

Social Work Reform Board

**Building a safe
and confident
future:**

One Year On

**Proposals for partnerships
between employers and educators**

December 2010

Proposals for Partnerships between Employers and Educators

Summary

The Social Work Task Force emphasised the importance of partnerships between employers and HEIs in the design and delivery of good quality training and development for social workers.

1.1 Social workers, their employers and educators must work with a wide range of partners, including service users, carers and other professionals. This paper proposes a partnership framework between employers and educators across the whole spectrum of education and professional development. The prime partnership addressed is that between employers and higher education institutions (HEIs), but the principles can also be extended to partnerships between several HEIs, groups of employers and small clusters of organisations, as these can have a significant contribution to make to the effectiveness of local arrangements for education, professional development and the supply of social workers.¹

1.2 The theme of partnership crosses many aspects of the social work reform programme. The proposals in this paper have close links with a number of other areas of work, including practice placements, Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE), Continuing Professional Development (CPD), Standards for Employers, Supervision Framework and Social Worker Supply & Demand Model.

1.3 As it has an impact on so many areas, the partnership framework proposed in this paper aims to build on existing partnerships in order to address current needs (e.g. practice learning and CPD), whilst remaining flexible enough to accommodate future developments as they become clearer (e.g. Assessed and Supported Year in Employment).

1.4 The proposals in this paper present a balanced way forward, reflecting current best practice and evidence from research and stakeholder views on the areas of improvement needed. They take account of current policy drivers, regulatory frameworks and the overall direction of the reform programme.

1.5 A wide range of examples of existing partnerships have been provided to the Social Work Task Force and Reform Board, reflecting the diversity of arrangements already in place to meet local need. These show that good partnerships between employers and HEIs in relation to social work education and CPD are:

- **Driven by a shared understanding of the mutual benefits of partnership**
A good partnership is a joint planning and decision-making forum. Partners will need to establish joint goals and ensure a relevant shared agenda is established.

¹ This framework excludes any practice-based, project-based or inter-professional partnerships which may have clear and valued shared objectives, but are outside the scope of this work.

- **Based on a formal written agreement, supported by the regulatory framework, sector standards and good practice**
This will become the key indicator of a formal arrangement. It will also serve as a means of clarifying expectations of partners, and the boundaries of the partnership.
There is a description of the key elements that you may wish to include in a written agreement in [Appendix 1](#).
- **Based around local, flexible and diverse arrangements**
This framework will be a trigger for existing partnerships to review their arrangements and choose how to move forward. The intention is that the framework should support a wide range of models and arrangements.
- **Structured to operate at strategic and operational levels, and informed by workforce planning arrangements**
Senior managers (employers and HEIs) must endorse the formal partnership arrangements and set the strategic direction, including numbers of placements and priorities for PQ/CPD. Other groups of staff, under the umbrella of the partnership, should be responsible for the operational delivery of agreed goals.
- **Structured to operate across the whole spectrum of education and professional development and able to respond flexibly to new initiatives and policy developments**
Initially, the prime focus of partnerships is likely to be practice learning and CPD but they must be flexible enough to incorporate new developments as they emerge. It will be essential for partnerships to keep their arrangements and written agreements under regular review.

What can you do?

We would like to know what you think about our proposals on partnerships between employers and HEIs:

Q1. Does the proposed partnership framework address the need of all types of employers and HEIs, and will it create effective partnership arrangements for social work education in the future?

Q2. What aspects will contribute to the successful development of a partnership framework?

Q3. What possible barriers have to be overcome?

You can express your views on the proposals within this report by:

- Emailing the Social Work Reform Board at **information.swrb@education.gsi.gov.uk**
- Contributing to national and regional meetings, workshops and conferences, details of which will be posted on our website and in our newsletter.
- Sending your comments to your representative organisations and asking them to submit them to the Reform Board.

Proposals for Partnerships between Employers and Educators

Introduction

2.1 Effective partnerships are characterised by people working together for a common goal, based on mutual respect and value for each other's contribution. In the context of partnerships between employers and educators on social work education and CPD, they should:

- Promote and contribute to shared outcomes in the delivery of social work education.
- Develop a strategic approach to workforce planning and social work education.
- Foster relationships between key people that are based on feedback, communication, understanding and respecting each other's values.
- Provide clarity of roles and expectations as a basis for sharing the workload.

The benefits of partnerships

2.2 The social work reform programme provides an opportunity to emphasise the value of partnerships. The partnership framework proposed in this paper is based on the premise that strong partnerships and good collaboration between employers and HEIs will lead to a more strategic approach to meeting the needs of the workforce and providing high quality placements for students.

2.3 Effective partnership working will be critical in achieving the goals of the reform programme, including:

- Improving the quality of service users' experiences by developing a stronger social work profession.
- Improving recruitment and retention of high quality social workers, through collaboration between HEIs and employers in initial training and CPD.
- Maximising cost effectiveness and economies of scale at a time of financial constraint and uncertainty.
- Improving the quality and quantity of practice placements for social work students.

Current practice

2.4 There is a huge variety of partnership arrangements/networks across the country for initial education and CPD, which range from excellent in some areas to very weak or non-existent in others. We are clear that we want to learn from the best existing partnerships and we intend to make examples of good practice available on our website in due course.

2.5 We know that there are some key factors that can hinder the development of good partnerships, such as:

- Poor engagement
- Over-reliance on key individual staff or relationships between specific individuals.
- Lack of commitment from senior staff.
- Lack of clear drivers and objectives.

