

Commission on Social Workers – Submission Questions

Please describe your role or the organisation you represent and your interaction with social workers.

The Pre-school Learning Alliance is the largest voluntary sector provider of quality affordable childcare and education in England. It is a key partner in providing range of different services in children's centres across the country – including management, family support and childcare.

Through direct provision and its membership of 15,000 nurseries, sessional pre-schools and parent and toddler groups, the Alliance supports over 800,000 children and their families in England. The Alliance also develops and runs family learning programmes, offers information and advice, runs acclaimed training and accreditation programmes and campaigns to influence early years policy and practice.

Our member settings and directly run provision will liaise with social workers in multi-disciplinary teams where intervention and support is required. Alliance members and staff would also be supporting projects consistent with the Charity's aims

Image

- **Do you agree that the image of social workers is often a negative one amongst the media, the public at large and other professionals and why?**

Yes, the image of social workers is unfortunately more often than not a negative one. For social workers working in the area of childcare this pejorative view is linked to their statutory responsibilities.

- **Is this a particularly British problem and how does it contrast or compare with social workers and their role overseas?**

This negative image is largely UK based where there appears to be a low value placed on "doing good work". In the US the role and status of the social worker is held in much higher regard.

- **What can be done, and what is being done, to address this perception?**

More positive media portrayals would help as would as rise in the status of the social worker.

Recruitment and Retention

- **Do you think that the new qualifications for social work have turned social work from a vocation into a profession and what improvements to training, workforce strategy and career structure should be made?**

One improvement to training, workforce strategy and career structure would be to linking qualifications to a degree with post qualifying experience before full status.

- **What can be done to address the high vacancy and turnover rates in certain parts of the country and to what extent is it a matter of money?**

Golden hello payments, secondment to higher training, increased annual leave and salary would all help address high vacancy and turnover rates.

Broad ladder for recruitment and training – accelerated progression, and worker exchange could also make a positive difference in this area.

- **Where can national and/or local government invest most effectively to improve the social worker workforce, and do you think either is sufficiently committed to taking on this challenge?**

Work priorities and effectiveness

- **Is the current balance right between early intervention and reactive support particularly with regard to vulnerable families, and where should the priorities be?**

Social work has fundamentally changed because of demographic changes and resource limitations more narrowly defining role expectations into a reactive service.

Early intervention can be cost effective – Priorities must be around legal duties, then child/family support, and those at risk of social exclusion.

- **Is the workload of social workers sustainable and are they constrained by bureaucracy, and have they become too risk averse?**

Workload is manageable if expectations are clarified. Bureaucracy has allowed process to dominate outcome and negative media coverage has created a risk averse position. Societal expectations of social workers need to change.

- **How has greater inter-agency working changed the job and how could further improvements be made?**

Workers are imbued by the culture and the organisation that employs them. A truly holistic social work job embraces local authority NHS and Job Centre Plus agencies etc. Poverty may be a central element which needs to be addressed and the role of the social worker could be increased to help clients gain employment.

General

- **How can we make the job of social workers more enjoyable, fulfilling and respected?**

The job of social workers can be made more enjoyable, fulfilling and respected via improved status. Factors that can play a part in improving this status are a more positive profile, improved career structure and shift to regard.

- **What do social workers do well and what do they do badly; and who benefits most and least from their involvement?**
- Social workers do best at meeting generic needs but are unable to provide self-publicity. Social workers best engaged in 'change ready' situations and least well in situations where change is not accepted.

- **Should social workers be more accountable and more closely regulated?**

There should be less process but more direction from a more coherent set of role expectations

Are there any other issues you would like to comment on?

Social work, over the years, has been the butt of many jokes – an expression of the low regard and the lack of understanding of the day-to-day role of the social worker and the challenges they face. Negative images of social workers are not assisted by the very damaging circumstances of tragic cases.

Good news stories and stories of successful interventions never make the press and the sensitive and personal nature of their work can see appreciative feedback is often relayed very personally from client to social worker and not highlighted on any public forum. The negative public perception therefore is often unchallenged.

Social workers do a difficult and stressful job working with people who are often living in extremely difficult situations. Clients may be experiencing extremely high levels of poverty, high levels of distress and challenging personal circumstances. Social workers may have to enter environments where their intervention is not welcomed.

The intervention of social workers can make a long-lasting positive difference to the lives of people of all ages, their families and communities.

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Please return your submissions to Tim Loughton MP, House of Commons,

London, SW1A 0AA or email them to loughtont@parliament.uk