

**Taskforce recommendations re initial social work qualification
Questions/issues for HE**

1. Admissions

Recc: Criteria governing the calibre of entrant to SW education and training be strengthened:

- *successful completion of a written test, which measures the clarity of writing, logical coherence and the capacity for developing reflective and analytical thinking*
- *high performance in selection interviews which evaluate the life and work experience of course applicants, their communication skills, creativity and emotional resilience, reinforcing the current requirements*
- *HEIs applying entry thresholds below the national average for social work (where entry to degree courses is based on UCAS points) should raise their threshold*
- *all candidates should give evidence of their competence in English and Maths (through at least grade C or above at GCSE or an equivalent qualification)*
- *Regulation should ensure that these criteria are applied consistently and fairly and in line with government ambitions set out in Unleashing Aspirations and the recent Higher Ambitions report.*
- *Exit routes to alternative, lower level or non-qualifying courses should be available in all programmes to enable those who are not competent or suitable to practise as social workers to complete a course in related areas.*
- *Encourage expansion of the Masters qualification for those who hold appropriate degrees*

Some areas to consider:

1. How will entry standards be monitored? Will the tradition of broad access to social work qualifications be retained (Need to establish comparable requirements of suitability for applicants with AL and those with other qualifications)
2. Review of entry requirements: How meaningful is the threshold of 250 UCAS points? What exclusions should apply (again guidance on this might help). Do we need to differentiate HEIs that selecting students and those recruiting? How can SW depts negotiate with centralised HEI admission criteria/processes?
3. Where experience is required how is this criteria best interpreted?
4. Should guidance on 'rigorous' selection procedures be issued? e.g. written test, employer engagement, SU&C involvement, group sessions, interviewing, paper screening, access programme links, 'grow your own'?

5. How can employer and service user and care input to admission best be supported?
6. How should HEIs adapt their programmes to provide support to students with lower entry qualifications and enable their progression?
7. What research needs to be done on what qualities are needed to make a good SW and how this can be translated into selection procedures?
8. How can the 'exit route' best be planned? Are there examples of 'good practice' in offering exit routes that might be helpful?
9. How might expansion of M-level programmes be achieved without jeopardising BA programmes? (NB possible specific issues for HE in FE programmes and cities which have more than one university offering social work)

2. Curriculum and delivery

Overhauling current arrangements should be set out by the Government as soon as possible and overseen through the proposed national reform programme for social work. The overhaul should lead to a curriculum based on jointly agreed outcome standards for the social work degree with these standards explicitly tied to robust assessment processes systems for ensuring that everyone who designs and delivers social work courses are up to date with current knowledge, policy and practice. The regulator of social work education will have an important role to play in taking a more robust approach to ensuring that requirements are met, that the curriculum is kept up to date and that employers and service users are engaged in its design and delivery. The Task Force believes that a stronger and more consistent focus on the content and quality of the degree will ensure that, by the time students complete their courses, they will be equipped with the knowledge, legislative context and tools required for initial work with either children or adults. They will also be prepared for more specialist learning during their assessed year in employment (see below) and throughout their subsequent career.

Some areas to consider

1. Is this a review of requirements/rules as well as curriculum?
2. What kind of document are we aiming to produce? – are there exemplars from other professions (e.g. [Tomorrow's Doctors](#), new nursing curriculum) and/or SW in other countries (e.g. [IASSW standards](#), [Canada](#), [USA](#), [Australia](#)) that would be useful to emulate in terms of style/length?
3. What is the status of the existing documents (Benchmark Statement, NOS, GSCC, user views) in terms of currency and relevance?
4. In what format is the curriculum document to be written (learning outcomes, competencies)?
5. How will the requirements relate to the AYE and/or postqualification requirements (and/or Foundation level): what is the process to ensure that the continuum is built?
6. What other documents/ requirements need to be taken into account: e.g. 10 Essential Shared Capabilities (MH), Common Core (C+F) etc
7. How to ensure that K,S,V are all present?
8. Should we focus on key domains? (e.g. critical thinking/analysis of knowledge, reflective and ethical practice, skills development, research mindedness)
9. Is the curriculum for the whole programme including PL?

10. Will M level initial qualification be distinguishable only by level, or are will there be differences in curriculum requirements?
11. What is the position about specialisation and/or specific user group focus within the degree?
12. Gaps: the Task Force report mentions the need for:
 - greater consistency and linking theory to practice;
 - more emphasis on assessment frameworks;
 - risk analysis;
 - communication skills;
 - managing conflict and hostility;
 - working with other professionals;
 - and understanding of the research, legislation and policy basis for practice.

Are there other areas where there is agreement on 'gaps' or deficiencies in current programmes, and how will these be prioritised? (e.g. personalisation, safeguarding, substance misuse, managing stress, human rights, international dimension). What areas need to be covered in more *depth* (e.g. communication skills, managing risk)
13. How to ensure that the curriculum remains responsive to changing context of policy/practice etc?
14. How will the transition to the AYE best be managed? e.g. final module 'becoming a practitioner' with strong employer inputs
15. What measures might be taken to ensure that assessment procedures are sufficiently robust? This might include suitability procedures.

3. Practice learning

Recc: new arrangements be put in place to provide sufficient high quality practice placement which are properly supervised and assessed, for all social work students.

