



## Education Committee

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

Wednesday 4 May 2016

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Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Department for Education memorandum on social work reform](#)

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Members present: Neil Carmichael (Chair), Ian Austin, Lucy Frazer, Catherine McKinnell, Ian Mearns, Stephen Timms.

### Questions 121 – 229

Witness: **Isabelle Trowler**, Chief Social Worker for Children and Families, Department for Education, gave evidence.

**Q121 Chair:** Good morning and welcome. This is part of our investigation into social work reform proposals. We are very interested to hear your views, and it is an opportunity to be quite explorative on the issues of what the profession should look like, how it might be represented, and how it interfaces with the Government and so on. Those are basically the lines that we will be pursuing this morning, so thank you very much for coming along. Would you say who you are and what you do, for the purpose of those watching on television?

**Isabelle Trowler:** Yes. I am the Chief Social Worker for Children and Families for England.

**Q122 Chair:** Thank you very much. In your professional view, what is the current state of children and families social work in England?

**Isabelle Trowler:** I think that really goes to the heart of why we have such an extensive reform programme. What we have is an extremely mixed picture. We have some extremely strong local authorities where there is some very, very effective social work going on, but I think that is in pockets across the country. We have many children and families saying that the services they are getting are not as helpful as they might be. We have a workforce that is saying they cannot do their jobs as well as they might do, and we have an inspection that is saying the majority of authorities are not doing as well as they might do. Of course, social work is part of that picture.

It is important in the conversation about the state of the nation in terms of children's social care that we focus very much on not just the practice of social workers, but the practice system that they are working in. We can do lots of things to create a strong social work workforce, but if we are not at the same time addressing the practice system that they are working in we are not going to get very far. For me, the Government's reform programme is very much about those two things so that we get a balance of strength and capacity within the workforce, but we are also making a lot of change in the practice system so that they are able to work in effective ways to help children and families.

**Q123 Chair:** That latter point about the practice, the structure, if you like, is certainly something that we have been thinking about on this Committee, and it has some impact, obviously, on other structures. How do you see that being addressed in terms of healthcare, for example, and education?

**Isabelle Trowler:** You mean in terms of delivery of children's social care?

**Chair:** Yes.

**Isabelle Trowler:** That is one of the things we are exploring, and there are a whole range of different views about that. I think children's social care already is a multi-disciplinary service, and while we have social workers within it we also have residential care workers, we have foster carers and we often have clinical practitioners. There is a whole range of examples through the innovation programme, for example, where we have local authorities that are bringing in a range of different disciplines within children's social care. We know that the families we work with often have very complex social needs, and it is entirely necessary for there to be a range of different eyes looking at how we can help that family and how we can best protect children. We are currently, and probably for the foreseeable future, going to see a whole range of different ways of delivering children's social care. I hope that in the next four years we will get to a position where we are fairly confident that there are 10 good ways of doing it, rather than 152, which is what we have now.

**Q124 Chair:** Yes, because you could argue that this whole area has been reformed piecemeal, or incrementally at least, for the last decade or so. I am getting the sense that you are looking for something more seismic, but more lasting and more comprehensive. Is that a fair assessment?

**Isabelle Trowler:** That is a perfect way of putting it. I have been in this sector for 25 years. I think attempts to reform have gone beyond the decade that you refer to. At various points, in various places, and in various parts of the system we have made progress, but what we have not done is managed to create systemic change across the whole country. For me, what is different about this Government's reform programme, and why I like it and support it, is that I think it is building long-term infrastructure so that we have on the workforce front a national infrastructure for not just initial qualification, but post-qualification arrangements. We have a regulatory framework that is for social workers, but also we have the investment in the work centre for children's social care, so that we have a place to hold our system intelligence together. That can then in the longer term influence a whole range of things, both in terms of education, policy, practice, regulation, and so on.

Eileen Munro delivered a lecture a few days ago—her annual lecture on child protection—and she described this as a golden moment, because we are in a very, very strong position to do something much more long lasting and long term for the children and families that we need to deliver for.

**Q125 Chair:** Yes. Do you think there has been sufficient consultation behind these reforms and during this process of reform?

**Isabelle Trowler:** Yes, I do. I have picked up through this process, but also in other ways, that people would like to have more involvement. That is something that I have heard, and the Department has heard, but from my perspective one of the things that my role was about, and I think I have managed to do, is to bring the realities of practice into the frame. You can pick any part of the reform programme and I can detail not just a handful of people but hundreds of people that have been involved in the development of it. That will go from the innovation programme, to the assessment and accreditation system, to the development of the knowledge and skills statements—really extensive involvement and discussion. The role of the principal social workers has been invaluable to me in terms of the development of the assessment and accreditation system.

I could give you a whole host of examples. I think that we absolutely need to listen to the representative bodies, and if they are feeling marginalised, then let's do something about that. But I am pretty confident that, in terms of the realities of practice and getting practitioners involved, we have done quite a good job on that front.

**Q126 Ian Mearns:** Good morning, Isabelle. I understand that you have been quoted in the past, earlier this year, as saying that you are not the voice of the profession. But in an earlier evidence session Professor Ray Jones said you have to be the voice of social work, coming into the Government based on your experience and wisdom of knowing what social work is about. If you are not the voice of the profession, are you the voice of the discipline of social work within the Government, or are you the voice of the Government?

**Isabelle Trowler:** That is not a new position for me, that I would not want to be seen as “the voice” of social work. I think there are many, many different voices in social work, and if you look at our history as a profession, and also currently, then there are myriad views about social work, what it is about and its purpose. There is a whole range of different views, but I am a voice of social work. I see it absolutely as my role to bring in and to promote social worker as a profession within the Government, which is what I do.

My *raison d'être* is to convince and to influence policy and decision makers that social work has a massive contribution to make to public service and that we should be doing everything that we can to support the profession so that we can do as much as we possibly can. I am a voice of social work, and I am the voice of Isabelle Trowler. I am meant to have an independent view, I am independent from everybody, and I hold that principle very dear to me.

**Q127 Ian Mearns:** You are, after all, the Chief Social Worker for Children and Families. As a civil servant—and I am asking this very tentatively because you have a Minister sitting over your left shoulder—do you feel capable of challenging Ministers, and in what ways do you influence policy?

**Isabelle Trowler:** I certainly do, yes. It has been one of the joys of the job that I have found Ministers in the Department, and more broadly across the Government, very open to meeting me and to debate things with me. I have strong views about some things, and I think that has been appreciated, that we can have that kind of debate, which is really about the realities of practice. We all know that we can make policy shifts, but we need to understand what the impact on practice is going to be.

**Q128 Ian Mearns:** Do you find it at all difficult that there are two chief social workers?

**Isabelle Trowler:** Not at all, no. Lyn Romeo, who is fantastic, is in the Department of Health. We are very close and we work incredibly closely together. We like each other, which is a good start, but more importantly we are really clear that this is one profession. I do not find it a problem at all that we are across Departments. We have in the reform programme, as you know, a range of things that are happening that go across the profession as a whole. I think the working relationship is really strong.

**Q129 Ian Mearns:** There are often situations where the work of adult social workers and the work of social workers who work with children do cross over, because there may be families with very complex problems involving adults and the children. Within your field do you ever come across situations where you think, “Lyn and I should work on this together and do a joint response” or something of that nature?

**Isabelle Trowler:** Yes. I think that the most recent example of that is on best interest assessment and this link to the Mental Capacity Act. Of course, a lot of that activity has been in the adult sphere, but that is moving more and more into children’s social work now. In fact, Lyn and I are going to do the best interest training together later on in the year so that we can do that piece of work, and we think it is one of the areas where there is a clear joint interest to make sure that that is part of the law and the application of that is well understood across the whole practice frame within the profession.

**Q130 Ian Mearns:** According to some observers at the moment, the Department of Health and Department for Education are going in seemingly different directions in regards to social work policy. Do you think there is a danger of the profession or the discipline becoming fragmented because of that?

**Isabelle Trowler:** I have heard that criticism, and I cannot think why it is that people think we are going in separate directions. The most obvious one would be about Frontline, but the Department of Health is Think Ahead, so both Departments are moving in that direction of wanting to test those employment-based routes. I do not know why it is that people think we are going off in different directions. Of course, there is a really great focus on child and family social work because we are part of children’s social care, but that is because that is a Government priority, as it should be, and that is driven through the ministerial taskforce on child protection. That is not about a split across Departments, but because that is a particular priority area for Ministers. Of course it gets more profile and more attention, but that is not about a split in the profession.

**Q131 Stephen Timms:** Could I just chip in? One difference between the two Departments does seem to be about social work education, whether there should be a generic initial period of education or whether it should be focused specifically from the start, in your case on children and families. Can you comment on that?

**Isabelle Trowler:** I think that is a debate not just across Departments, but across the whole system. Where we have landed is a good place where we have a generic qualification, but there is a potential to have different levels of specialism within that. As I said, we have the Think Ahead in the Department of Health and Frontline in the Department for Education, which is exactly that. You will still get a generic qualification, but there are varying degrees of specialism within that, depending on what type of route you take. We might come back to that, I suppose, in terms of Frontline, etc. My view is that it is perfectly possible to maintain that generic framework, but you have to allow for some specialism. You do anyway, because your placement very much determines where your initial focus is, so in a way that already happens by default.

