. There is the CPD scheme that we have also inherited, which we are working on to bring fully into BASW so that providers of training can be accredited.

One of the major areas has been ensuring that the work of the faculties in the College can continue, joining up with the structures that were already there in BASW and bringing all of the talents together. That works a long way down the line, joining up those very active members in the College. Some of it very much is about bringing the ethos, the intellectual capital and the experiences of what was achieved in the College into BASW. We are along the line with those things.

Chair: Right. Thank you very much, Michelle, and thank you all very much. I am looking forward to receiving your letters. I think you will all want to write one on the way in which a body should be formed, supported, promoted and effectively led in order to answer

some of the questions that we have posed. That, from your vantage point too, as the regulator, is an important question. Thank you very much.