- *Formal sharing of accountability and responsibility between HEIs and employers through active partnerships – with formal guidance on the best approaches to building these partnerships locally. Partnerships should take responsibility for the allocation and audit of placement opportunities, based on the best possible information about supply and demand; and explore the potential for service level agreements where these are not already in place.*
- *Advanced teaching organisations. Best practice in this area should be recognised, encouraged and widely adopted. We would like to see the introduction of the status of advanced teaching organisation, tied to financial rewards and incentives and awarded to agencies who demonstrate expertise and a track record in providing good quality practice placements.*
- *Placement criteria Mechanisms should be introduced to make sure that all students eventually benefit from at least one placement in a local authority, mental health trust or national organisation undertaking statutory work, where social workers are employed and where case accountability rests with the agency*
- *New funding arrangements Funding to support placement organisation (currently DH's Education Support Grant, distributed by the GSCC) should be revised to ensure that funding provides the most effective means for securing high quality placements for all students, ensuring: dedicated support for placement organisation and allocation; support to practice educators in devoting time to students; and incentives for the development of advanced teaching agencies.*
- *Assessment standards: The practice educator should be recognised as a specific and senior role within the nationally recognised career structure for social workers. Employers should ensure that they support staff to develop these skills as part of their responsibility for investing in the next generation of social workers and for supporting all social workers in their on-going learning and development. Definitive standards are needed for those who teach and assess social work students on placement. While other professionals may helpfully contribute to the learning of students on placement and provide feedback, all social work students should in future only be taught and assessed by qualified and experienced social workers. A date should be set for ensuring that, all those who take responsibility for the supervision and assessment of a social work student in their final placement hold a current practice teaching award or have demonstrated their competence against agreed national standards, with these to be finally determined by the board overseeing the reform programme.*
- *Placement days: Consideration should be given to reducing the minimum number of placement days from 200 to no less than 130. Such a reduction would help to release more time to deliver important elements of the curriculum which may not be currently covered sufficiently; ensure a sharper focus on what the placement is meant to achieve in terms of the student's learning and development; enable all students to have better quality placements. Students should continue to gain practice experience and learning in two practice settings with two different service user groups. While this would entail a decrease in the number of placement days within the degree, the introduction of the assessed year in employment which we are also recommending would see a significant increase in the amount of time students spend in practice before becoming licensed social workers.*

Some areas to consider

1. How to frame guidance about effective practice in developing partnerships (HE/employer)? Template for a service-level agreement?
2. What would an advanced teaching organisation look like?
3. What is a 'high quality placement' ? How can QA systems for PL be enhanced?
4. How can current initiatives to support PL be better integrated?
5. How will the links be made to PQ provision re practice educator role?
6. Date for requiring suitably qualified SW supervision of all final PLOs?
7. How will the recommendation about no of placement days be made? Is there a role for reconsideration of APEL? What is the minimum length for a PLO that provides sufficient opportunity to learn and demonstrate competence?
8. What models of PL would be helpful to promote? (e.g. student units, group learning models)
9. How will recommendations about new funding arrangements be made?
10. How can the role of the independent/freelance PE (currently an essential but marginalised part of the PL provision) be supported and enhance?
11. How can we ensure that improved standards for PL and tighter local control of numbers of students entering SW programmes do not result in a deficit of qualified SWs nationally?

5.Regulation and standards

Recc: more transparent and effective regulation of SW education to give greater assurance of consistency and quality.

The regime should ensure proportionate regulation, targeting weak course providers and encouraging the best. The regulator should be authorised and resourced to ensure social work courses are properly inspected against a new set of standards in the interests of consistent, high quality provision across the country take a robust approach to ensuring that:

- *the content of courses is kept up to date with the changing demands of frontline practice;*
- *organisers and teachers of social work courses are up to date with current knowledge, policy and practice; and*
- *expert practitioners, service users, employers and other professionals are consistently and substantially involved in the design and delivery of courses ensure that criteria for entrance to courses and suitability for entry into the workforce are met through assessment.*

New regulation arrangements will take time to implement and must be properly resourced. In the meantime, the TF welcomes the work that the GSCC has done to consider how it can strengthen quality assurance of courses, under the existing rules. These include: publication of annual monitoring and re-approval reports on social work courses; the provision of clear information about quality for the public and potential students; targeted visits to providers and placements where provision may be weak; mechanisms for bringing together evidence gained directly from students, employers, service users and carers with evidence from formal monitoring; increasing the involvement of service users and carers in how courses are regulated; and monitoring courses more closely to ensure that HEI have appropriate staffing and resources, including placements, to offer high quality social work education. The TF believes that GSCC should implement these measures as soon as possible.

Funding: Significant govt funding to support the social work degree, including £70 million for the provision of bursaries, and £32.5 million for placement funding and development. Current bursary arrangements have encouraged increased applicants to social work courses. These incentives now need to be reviewed to promote applications from people of sufficiently high quality, and to encourage completion of degree courses, entry to and retention in the work force. We believe that government should review funding arrangements to provide incentives for high quality entrants to the social work profession and to ensure high quality placements are made available to all students.

1. What measures other than those proposed by the GSCC be taken to enhance regulation? Can we learn anything from other professions here about driving up standards?
2. How will the recommendation that those who design and deliver the curriculum are kept up to date be operationalised? (staff development/secondments to practice?)
3. What steps can be taken to ensure that increased regulation, and/or the increased costs of staff development do not result in universities deciding to close their programmes?
4. What recommendations might be made about reviewing funding allocations? Need to ensure these do not have perverse /unintended outcomes.