**Q132 Ian Mearns:** Do the two Departments and the two chief social workers agree on whether initial training should be generic or specific?

**Isabelle Trowler:** Yes. That is the place that we have landed. I am perfectly happy with it being a generic qualification as long as we have the opportunity for people to have a certain level of specialism. Going back as far as 2004, I think, in the Laming report, but certainly in his report in 2009, and Moira Gibb in 2009, Eileen Munro in 2011, and Martin Narey in 2013, all said that we must have some capacity to explore specialist capabilities within the generic qualification. I think that is absolutely right and that is what we are doing.

**Q133 Ian Mearns:** Hopefully today will help in this, but we have been told by some, unfortunately, that frontline social workers in some places have not heard of you. What are you doing to engage and consult with social workers across England?

**Isabelle Trowler:** Oh my goodness, that is incredible. I spend an awful lot of time out and about. I am in local authorities all the time. I do as much as I possibly can. My diary manager will vouch for that. I am all over the place. I obviously have to do more, if that is the case.

**Ian Mearns:** You might want to rephrase that.

**Isabelle Trowler:** What did I say?

**Ian Mearns:** “I am all over the place”. That will be on Twitter later, don’t worry.

**Isabelle Trowler:** Thank you.

**Chair:** Don’t worry, Isabelle, in our line of work we are always told nobody knows who we are, and then when trouble comes they always know how to find us. So don’t worry about that. I think the next question is coming from Ian on accreditation and assessment.

**Q134 Ian Austin:** In January you said that the consultation on mandatory assessment would begin within weeks, but I do not think it has yet started. I was wondering why that was.

**Isabelle Trowler:** The consultation on the rollout of assessment and accreditation is pending the results of the year-long pilot that we have been involved in. The pilot ended at the end of March and we are now right in the middle of looking at the analysis of what the pilot has told us, and it has told us many things. The plan is to go to consultation as soon as possible. I know that there are some complications with that because we have these two purdah periods, so whether or not we will manage to get it out in-between those two I am not sure. The position is that we absolutely want and need to consult, but when we are confident about the analysis and what that is telling us then we will go out to a consultation on rollout.

**Q135 Ian Austin:** All right. Witnesses we have heard from were split on whether the new system would bring benefits. Brigid Featherstone said the complexities of social work could not be fully assessed in a one-off test. I wonder what your view of that is. Do you think it can be?

**Isabelle Trowler:** Yes, I think she is right. What we have is a four-stage process, and what we end up with is, I think, what we are trying to work out now. The really critical part of it is the employer endorsement. In order for anybody to go through to accreditation the employer has to endorse that person as ready. That is a really important stage, because the employer is best placed to know what that person is like on a day-to-day basis. They will see them manage the complexity of social work on a day-to-day basis, and they will observe them, hopefully, in direct practice. That is an important part of the process. Then we have a range of knowledge questions and scenario questions to test decision making, and then at the end the simulated practice observation so that we can look at how well people are able to engage.

The results are fascinating. We have had 940 social workers who have undertaken different parts of the assessment, but 940 social workers in total. Overall, overwhelmingly people are saying, "This is okay. This reflects the kinds of decisions I need to make, the sort of practice context that I work in, and how I am at work". Of course, it does not replicate direct practice, which is why that needs to be part of the employer endorsement part, but I think that the feedback from social workers is that this make sense and does reflect the realities of practice.

One of the things we are debating most about is what social workers need to know. This is fascinating, because of course some social workers are saying, "We do not need to know about child development because the health visitor knows about child development" or, "We do not need to know about non-accidental injury because doctors know about non-accidental injury" or, "We do not need to know about welfare benefits because welfare benefit advisers know about benefits". Then, of course, that gets you into a situation where you say, "Okay, what do you need to know?" I have my own position about that, and I think you need to know a little about most things to be a good social worker so that you can challenge other professionals in your day-to-day work. It is triggering that kind of debate, which I think is very, very helpful.

**Q136 Ian Austin:** Okay. What proportion of social workers would you expect to fail the accreditation?

**Isabelle Trowler:** We do not know yet, because we are looking at the results of the accreditation. I just cannot say.

**Q137 Ian Austin:** What would happen to social workers who do fail accreditation?

**Isabelle Trowler:** I think that they would absolutely need to be able to retake it. If there are social workers—who will absolutely be in the minority—who are not able to meet that standard, then it would be a matter for the employer and the individual to develop their knowledge and skill so that they are able to be accredited.

**Q138 Ian Austin:** Is there likely to be a limit on how many times people could take it again?

**Isabelle Trowler:** Again, that is one of the questions that will go out to consultation.

**Q139 Ian Austin:** Will they be able to continue to practise while taking it again?

**Isabelle Trowler:** They will still be a registered social worker. It will not remove registration from them.

**Q140 Ian Austin:** Theoretically they could just—

**Isabelle Trowler:** It depends. It depends who we require to be accredited and in what circumstances. These are the questions that will be asked in the consultation.

**Q141 Ian Austin:** Just on that, can I ask: is this only going to apply to people working in a statutory setting? How will you deal with people who are moving between statutory settings and the private sector?

**Isabelle Trowler:** Yes. This is not just for social workers that work in the statutory setting. It is for social workers and employers who want to demonstrate that they have the knowledge and skills set out in the relevant practice statement. Certain individuals might want to be accredited because they have something that says, “I have the knowledge and skills”. Employers might require it from people that they want to employ, that they can demonstrate they have the knowledge and skills through the accreditation process. The Government might require social workers, for example, who hold case responsibility for children on the Child Protection Register and for children in public care to be accredited. It depends what those final decisions are.

In terms of transfer from one type of practice to another, we have to be assured that people who are coming into practice and are working with some of our highest risk, most socially complex families have the knowledge and skills to do that well. That is my ambition. I think we have had a lot of discussion for a very long time about initial qualification. This is trying to move the debate beyond that so that we introduce a practice-focused career pathway right through from those critical parts of the system, supervisors, who have a tremendous influence on the quality of practice, but also, really critically, practice leaders. We will probably come back to that at some point, but these are three stages where we

need to be focused on post-qualification, accreditation, and of course the continuous professional development that will be triggered by the accreditation system.

**Q142 Lucy Frazer:** You just mentioned the continuing professional development, and you also said a few moments ago, “My *raison d’être* is to convince the Government as to what they should be doing to support the profession”. CPD is obviously a significant and important part of that. What have you done to improve CPD?

**Isabelle Trowler:** We have had a lot of debates about CPD, accreditation, which comes first, and so on and so forth. One of the things that I looked at was some examples of where there has been investment in CPD. One of the difficulties that we have had historically is, again, that we have had no infrastructure. Public money is used for CPD in post-qualification, but we have no system for checking what we get from that. Over time the CPD investment dissipates because it is quite hard to check what the impact has been. It has been entirely deliberate that we, in terms of the Government, set the standard and that we set the infrastructure, but also I am interested in depth of practice and how we support social workers beyond initial qualification.

We are just starting on a significant piece of work on permanence, which will be a CPD programme for between 2,000 to 3,000 child and family social workers. We will work at this over the next four years. We are in the process of setting up an expert group to develop that programme so that we can also trigger some really in-depth practice development post-qualification. The other thing that I have done in relation to CPD is launching a development programme for practice leaders towards the end of this year. I am absolutely sure that if we want to improve this system for children and families we need to have in the professional leaders of the system and that we hopefully, by the end of the year, will have launched that programme. This will be probably about a year or even two years’ long where we are coaching, mentoring, putting talented aspirational leaders alongside very effective current leaders so that they learn the trade on the job. So those are the things that I have done. I can talk about ASYE, that I have—

**Q143 Lucy Frazer:** Can we just stop and backtrack a little bit? Why is Government investment into CPD for social workers not included in the reforms if you are doing a whole host of other things as well?

**Isabelle Trowler:** There are several reasons. It is included, and I can give you more examples. It is essential that we get the infrastructure for CPD in place. There is a debate about how much it is Government’s role to provide funding for CPD.

**Q144 Lucy Frazer:** Do you think it is Government’s role to provide funding for CPD?

**Isabelle Trowler:** Probably not but in this context, where we need to support the system to develop, that we need to trigger and from accreditation the—

**Q145 Lucy Frazer:** Whose job is it, if it is not Government’s job, to fund investment in our social workers? Whose role is it?

**Isabelle Trowler:** Local employers and individuals.

**Lucy Frazer:** Local employers being local government?

**Isabelle Trowler:** Social workers work in a whole range of different settings.

**Lucy Frazer:** But that includes local government.

**Isabelle Trowler:** Certainly. Local government would absolutely see that a critical part of their role is to support and develop their workforce.

**Q146 Lucy Frazer:** I think you said you do not think it is Government's role but you have mentioned a number of programmes, which I presume are being funded by Government?

**Isabelle Trowler:** Yes.

**Q147 Lucy Frazer:** So where is the line between appropriate investment and non-appropriate investment?

**Isabelle Trowler:** When Government is confident about the system, and that things like CPD are properly provided, they can then take a backseat. Ideally what we want is a profession and employers to be responsible for a workforce.

**Q148 Lucy Frazer:** What if they are not? What if we do have a problem with the retention, which we do, so obviously it is not being provided? We know, for example, that in Wales people are happier in their roles and there is a good CPD programme. Those two things may or may not correlate. But from our evidence session we know the people value CPD. We have heard it in social work, we have heard it in education, so we know there is a need for it. If there is a gap, is it not the role of Government to fill that gap until someone else provides it?

**Isabelle Trowler:** That is exactly what I am saying. If there is a gap, there is a role for the Government to stimulate the system so that it starts to invest in that. That is what accreditation will lead to. If you set a national standard, and if you have an assessment process where people have to demonstrate that they have the knowledge and skills to do certain things, then inevitably that will trigger local employers to make sure that they develop their stance so they have the knowledge and skills, so they are accredited, and so they can do the job that they need them to do.

**Q149 Lucy Frazer:** Do you think local authorities have that capacity?

**Isabelle Trowler:** It varies. We have some fantastic local authorities who do huge amounts of CPD. Certainly in my last authority we invested hugely in CPD. Lots of authorities do. Not all of them do, and there is too much inconsistency across employers and the experience that—

**Q150 Lucy Frazer:** But isn't that inconsistency made more consistent by a uniform approach, which can be delivered top down from Government?

**Isabelle Trowler:** Sorry, say that again.

**Lucy Frazer:** If there is inconsistency, one way of making more consistency is to have one streamlined approach, which is dictated by Government?

**Isabelle Trowler:** Yes. It would be interesting to see how well that will go down in the sector. Where we are at is Government have taken the right position that we need to get an infrastructure in place, which will enable us to assess knowledge and skills.

**Q151 Lucy Frazer:** Where is the funding for that coming from?

**Isabelle Trowler:** From Government, from the Department of Education.

**Q152 Lucy Frazer:** Should that funding be ring-fenced like it is in the NHS for CPD?

**Isabelle Trowler:** I do not know. This is a reform strategy that is well resourced. Obviously there is a limit to how much at any one point. In terms of value for money, the first thing is to get the accreditation system in place, so you have an infrastructure, a long-term infrastructure. Over time the different policy priorities will trigger a range of CPD opportunities that we—we need to work with the sector about what it is that they think we can help them with.

**Q153 Lucy Frazer:** You mentioned the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment system. We have heard some support that that should be mandatory. Do you agree with that?

**Isabelle Trowler:** It depends what you mean by “mandatory”, but should every social worker who comes into practice have that ASYE, absolutely—it is essential—and Government supports that. For every newly qualified social worker we give £2,000 for that year. It is really important.

**Q154 Lucy Frazer:** It is voluntary so they do not need to do it, so you encourage them. There is an incentive, but it is voluntary?

**Isabelle Trowler:** Of course we have lots of debates about this about what Government makes mandatory and what it does not. What is interesting about ASYE is that it has major traction in the system and that the numbers of social workers year on year or employers who apply for funding is increasing quite substantially. I would not be opposed to it being mandatory—if you mean statutory guidance or in the law—but it is an extremely important function. For me, it is not just about a year in your first year in practice. It is about what happens in it, and the quality of that experience. We have again quite a disparity for social workers—some local authorities are getting absolutely fantastic support and there are other areas where they struggle. We have done a recent survey of ASYEs, which is not yet published. I know community care has done a survey of ASYEs. Again it is a mixed picture. You can make something mandatory, but it does not mean that it is any good.

**Q155 Lucy Frazer:** Are you in favour of it being mandatory or not?

**Isabelle Trowler:** Yes. We are getting traction in the system. What we need to focus on is working out what is a good ASYE programme. Either way, ASYE is moving in the right direction. It is something that should be protected.

**Q156 Lucy Frazer:** What do you see is the relationship between the knowledge and skill statements in the existing professional capabilities framework?

**Isabelle Trowler:** I have the same position as Eileen Munro. She set out in her review that the PCF is a generic framework, there are nine domains of it. But in terms of the knowledge base, critical reasoning and intervention skills—those three domains—that we need to have some specialist knowledge and skills so that we are clearer about what it means for those that are teaching and those that are being taught.

Last year we funded the College of Social Work to do a review of the PCF and its relationship to the knowledge and skills statements. There was a range of recommendations. The PCF is very popular. People like it. Now of course the college is closed so the PCF sits with BASW, and we need to make sure that the two meet together successfully.

**Q157 Catherine McKinnell:** There seems to be some confusion around the role of practice leader and how it interrelates with the practice social worker role, which itself is not non-established. Could you explain what the relationship is between them?

**Isabelle Trowler:** The practice leader role is not a new role. The practice leader role is usually the most senior social worker in a local authority that has day-to-day responsibility for children's social care. It is often the assistant director, for example. It is the person who is a qualified social worker who knows how to operate that whole system from front door through to adoption, for example; and who is able to combine their own practice experience and good decisions about children, and so on, with the mechanics of running quite a complex practice system.

The practice leader role is not new. The reason that we have used the title “practice leader” is because there is a whole range of different job titles out there, but it is targeted at that senior role. So in the vast majority of authorities you will be able to identify who that person is quite easily.

The principal social worker role—that is the new role—was a recommendation from the Munro review. It was very much about how you get a focus on practice in a system that can quickly become distracted by a managerial approach to running the practice system, and that the person in that role has influence within the service about decisions that are being made about how the practice system should run. It is quite interesting because, in my perspective, I do not think there is any confusion about who the practice leader is. It is a role we have had for probably 30 years. It is well established. It is not always well done and we need to do something about that.

The principal social worker role is new. The role of principal social workers is building. It has had quite a rocky start. In the last year, under the new Chair, it is getting form but there is a huge inconsistency in what principal social workers are doing. That is okay because it is a new role and you need to let that flourish a bit. We could swoop in now and say, “As a principal social worker you must do this, you must do that” but we are learning

about that role. It is in its infancy. There are many different job grades, some are senior and senior management roles, probably about 20%. Most are more junior than that.

If I could just say one more thing. Personally I would probably give it another year and then we need to evaluate and take stock of what is the best evidence that that would be an effective role and in what circumstances.

**Q158 Catherine McKinnell:** I am still confused because the memorandum from Government said, “Our development and practice leaders built on and extends the reach of the principal social workers” and you—in your reply to my previous question—turned it on its head in the sense that principal social workers are the extension rather than the practice leaders. But I still do not understand what the relationship is between the two and whether one is going to be replicating the other or whether they have separate roles or whether one is going to disappear. That seems to be the discussion that is going on and the confusion that is out there.

**Isabelle Trowler:** There is no way that the practice leader role is going to disappear because you need somebody to run these systems. You need a senior person who is qualified. The best way of thinking about it is like a school—the practice leader is the head teacher equivalent. In every local authority in children’s social care, you know the children that you have responsibility for, you know their names, where they live, who their doctor is, what time they go to bed. You know all about them. The head of that system, the professional leader, is the practice leader.

**Q159 Catherine McKinnell:** So in many circumstances the practice leader will be the assistant director of Children’s Services?

**Isabelle Trowler:** Children’s Social Care.

**Q160 Catherine McKinnell:** So therefore what is the relationship with the principal social worker?

**Isabelle Trowler:** I do not think there is a fixed one—that is what I am saying. Local authorities have recruited principal social workers and they are using that role in a wide variety of ways, so some have the title attached to another job that they are doing. Other people have the role of principal social worker and are case holding. Other people that have the title are senior managers. That is what I am saying. There is not a fixed relationship between the principal social workers and the practice leaders because the principal social worker is a very new role and what we need to do is to watch and see how that develops and whether it is a good use of resource. I can see—certainly from my perspective—having that group of principal social workers has been hugely helpful in some of the policy development, and the best example of that is the assessment and accreditation system.

I am right in thinking that all the social workers we have had around the table are absolutely immersed in day-to-day practice and a supervising social worker and so on, so bringing that into the policy room has been hugely helpful.

**Q161 Catherine McKinnell:** One of the concerns that has come across in some of the evidence that we have heard is the uncertainty around the role and this sense that it may well disappear within the year. It has not been given the opportunity to bed in and may not survive. What reassurances can you offer that it is something you are supporting?

**Isabelle Trowler:** The jury is out with me, that is what I am saying. We have a wide range of examples of how it is being used. We need to establish whether or not it has had a positive impact. I can certainly see from my perspective it is very useful to me but it is the employers that are paying for it, is it useful to them? There is a mixed view. We can make a decision now if we like but it needs a bit more time to bed down so we can get some good examples of where it is working well and where it does not work so well.

**Q162 Catherine McKinnell:** There were lots of concerns raised about the college and now the role of the principal social worker. These are all Munro recommendations that are being put into practice and the insecurity that is coming about the competence in it is undermining it in terms of its progress. Is there not a concern that, without having a bit more clarity from the top that it is supported, it is undermining it?

**Isabelle Trowler:** It is absolutely supported. The Department provides funding for the national Principal Social Worker Network, that principal social workers are involved in a whole range of policy conversations that are happening. I am saying absolutely it is useful to me. Ultimately it will be a decision for employers. Do they want to invest in that role? From my conversations with current practice leaders and ADCS it is a mixed view. I cannot magic that away.

**Chair:** Thank you very much. We are going to move on now to the professional body itself with Stephen.

**Q163 Stephen Timms:** Just a preliminary question. You said earlier that you favoured a model of initial social work education where there is a generic qualification but the opportunity to specialise. How do you respond to Sir Martin Narey's proposal for a specialist children social work degree?

**Isabelle Trowler:** What Sir Martin Narey proposed is exactly what is happening. That we do have that generic qualification but within that there are options for specialism. I do not think there is a difference of opinion there.

**Q164 Stephen Timms:** You see that degree leading on to either a career in children's social work or a career in adult social work?

**Isabelle Trowler:** The initial qualification?

**Stephen Timms:** No, the degree. You go in wanting to be a social worker and then in the course of that you would decide whether or not you wanted to be a children's social worker or an adult social worker: is that right?

**Isabelle Trowler:** Yes. Throughout your whole career you might make a different choice but we draw in a huge diverse group of people into social work education. Some people of course have a very extensive career in children and family services anyway. They are very clear that they want to pursue a career in children and family social work.

**Q165 Stephen Timms:** As you see it, it is not purely a children's social work degree we are talking about. It is a social work degree within which you can choose to specialise in either children or adult social work.

**Isabelle Trowler:** That is the position that we have reached and I am very happy with that.

**Q166 Stephen Timms:** The Department's vision says that it wants a confident social work profession that is not shaped to comply with, quoting again, "The diktats of Ministers or guidance from Whitehall". Did you fight to save the College of Social Work?

**Isabelle Trowler:** I absolutely think that we need a professional body of social work. What happened to the college was very sad. The Department of Health worked with the college to establish what the business model was and whether that was a sustainable model. The conclusion of that was that the college—it was obviously the college's decision to close—was not a sustainable model.

**Stephen Timms:** I take it you did not fight for it?

**Isabelle Trowler:** It depends what you mean by "fight". The evidence was clear that it was not a sustainable institution and that the Government had spent in the region of £8 million in supporting the college but it was not a sustainable institution.

**Q167 Stephen Timms:** Did you warn of the risks to the profession from its loss?

**Isabelle Trowler:** There was lots and lots of discussion about the importance of having a professional body and it is absolutely something that we need. It is not that we suddenly do not need one. But we need a professional body that is independent and sustainable. Of course now all eyes are on the British Association of Social Workers.

**Q168 Stephen Timms:** Partly what I am hoping is to understand a little bit more clearly how you see your role. Clearly the loss of the college is a significant event in terms of the social work profession. Do you see yourself as somebody standing up for the profession warning of the dangers of the loss of the college?

**Isabelle Trowler:** Absolutely. I spend most of my day, as I said at the beginning, promoting and supporting the profession. I absolutely see that as part of my role.

**Q169 Stephen Timms:** Did you warn of the risk to the profession from the loss of the college?

**Isabelle Trowler:** Yes, that we were very well aware that if we—

**Stephen Timms:** It is whether you proactively warned of the risks. I appreciate there were lots of discussions going on but is it your role to warn of the risks to the profession from the loss of that institution?

**Isabelle Trowler:** Yes, I think it is my role.

**Q170 Stephen Timms:** What are the dangers to the profession from the loss of the college?

**Isabelle Trowler:** The point of having a professional body is that it has credibility, that it has a standing in a wider public service network; that it has the credibility to hold individuals to professional standards; and that it has a voice in policy making. It is an institution that is respected and draws people to it to be a membership that is properly representative of the profession.

**Q171 Stephen Timms:** Given the loss of the college what do you think is the best model now for a professional body in social work, and what are you doing to achieve that?

**Isabelle Trowler:** I think it was Marc Seale who said it in the evidence session that our best hope is the British Association of Social Workers. It has a new chief executive who you have also heard from, who understands the need to address some of the needs in the profession to have professional standards. I am sure you are aware of the debate in the earlier years about the British Association of Social Workers and the College of Social Work. But I do think it needs to be a grassroots movement for it to be sustainable. It needs to come from social workers. The British Association of Social Workers has a job to do to convince the wider profession that this has its professional interests at heart and that it understands the realities of practice. Ruth Allen and I have exchanged messages. We will meet as soon as we can. I am very keen to watch BASW grow into that professional body.

**Q172 Stephen Timms:** I appreciate you are keen to watch. Are you taking action to make sure that the Association gets the role that you have envisaged for it?

**Isabelle Trowler:** No, not yet. But we have to wait for Ruth Allen to get her feet under the table. I presume we will have a series of discussions to understand what the direction of travel is in BASW, that—as I have said here and I say in other places—that is absolutely our best bet. But I do think the Association needs to be attractive to a broad membership. That would be one of the biggest challenges for BASW.

**Q173 Chair:** Just on that question: last time—and you have referred to the evidence session specifically—I invited all of the four contributors to write to us with some thoughts on a professional body, including obviously the Association. If you had any ideas that we should be thinking about when we come to be making our recommendations I would be most grateful if you would pass those on.

**Isabelle Trowler:** Okay.

**Chair:** Thank you. Ian is going to be talking about recruitment and retention very quickly.

**Q174 Ian Mearns:** On the last set of questions, you talked about the change in BASW—the new chief executive in BASW—do you think BASW yet share your vision of what you want them to do?

**Isabelle Trowler:** That is a good question. We share a deep concern about the practice system that some social workers are operating in and we must do something about that. We are very strong on that. I think BASW wants to see more continuous professional development, and we have had that conversation, and I do too. It would be very helpful for

BASW to now be proactive in describing what that CPD framework could be like and think about what that looks like. Until I see that I do not know whether I agree or disagree about what their position would be on that.

We have a joint interest in making sure that the social work profession has a positive profile, so there are a number of points that we agree. In terms of assessment and accreditation—and I completely understand this—the anxiety that BASW has is that it will be used against social workers rather than for social workers. How this is rolled out is a critical part of that debate.

**Q175 Ian Mearns:** A crucial point from your perspective—in the role that you have—do you think you need to be proactive with BASW, have a discussion about them and what you would see their role being?

**Isabelle Trowler:** Absolutely. That is what Ruth and I will intend to do.

**Q176 Ian Mearns:** The profession overall is having some problems, and it has had some problems, morale is patchy at best. We have had evidence of people talking of a climate of risk and blame. The Department talked about pressurised working conditions, perceptions of low esteem in localities where problems have occurred, where the press are looking at departments and social workers in not particularly glowing terms. With that sort of background—I know it is not doom and gloom like that everywhere, absolutely—we do have a problem with social workers leaving the profession. How do you think the reform agenda is going to address those factors?

**Isabelle Trowler:** We have already talked quite a lot about qualification, post-qualification, CPD, and so on and so forth—we have probably covered that. Where the debate about retention leads us—it is about the practice system, where I started—is that we have to make sure that the system in which social workers are operating allows them to be effective in the work that they are trained to do. You are right that it is not the same everywhere. We have some very strong authorities that know how to run effective practice systems where caseloads are reasonable, quality of supervision is strong and frequent, they have strong practice leadership, there is lots of CPD, and where social workers effect change for children and families, which is what this whole thing is about. But we have a lot of authorities that do not, and it is very worrying. You cannot expect social workers to be effective when caseloads are sky high, there is little administration support and quality supervision is not strong enough. All those things will make a social worker decide to stay or leave.

**Q177 Ian Mearns:** Given the fact of what you have talked about there—there are some strong authorities and some weak authorities—would you try to resist national solutions to localised problems?

**Isabelle Trowler:** For me the part of the reform programme that this talks to is the innovation programme and also Partners in Practice. The innovation programme we have invested in over the last 18 months. Now we have a second wave of that starting. We absolutely need in four years' time to be in a position—for those authorities that struggle to know how to run effective practice systems—where we have a much stronger evidence-base about how you do that, both through the innovation programme but also through

Partners in Practice. I do not think that has been mentioned yet, but it is a group of very strong authorities that are running a tight ship, that are doing well by children and families, and that we need to not just be able to describe it but to understand how they do it so that that knowledge is spread throughout the sector. That is the kind of sector involvement where Partners in Practice will work with other authorities to help them develop their practice systems.

**Q178 Ian Mearns:** If the Government imposes national solutions to localised problems, the good authorities could be the collateral damage, the babies that go out with the bath water.

*Isabelle Trowler:* I do not know what you mean by “national solutions” I suppose. Are you talking about having a national child protection system?

**Q179 Ian Mearns:** Wholesale. I will use the analogy of schools, for instance. There is a wholesale change being envisaged for schools because there are some significant local problems around the country.

*Isabelle Trowler:* I am still not quite sure of the question. Are you talking about the development of the trust model?

**Q180 Chair:** I think what Ian is getting at is that if you had, as you have acknowledged, a number of local authorities not performing, what mechanism do you have to put that right? What is the intervention system? Because Ian is thinking that you could have a forced academisation programme on to social work, which is not what we are discussing but that is what he is envisaging. What you could address is: is there an alternative intervention system for social work that might help local authorities that need to improve to improve?

*Isabelle Trowler:* There are some good examples of the intervention work the Department does, so that we have some of those stronger authorities who are now helping the Department directly intervene with authorities that are struggling. That is already happening.

My personal view is no, we do not need forced academisation. The reason I was a bit confused by the question is that that is not something that I am debating with anybody. Obviously there is the development of the trust model, the two trusts we have were required to be created, but my understanding is there are some authorities that are looking to do that, to develop a trust model independently.

**Q181 Ian Mearns:** Do you think the Department have the balance right in terms of their focus on recruitment or retention?

*Isabelle Trowler:* Yes, I do. It is back to the practice system that you have to address both. This reform does it.

**Q182 Chair:** This question about helping the less good local authorities overcome their difficulties is something that we will have to come back to. So if you have any thoughts

on that I would be very grateful if you could write to our Committee. It is central to what we need to be recommending in our report.

*Isabelle Trowler:* Great, okay.

**Q183 Chair:** Isabelle, thank you very much indeed for coming along today. You have been extremely helpful and you have answered our questions very capably. I much appreciate that.

*Isabelle Trowler:* Thanks very much.

### Examination of Witness

Witness: **Edward Timpson MP**, Minister for Children and Families, Department for Education gave evidence.

**Q184 Chair:** We are going straight over to the Minister. We have an hour but we have more questions. The thrust there is that we have to be swifter in asking and pithy in response. Welcome, Ed, Minister responsible for this fascinating area of policy. It is good to see you here today.

*Edward Timpson:* Thank you.

**Q185 Chair:** We have already asked this question of others but your take will be interesting. Why is reform needed?

*Edward Timpson:* One thing that we can all agree—whoever is giving evidence to this Committee, whether written or oral—is that we do not have a system we can all sit back and say, “We are content to leave it as it is”. That is why there has been a series of efforts by a succession of Governments to try to inject reform into how we create consistently high-quality social work right across the country.

**Q186 Chair:** When will your full children’s social care strategy be published?

*Edward Timpson:* We are looking to do that as soon as possible. As you will know, Chairman, it has been an interesting time for Government with a whole host of different purdahs coming closely into view. We are trying to work around those. What we do want to do is build on the speech of the Prime Minister on life chances in January—the paper that we published there around our vision for Children’s Services—and give a much more fleshed out version of how we intend to do that, both through the social work reform agenda, but particularly through the three pillars that were identified as being crucial in achieving that: people—having great people in social work and keeping them in there—and the practice system, which you have heard a lot about, but also the Government’s accountability.

**Q187 Chair:** Just on this theme, obviously we would be reporting shortly as a result of this final evidence session and so on. We would hope that we will be considered as a contributor to the strategy.

**Edward Timpson:** Yes, absolutely. As I have done in other Committee reports, I look forward to seeing what you have to say and taking your view seriously.

**Q188 Chair:** What mechanisms will you have in place to assess the success of these reforms because that is obviously an important element?

**Edward Timpson:** One of the best ways of assessing it is looking back through what it is we have identified is falling short of where it needs to be. How we know that. So that may be through Ofsted inspections. It may be through the interaction we have directly ourselves as a Department but also through the work, for instance, of the chief social worker and others like the Children's Commissioner who are feeding directly back into the Department what is happening on the ground. Through the innovation programme we are learning a huge amount and assessing the impact of those on the system in understanding what an excellent practice system looks like.

**Chair:** Catherine is going to ask a few questions about basically your relationship with the Department of Health.

**Q189 Catherine McKinnell:** Why is the Department for Education pursuing what is perceived to be a different reform agenda to the Department of Health?

**Edward Timpson:** We are not pursuing a different reform agenda. We both commissioned reports around social work training by David Croisdale-Appleby from the Department of Health and Sir Martin Narey from the Department for Education to nail down what it was that was leading to an inconsistent level of practice that was borne out in so many Ofsted inspections, and also unfortunately in many serious case reviews across the social workforce. We have used those two reports, as well as the important work of the Social Work Reform Board and the Munro review, to create a system that is unashamedly focused on delivering high-quality practice. That starts at the training level and making sure that we are, first, attracting as wide a range of people into the profession as we possibly can. Then having real rigour in what that training involves, both at the initial training point but also beyond the initial qualification and into the practice itself.

I remember when I was chair of the all-party parliamentary group that looked after children and care leavers; we looked at the motivations for young people coming into social work as well as those who were career changes. But also what was selling them short in their initial training, whether that be an adult social worker or children's social worker. Predominantly it was around their inability to access good practice placements where they could learn for themselves, face to face, what it was like to be in a social care situation, whether that be in a family setting, where there is a domestic violence incident, for example, or whether it be in the adult social care arena.

What we are doing as Departments—we have built on those two reports—is an initial generic approach to social work because there is always going to be a cross-fertilisation of skills that are required in both edges of the profession. But then looking at, as all the reviews previously have indicated we should do, how we then draw in a greater level of specialism so that those who do end up in children's social work have the requisite knowledge and skills that they need to do a great job, not just in theory but in practice as well. That is where many of those students that I spoke to four or five years ago felt the system was lacking.

**Q190 Catherine McKinnell:** But some of the witnesses that we have heard from during our inquiry are concerned that the profession is becoming fragmented between adult social work and children social work and do not always feel there is leadership across both strands. Obviously the two are completely interlinked as well. What are you doing to make sure that both in reality and perception that the two strands are working together and pulling in the same direction?

**Edward Timpson:** The first thing I could do is give assurance there is absolutely no intention of trying to split the profession. What we are trying to do is doing what happens in a lot of other areas of public service, for instance, with nurses and midwives. Although they work within the same health arena, they both end up doing three years of specialist training in order to ensure that they can do their specific role within that arena.

What we are wanting to achieve is a social workforce that has those basic building blocks in place to be a social worker, but then is much more able to align individuals within that social workforce to the specific skills that we need them to perform. This is not a new proposition. It happens in many other parts of public service and we are making sure that we do it in a way that is joined up. So the new regulatory body is for the whole of social work. When we have developed teaching partnerships it has been done across both the Department of Health and Department for Education. As we heard earlier, both chief social workers under the same office are in a constant conversation around developing and setting an accreditation system or they may well want to look at how we ensure that best interests are being properly implemented.

**Q191 Catherine McKinnell:** One of the other concerns is that, where the child is in need of intervention, often the family do as well. To go down separate paths is a bit illogical for the practice of some social workers. The appointment of two separate chief social workers came as a surprise to some in the profession and is also a source of that concern that it may become increasingly fragmented and disjointed rather than one coherent voice for social workers. What are you doing to ensure that is not a divisive force? It would be helpful to understand why the decision was taken not to appoint one chief social worker, why two separate chief social workers have been created?

**Edward Timpson:** Just to pick up on your last question. This was a recommendation that came out of the Munro review, which we, in accepting the report—

**Q192 Catherine McKinnell:** A recommendation for one social worker or two?

**Edward Timpson:** This was for a chief social worker. We accepted all but one of the Munro recommendations so we have taken on board a huge amount of the work that Eileen Munro did in that report. We did initially recruit for a single chief social worker but what became apparent through that exercise was the level of divergence as well as convergence there was in recruiting someone who would be able to perform that role across the whole spectrum of the profession. It became apparent, having tried extensively to recruit on that initial basis, that there was a stronger prospect of having high-quality representation through having the two chief social workers under one office, albeit that of course they are working simultaneously as they carry out their specific tasks.

**Chair:** Thank you, Catherine. Lucy, a few questions on retention, please.

**Q193 Lucy Frazer:** The vacancies in social workers for children have increased by 27% in the last year. They are now at a national average of 17%. We know you are putting money into people going into the profession, which is obviously great, but we need those in to stay in the profession. What is the Government doing to ensure the retention of those people?

**Edward Timpson:** First of all, it is fair to say this is a long-standing problem in the social work profession. The latest research shows that a social worker's career lasts about eight years before they leave, on average, whereas a nurse is 15 years and a doctor is 20 years plus. There is a clear retention problem that does need to be addressed.

However, within that there is huge variation across the country, in terms of the performance of local areas, as to how they manage to achieve different levels of retention of their social workforce. For instance, in Yorkshire and Humber I think the vacancy rate is only around 7%, whereas in outer London there are some areas where it is as high as 28% or 29%. We need to understand better what it is that is happening in Yorkshire and Humber that is not happening in parts of London.

We know also what the triggers are and why people leave the profession. One of those is of course they feel unprepared for the early years of their time as a social worker. I can refer to cases that I used to do on behalf of local authorities and parents when I was practising at the bar where very inexperienced social workers were giving evidence in court and it was clearly a case well beyond their capability. Burn-out can result in them leaving the profession.

Similarly, we also know that there has been the lack of a career pathway for social workers. One of the frustrations for many of us has been the movement of experienced social workers out of frontline social work into management because there is no clear way for them to remain in practice. This is one of the things we are trying to address through having frontline practice, practice supervisor and practice leaders, a clear practice career pathway that they can see that allows them to develop themselves as a social worker but remain with what I hope brought them into social work into the first place—working directly with children and families. If they lose that, then they can drift away. There is more that we can do around retention.

What we have seen with the new fast-track routes into social work, although it is early days, is that they are proving to be a better prospect for retention of those individuals. For example, for Step Up to Social Work 83% or 84% are still working within social work as social workers three years after completing their course. There are signs that some of the other routes that we are opening up are improving retention but of course there is still more than we need to do.

**Q194 Lucy Frazer:** You have highlighted a number of problems. Of course you need to address the problems and until you know what the problems are you cannot address them, so you are absolutely right to highlight the problems. You have highlighted one, which is career progression. There must be other strategies to keep people in the profession that are about their time in the job. What strategies does the Government have in relation to other things to ensure people stay in the job?

**Edward Timpson:** The new routes into social work are attracting different people with different skills and potentially more stickability, as I have just tried to illustrate through the Step Up programme. Close to 1,000 social workers have gone through that. That is a significant proportion of the around 30,000 children and family social workers that are currently registered.

We are seeing a greater number who are getting that assessed and supported year in employment. That is hugely valuable because that helps them embed good, strong practice much earlier. They feel better supported, their casework loads are often protected and that means they have durability beyond that first year that others potentially do not.

Through Partners in Practice, where we are working with some of the best local authorities, we are trying to understand—as I illustrated earlier in Yorkshire and Humber—why it is that they have such high levels of retention. The data that we now have, which we have not had before and I think is often the best indicator of where success lies in this area, is not only around retention but also around sickness and absence rates. If you have a high sickness/absence rate that suggests a workforce that is not motivated, that does not have a clear direction and that is floundering, and of course we know for children and families in particular a churn of social workers is the worst possible outcome because they lose that consistency of relationship.

We need to learn more from those areas where they do it well in Partners in Practice and use the work centre that we are bringing on-stream to assist those local authorities who are not doing so well on retention to understand how they can do better in the future.

**Q195 Lucy Frazer:** You mentioned casework and caseload. A Community Care investigation found that around half of councils do not set a safe caseload benchmark and of those that did, 90% were unable to say whether their social workers were exceeding the benchmark. Is it Government's role to change this and if it is, how can it do it?

**Edward Timpson:** We set clear guidelines on what is a manageable casework load, whether that is for a social worker or that is for an independent reviewing officer. In terms of how that is administered it is a matter for Ofsted when they inspect children's services to look at that issue, see what impact it is having on their ability to provide high-quality social work and raise it as an alarm bell that needs to be addressed in any improvement that is required in that local authority, or potentially some intervention that the Government then has to institute.

What we need to do is not only decipher where it is going wrong but try to understand where it is going right and really understand what works. The danger of having a very arbitrary casework load number and saying no social worker should ever have more than five cases is of course we know no two cases are the same. Some cases can be extremely complicated and take up an enormous amount of time—where there is a huge sibling group, very difficult child sexual exploitation issues or a baby that has been born addicted to drugs, which means a lot of involvement with health professionals—and there are some cases which, comparatively, although very serious, are more straightforward for the social worker to manage. We need to be a little careful about Government from the centre saying, "That is the minimum or the maximum you can have". What we do is set the guidelines, then leave Ofsted to look at that more closely when they do their inspection.

**Q196 Lucy Frazer:** How do we encourage experienced social workers to return to social work?

**Edward Timpson:** There are a number of ways. First of all, you need to make it attractive to them. We have to work on the basis that they have left either because their family circumstances may have changed, they have found something that they thought at first glance was a more attractive offer, or potentially it is because they have decided that social work was no longer for them. We need to use the career change route through Step Up and through recruitment at local level, and also the work that is being done on social work reform around the career pathway that is being created, as a magnetic pull to bring them back into the profession. That experience is invaluable and once you lose it you do not get it back again.

As a Government, we have invested since 2010 over £700 million in social work training. The last thing we want to do is see that all disappear just a few years down the line, which is why we are being rigorous about how we create a practice system that, for people who have left, would now look far more attractive to them than it did when they decided to move on to pastures new.

**Q197 Ian Mearns:** In January the Department announced £100 million extra funding for Frontline and Step Up to Social Work. That was two months before the independent evaluation of Frontline was published. Was the Department aware of the independent evaluation's findings before the publication?

**Edward Timpson:** There had already been some evaluation that had taken place of Frontline. That was the latest one that had been published. There was already some emerging evidence and we did, as we have to, a full Government procurement process. There were other entries into that potential contract to deliver a fast-track programme. As a consequence of having gone through that procurement process, Frontline won that contract. Hence they are now going to move on to the next phase, the next cohort of students going through the Frontline programme.

I have had the enjoyment—if I can put it that way, Chair—of going to see a fairly brutal assessment process for potential Frontline candidates up in north London a year or two ago and it reminded me rather too much of the time when I was going through a similar process to become a barrister. It was clear to me that the standard of entries was exceptional. What we do know is that for the 100 places that were available there were over 2,800 applicants. This is a really exciting and evolving route into social work.

What I think is really important, Mr Mearns, is that it should not be the only route and it should never be the only route. The vast majority of people who become social workers will still be coming through the more traditional route. That is why we need to also focus on them and their quality at the same time as developing these fast-track programmes.

**Q198 Ian Mearns:** In other evidence we have seen first and foremost that Frontline is seen on the face of it to cost twice as much as other postgraduate courses and three times as much as undergraduate courses. Additionally, we have also heard in evidence that there was a concern over the range of diversity of successful applicants for Frontline compared to the populations they would seek to serve once they qualify. Any comment on that?

**Edward Timpson:** I know you heard evidence from Josh MacAlister from Frontline about the overall cost of the Frontline programme, explaining that once you take into account the value for money and the other economic factors associated with Frontline it works out as 9% more than the traditional route. Of course, that is what we know at this stage. That may well change over time as we see whether those Frontline students are the ones that end up where we want them to be, which is moving up through the career pathway and remaining in the profession.

On the point about diversity, Josh MacAlister acknowledged that is something they need to look at as they move the programme into the next phase. What was interesting was they attracted proportionately more men than had been in the other routes. In some ways that is an encouraging sign but it is one that we need to look carefully at and Frontline will need to look carefully at as it progresses.

**Q199 Ian Mearns:** In terms of Josh MacAlister's evidence, I could say, "He would say that, wouldn't he?" Have you tested what he has said? Have you double checked from the Department's perspective what he has said in evidence to make sure it is absolutely valid?

**Edward Timpson:** We have. We have done that not only with Frontline but also with Step Up and with the other routes because as a Government we have a responsibility to make sure that for the taxpayer, we are getting value for money too. There has been a full and rigorous assessment of that. I am obviously happy to share it with the Committee if that would be helpful.

**Q200 Ian Mearns:** I would welcome that. Thank you very much indeed.

The Frontline evaluation rated positively social work trainees from all three routes: fast-track, postgraduate and undergraduate. Given the cost evaluation found that Frontline was more expensive, how can you assure us that fast-track schemes represent value for money?

**Edward Timpson:** Two ways. First of all, they are under a contract so they have to fulfil that contract. That contract has a lifespan and we will be reviewing any potential renewal in the future. What we will see is a gathering evidence base of the impact that these fast-track routes are having on the profession. As the numbers become more dominant as an overall percentage of the workforce, that will become clearer.

What we have already seen through Step Up, which bears many of the hallmarks of Frontline, is, as I said earlier, that durability of the students going through. Also we know from the qualitative feedback the huge value that they are given by their employers, the way that they are changing some of the culture within their own organisations and also helping raise the status.

That is something that we have not touched on but it is vital in all of this. Part of what we are doing through the social work reform agenda is saying, "Social work really matters". We need to have it in the same bracket as our doctors and nurses and our teachers. It should be seen in that way. Just because most people do not get to see a social worker doing their job does not mean that it is not something that should be as valued as those that they do. That is part of, as I say, what we are trying to achieve through this reform agenda.

**Q201 Ian Mearns:** Frontline focuses on child protection rather than a whole family emphasis. How can we be sure it delivers well-rounded social workers? Given that emphasis, something else that occurs to me is that if we are getting more and more specialised social workers and then they drop out but we want them to return, would the Department be thinking about training schemes that would help a previously trained child social worker to go into adult work or vice versa?

**Edward Timpson:** It is a good point. It is why when the new social work degree was looked at by Sir Martin Narey and when Frontline was developed, both of them began and will continue to begin with a generic qualification across the whole of social work. We do not want to discourage people from moving around the profession because ultimately that keeps their experience within what is a very important sector. What we also need to do, in the same token, is not make it become so generic that we lack that real specialism that we need. We know, for example, that the needs of children coming into care are getting ever more complex and we need a workforce who have the skills in order to respond to that. That is at the heart of what the new practice system is that we are creating.

**Q202 Stephen Timms:** Can I just pursue a little bit further what you were just saying? For initial social work education, as you say, there will be a degree. The first year will be common irrespective of whether you want to be a children or an adult social worker. Do you envisage specialist children's social work degrees or are we talking about generic degrees where in year 2 and 3 you choose what you are going to become?

**Edward Timpson:** What we have is a social work degree that, as you rightly identify, begins like a lot of degrees in different professions with an overarching, broad knowledge base. Then, as you move through that degree, you can start to choose which of the faculties you are interested in and you want to become more specialised in. I am sure we can all point to our own experience, if we went through the vocational route or the university route, of doing exactly that.

**Q203 Stephen Timms:** Sir Martin Narey recommended something different to that. He recommended specialist children's social work degrees with one year that was common, irrespective of where you wanted to end up. Do you support that recommendation?

**Edward Timpson:** We do support the recommendation to have a generic start to a degree and then that opportunity to specialise thereafter.

**Q204 Stephen Timms:** Do you support the recommendation for a specialist children's social work degree?

**Edward Timpson:** It is not a specialist children's social work degree inasmuch as you have that generic start and then you move through, in the same way that I might have a degree in political sciences, dare I say—you might have one too, I do not know. I am sure you did something far more important and interesting than that. What it did allow is, within the second and third year, some specialism within it, such as Russian politics.

**Q205 Stephen Timms:** You have rejected that particular recommendation?

**Edward Timpson:** No, we have not rejected the recommendation—

**Stephen Timms:** I think you have.

**Edward Timpson:** —to move from a first year of a generic degree to an ability to specialise thereafter. We might be getting down to the semantics of what we call it but for all intents and purposes it is a social work degree where that person has decided in the subsequent years, past the first year of generic training, to move into a specialised area.

**Q206 Stephen Timms:** Let me just read you the recommendation from Sir Martin Narey's report. "Universities should be encouraged to develop degrees for those intending to work in children's social work." That is different, I think, from what you have described. I just wanted to get that on the record.

Can I ask what you think is the right balance between fast-track and traditional routes?

**Edward Timpson:** As I said in a previous answer, I fully expect that the vast majority of social workers will still go through the traditional route. We do not know yet what the level of uptake for fast-track will be in the future. It is in its very early stages. Through Frontline we had a first cohort of 100 and a second cohort of 180. We are moving to subsequent cohorts.

We are also looking within that at some other routes that people can take when they move into post-qualification, particularly for instance around permanence, looking at that very important area of children's social care where the decision is made as to what the right permanent option is for that child. It requires some fairly deep knowledge and skills around how to make such a profound decision.

What we are doing is this. If we take a tree as an analogy, we start at the trunk with social work and then as it goes on we develop a profession that can branch out in different directions but still has that base at the bottom that they can return to.

**Q207 Stephen Timms:** When you say you would expect the vast majority still to go through the traditional routes, are we talking about 80%?

**Edward Timpson:** I am afraid I am not going to put any figures on it because we do not know what the demand is going to be in the future. There needs to be flexibility within the system to meet that demand. What we do know is that we have around 30,000 children and family social workers. We do not necessarily have the right mix in order to meet all that demand as we currently know it. We are getting a better understanding of what the workforce is and how we need to develop it with the data that we have started to collect over the last two years but that is an area where we do need to do more. As we move towards devolution deals, combined authorities and other structures at local government, there is a really good opportunity to use that as a way of having a deeper, more granular understanding of the workforce so that decisions about what routes we need them to come in through can be better judged.

**Q208 Stephen Timms:** Sir Martin Narey referred to significant weaknesses in some university courses. The HCPC says when they have asked your Department for the names of programmes with significant weaknesses, they have been told that the Department does not

have that information. Can you identify a higher education programme where there are significant weaknesses?

**Edward Timpson:** We asked Sir Martin Narey to do the report he did on social work training in order for him to identify where he thought there was a good level of HEI offer and where there may be areas where it is falling well short of where it should be. That is information that he has established through that report.

**Q209 Stephen Timms:** Do you know where the weaknesses are?

**Edward Timpson:** If the Committee is interested in having specific names of specific universities, I do not think Sir Martin Narey is that far away. I am sure he would be happy to comply. What I do know, and I am confident from his report, is that there are weaknesses and they need to be addressed.

**Q210 Stephen Timms:** HCPC should know where they are, shouldn't it, because of its regulatory role?

**Edward Timpson:** I do not know what direct activity HCPC have with HEIs. I know that they obviously set the regulatory framework and they assess those courses against it. One of the reasons why we are creating a new social work regulatory body is so that we have a body that is absolutely focused on social work rather than 16 healthcare professions that sit within HCPC, including art therapy and podiatry, which do not necessarily have the real focus, as I say, on social work.

**Q211 Stephen Timms:** Is your advice to HCPC that they need to ask Sir Martin where these courses or weaknesses are?

**Edward Timpson:** Knowing that Sir Martin Narey has done the report and come to those conclusions, then—

**Q212 Stephen Timms:** They should ask him?

**Edward Timpson:** I would suggest that that would be a helpful line of inquiry.

**Q213 Stephen Timms:** Most social work research in the UK is carried out by university departments. Some of them feel that the fast-track routes could be a threat to them and therefore to research. Are you worried about the future viability of research? Are you doing anything about it?

**Edward Timpson:** The role of research is really important and it would be wrong to suggest that you can continue to train and develop a social workforce without feeding in that research. It is a vital component of creating the right recipe for success. I know with Frontline they have decided on a less traditional model—which has, it has to be said, passed the HCPC test inasmuch as they have signed it off—where, rather than them going to the academic research, the academic research is coming to them. They have built it into their programme. That is important. I would suspect that if they had not done that it would have been more difficult for HCPC to allow them to continue in the way that they are.

**Q214 Stephen Timms:** Are you worried about the future viability of research?

**Edward Timpson:** No, I am not worried because what we have established is where we know HEIs really add value, and also with the What Works Centre we are going to have a comprehensive countrywide research base on what makes great social work. The research coming from universities is going to be at the core of that through it being an academic-led centre.

**Q215 Stephen Timms:** Final question from me. How likely do you think it is the Department of Health is going to stop funding the social work bursary?

**Edward Timpson:** No decisions have been made about that. As you will know, there has been a consultation in relation to the nurse bursaries. In doing that, at the same time it was right for us to review what the social work bursary was doing. Was it providing value for money? It is a significant sum, about £18 million a year. We are looking carefully at that. There will be the usual period of consultation as to how best to fund placements in social work in the future. There have been absolutely no decisions made at this point. If there is any speculation, I am afraid it is founded on speculation.

**Q216 Chair:** That you very much. One or two of your answers to some of Stephen's questions may well provoke a flurry of correspondence to this Committee. I can sense that coming. Have you any plans to look at CPD funding? We have heard from Isabelle already of the importance of CPD.

**Edward Timpson:** The first thing to establish is that CPD is compulsory. In order for a social worker to remain registered they have to continually update their CPD through HCPC, who then, I think, do a random 2.5% trawl through all social workers every two years. We know it is there and it is a necessary and very valued part of making sure that those in social work remain on the top of their game and up to date.

**Q217 Chair:** Does that mean funding will be at least protected, or possibly increased?

**Edward Timpson:** The funding for CPD does not flow from central Government in its entirety. It is for employers to decide how they want to enable that to happen, and of course—we may come on to this—having a professional body to help facilitate CPD through membership is also a good way of having a virtuous circle of ensuring CPD can happen. What we are doing through teaching partnerships, through the What Works Centre and through Partners in Practice is providing a platform for CPD to be more accessible and of a higher quality. One of the last things we want is social workers, two days before they need to comply with their CPD to get their re-registrations, to go online and do a quick multiple-choice test. We want it to be meaningful.

**Q218 Chair:** We have heard that Assessed and Supported Year is popular. Are you thinking of making that mandatory?

**Edward Timpson:** It has been very successful. We have funded it to the tune of £18 million over the last five years, so we have heavily invested in it. Over 10,000 social workers have now been through that assessed and supported year in employment. We have not made any decisions about whether to mandate or not. It is an area where we would be interested to hear the Committee's views, having considered all the evidence.

I do agree with the chief social worker that what we do not want to do is mandate something that is not very good and is not consistent in quality. Although ASYE has grown exponentially over the last five years, it is still the minority of social workers who have been through that assisted and supported year in employment. In terms of the evidence base, I would want to have as much confidence as I possibly can before making a decision to say this is something that every social worker has to do. This may be an area where evolution will win the day in that it becomes a prerequisite for many employers that their potential employee has been through the ASYE. It is trying to judge whether it would be better to let it happen through that process or not.

**Q219 Chair:** What we have heard also is that some social workers consider the accreditation and assessment system to be punitive rather than supportive. Do you have any thoughts on why that should be or what could be done to make it seem and be more effective at providing support to social workers?

**Edward Timpson:** I can understand, at first glance, that having an assessment and accreditation system put into place could inject a level of fear as to whether that means I am going to pass those tests and be able to remain in practice. I completely understand that initial reaction but what we have seen in the 900-plus social workers that have been through the piloting phase of the assessment and accreditation process is almost a realisation that, first of all, they were more confident than they thought. Also they valued the opportunity to be able to reflect back on their own practice. That is something I have heard again and again from social workers. They often do not get the opportunity to do so. It is also important to note that if you do not get through the first time, you will get another opportunity through being supported to enable yourself to meet the requisite standard.

Having said all of that, I am not going to be half-baked in my determination to see high professional standards right across social work. The reason why we have spent a long time testing this out with a large proportion of social workers is to make sure we get this right, because it could be extremely powerful to make sure we do get that high consistency of standards right across the country.

**Q220 Chair:** Thanks very much. That takes me on the College of Social Work. Do you have any thoughts or plans as to how you might intervene or at least stimulate its replacement with something else? Do you buy the idea that the Association is the natural replacement and should develop into the role?

**Edward Timpson:** We worked hard to help the college grow and become sustainable. You heard earlier about £8.2 million we provided the college beyond the years we said we were initially going to enable them to become a self-sustaining professional body. I know Dave Hill and Annie Hudson, who you heard evidence from, really did do their best to raise the level of membership that was required to enable that to happen but unfortunately it did not and there had to come a point where the Government could not keep putting millions of pounds into what was effectively an insolvent body. The college then had to make a decision as to whether it was going to try to continue on its own.

**Q221 Chair:** Do you think that we should be sketching out what a new body might look like or are you confident that something will emerge?

**Edward Timpson:** In some ways Government has already tried to do that. “Let us follow the recommendation of Munro and help establish a College of Social Work and then let the membership start to grow.” That has not worked and it is regrettable but that does not mean that there should not be a strong professional body representing social workers. That is what I want to see. Having tried it from the top down, my strong preference is from the bottom up, from those grassroots. We have the British Association of Social Workers. We know that they have a growing membership. That could well be the best groundswell of a professional body for social work. It would be wrong for me to impose another model through Government. What we need to do is let them make that decision.

I am very supportive of there being a strong professional body for social work, not just so that they can make sure that the reforms that we are bringing in really do match their experience on the ground and help enhance it but also, going back to the point about raising the status of the profession, they need a strong voice. I hope we get that sooner rather than later.

**Q222 Ian Mearns:** We have previously had a General Social Care Council and then since 2012 we have had Health and Care Professions Council. The Vision for Change document says there will be a new regulatory body by 2020. Why does social work need yet another change in regulator?

**Edward Timpson:** We would not be doing this if we thought we were doing social work the profession justice through the current regulatory framework. This is not a tinkering decision, this is a very profound decision of saying that if we are going to create the practice system that is going to be at the heart of high-quality social work, then we need to have a regulatory body that is designed to challenge and support that profession in a way that is much more focused on them rather than in a wider group of quite a mixture of different health and social care professions.

Although there are some who would say, as you suggest, Mr Mearns, we have gone back to where we were, this is a regulatory body that will have a wider remit, and that will be looking at post-qualification, at accreditation and potentially at CPD. That is going to help form a better structure for the career pathways that we are seeking to create through the frontline practice, practice supervisor and practice leaders.

**Q223 Ian Mearns:** We have been told by others that the Department’s vision and the details of the new regulator are currently still quite vague. Can you tell us exactly what it will be responsible for and how it will be different from the Health and Care Professions Council?

**Edward Timpson:** It is fair to say we still have work to do to establish the deeper, granular details of exactly what the regulatory body will be tasked with. What we are clear about is that it will be specific to social work, and not just children’s social work. It will be dealing predominantly with standards, making sure, through the knowledge and skills and accreditation and assessment system, that we are creating a consistently high level of social work, whichever route the social workers use to come into the profession, and, as I say, also looking potentially at the role of CPD. That is where we need some further discussion with the other bodies that we have spoken about to make sure we do get that remit right.

**Q224 Ian Mearns:** The closure of the General Social Care Council and the transfer to the Health and Care Professions Council cost over £19 million. Who is going to pay for this transition?

**Edward Timpson:** We are meeting the set-up costs of the new body within Government. It is something that we have been working on, mindful of spending reviews and the other constraints on public finances. This is something we think is so important that we have earmarked the necessary expenditure within Government in order to meet it.

**Q225 Ian Mearns:** The important question. The Health and Care Professions Council was established in 2012, what was the main thing that meant that was set up incorrectly in the first place and it was not as robust as you would have liked it?

**Edward Timpson:** What we have come to is the clear view that there needs to be a regulatory body that is focused purely on social work. Being in that wider regulatory body meant that the elements of the system that we know needed to change would not necessarily have been able to change without the creation of this new body. It is not to say that HCPC were not doing their job properly—they were—but in the context of what we are trying to do with the social work reform agenda, they would not have been able to do it in the form of the regulatory framework that was set up within HCPC.

**Chair:** We must move on to Catherine now.

**Q226 Catherine McKinnell:** What evidence do you have that removing children's services from local authority control will result in better outcomes for children and families?

**Edward Timpson:** I am one of those who subscribes to the “what works” view of the world, and also understanding what does not work. We have a very mixed picture in children's services where less than 30% of the 152 local authorities are good or outstanding. Over 70% require improvement or are inadequate. We have over 25 who are in intervention with the Department. We have moved 35 out of intervention. That has been a good outcome from the support that we are able to offer as a Department. What we do know is that there are some areas where there is systemic failure and persistent failure, which cannot be tolerated, and where every opportunity has been given for that organisation to turn that service around. It is only right in those circumstances we look at other ways of delivering the service that would improve outcomes for children and drive up consistent quality in that organisation.

We have seen this happen in education before. In Hackney during the early 2000s, the Hackney Education Trust was set up. It ran education and schools in Hackney for close to 10 years, turned them around, and then returned them back to the local authority. Generally they are still very well-performing schools. It can have a very positive impact, albeit that was education.

What we did was commission a number of reports, independent reports, into what to do with these persistent, systemically failing local authorities. The first of those was Doncaster, which resulted in setting up the Doncaster Children's Trust. We have already seen in the first year a significant improvement from what was the very, very low end of inadequate to a good adoption service. Many other elements of that service have gone from inadequate to “requires improvement”. Also, importantly, there has been a huge culture change within that organisation. Social workers feel more supported, more valued,

and feel ownership of the service they are running. There is emerging evidence from Doncaster and now in Slough, from the initial independent reports that have been done there, that it is having a positive impact.

There are many different models that can be tried. I know we are short of time, Chair, but Hampshire run Isle of Wight and have turned Isle of Wight around. Richmond set up a community interest company, Achieving for Children, who took over the running of Kingston, which went from inadequate to good in a few short years. The tri-borough has come together and runs a single service. Two of those councils have become outstanding. There are examples of how, if we deliver services differently—I am also keen for other voluntary organisations to come in and help local authorities—we can improve services. As I say, for me it is about what works. If that works, we should do it.

**Q227 Catherine McKinnell:** I think people are interested in seeing the evidence base. Obviously the report that was undertaken into children's services outside the local authorities was completed in 2013 but the results have been delayed in terms of their publication. Could you give us an idea of what the main conclusions are of the report?

**Edward Timpson:** Could you just be a bit more specific about the report you are referring to?

**Catherine McKinnell:** The report into the FOI requests that have ultimately resulted in the Department deciding that it will publish it but not until summer 2016, it is the Department for Education's own commissioned study.

**Edward Timpson:** Yes, I think this is the LaingBuisson report

**Catherine McKinnell:** That was concluded in March 2014?

**Edward Timpson:** Yes, that will be published, as indicated, as soon as purdah is over. So I am not at liberty to start divulging its contents until then, but the reason it is being published is because it is a helpful paper. It is trying to flesh out some of the ways that we can deliver children's services that are more innovative. It is why we set up the innovation programmes so we can test these ideas out, but in a risk-controlled environment. This is all about how can we give children who need protection, who are vulnerable, a greater prospect of receiving the services that they need. But then they are being sustained so that they end up with the outcomes that we know that they are capable of.

**Q228 Chair:** I have two quick questions. Ofsted has a reputation for being focused on education and some would say even more focused on secondary education within that. What reforms, if any, do you think are necessary to help Ofsted help the world of social work?

**Edward Timpson:** I recently went to the Ofsted HQ, just opposite Holborn Station—I don't know if you have been there, Chairman, but it is well worth a visit—and spent some time with the new Head of Social Care within Ofsted, Eleanor Schooling, who I think is a real breath of fresh air in driving social care at the heart of Ofsted's work, whether that be through children's services or the new joint inspections that we are doing on special educational needs.

**Q229 Chair:** One last question. Which of your reforms, if any, will require primary legislation?

***Edward Timpson:*** A social work body will require primary legislation.

**Chair:** Okay, thank you very much for answering our questions. We are at the end, although we did skim a few. Thank you very much.