2.6 There is also a significant weight of evidence and examples of good practice that illustrate the factors that support effective partnership arrangements and we have included a list of sources and activities that we have used in developing this work in **Appendix 2**. Engagement with stakeholders tells us:

- Partnership arrangements should be formal, and linked to incentives and sanctions wherever possible.
- Existing partnership activities are at different stages of development. The new framework must be able to meet existing priorities and have the potential to adapt to new ones as they emerge.
- Partnership arrangements should encompass a range of activities at strategic, specialist and local levels, with some aspects of partnership needing to be organised differently to others.
- The new framework should be flexible, but must also facilitate strategic planning and engagement across the whole continuum of qualifying and post-qualifying education.

Key issues and policy context

2.7 A common concern was that partnerships were ineffective or problematic because they lacked formal arrangements. It is notable, though, that many partnerships, including some of the very best, currently operate without any written agreements. However, people with experience of practice learning partnerships were particularly concerned that tensions sometimes arise over sudden increases in student numbers by HEIs and/or sudden reductions in numbers of placements by employers. Both sides felt helpless as there seemed to be no sanctions or ways of preventing partners making unilateral changes to previous agreements or understandings.

2.8 The proposals for a partnership framework have addressed the strong stakeholder view in favour of formalising arrangements, but must take into account the current policy context. The framework must be consistent with the options for accountability that will be part of the planned future context for social work. This is likely to include:

Regulation:

As the GSCC's functions are transferred to the Health Professions Council (HPC), we anticipate that the latter will regulate partnerships in line with its Standards of Education and Training (SETs). This includes promoting/monitoring formal arrangements (SET 5.1) and regular and effective collaboration (SET 5.10) between

HEIs and placement providers.

College of Social Work:

As the College of Social Work establishes itself it may wish to take on a role in promoting partnership. This might include setting national partnership expectations, collating good practice examples, providing national workforce planning data, and guidance.

Sector standards:

Standards for Employers and Supervision Framework: The draft Standards for Employers state that employers should ensure there are appropriate partnerships to support the delivery of social work education and CPD.

Collaboration partnership statement (Universities UK): This is a high level statement which sets national/sector level expectations for partnership between universities and employers in England.

2.9 The developing regulatory and best practice frameworks will provide the incentives and guidance to support future engagement in partnerships. Through active participation in a partnership:

- Employers will be able to demonstrate they are meeting the Standards for Employers.
- Employers and HEIs will be able to jointly provide evidence to the regulator of their formal arrangements.
- Individual social workers and managers who are members of local partnerships will be able to demonstrate their skills within the Professional Capabilities Framework² and provide CPD evidence at the level appropriate to their role.

2.10 In a climate of financial constraint, joint planning in partnerships will also allow employers and HEIs to demonstrate best value in the delivery of social work education through shared activities and economies of scale. Partnerships will have a key role in the future of social work education, and no employer or HEI should expect to deliver social work programmes without having formal partnership arrangements in place.

2.11 Research³ shows that the engagement of senior managers is critical to the effectiveness of partnerships. Senior managers from both employers and HEIs should be involved in agreeing the numbers of placements that can be provided and local priorities for CPD. Strategic decision making should be informed by data on supply and demand of social workers. Other groups of staff, under the umbrella of the partnership, will be responsible for operational aspects of the agreement e.g. recruitment of students, provision and quality assurance of placements.

2.12 The aim of the partnership framework is to build on current partnerships and not prescribe structures and detailed arrangements. There should be flexibility to support 'natural partnerships' that work locally, taking into account regional and sub

² Specifically Professionalism (1), Contexts and Organisations (8) and Professional Leadership (9)

³ *Strengthening employer engagement in the planning, development and delivery of social work education.*

regional arrangements, and the location of universities. All partnerships will need to review their arrangements in the light of this framework. All partnerships will need the capacity to change and meet new expectations as they emerge.

The Reform Board believes all employers and HEIs involved in any part of the spectrum of social work education and professional development should be part of a formal partnership with at least one organisation and follow the good practice set out in this paper.

Key features that lead to effective outcomes

2.14 A good partnership cannot simply be a bureaucratic structure. Formal arrangements are a means of facilitating relationships between employers and HEIs, in order to distribute power in a constructive way. No partner is able to achieve the outcomes necessary on their own, but what each contributes is essential to the other partner. A partnership framework should enable communication, joint planning and shared activities to move to the complex level necessary to produce high quality social workers.

2.15 This means that the goal of the framework is to create partnerships that are effective joint decision-making forums and able to address such areas as:

- Ensuring appropriate quality and quantity of social workers to support local workforce planning at strategic and operational levels, including:
 - *Making realistic agreements about the number of social work students within a partnership, taking into account resources, need and organisational pressures within the participating organisations.*
 - *Joint planning and participation in the recruitment of high calibre students.*
 - *Developing high quality practice placements.*
- Ensuring agreed contributions from all partners to the delivery of qualifying and post qualifying programmes and provision of:
 - *A relevant and current curriculum for both taught and practice components of the social work degree.*
 - *Robust suitability and assessment processes.*
- Ensuring the quality of social workers in their first year of practice and beyond including:
 - *Agreeing priorities for PQ/CPD taking into account workforce needs and new developments in policy and practice.*
 - *Joint participation in the support of newly qualified social workers.*
- Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the quality of the learning experience of social workers on placement, in practice and at university, at qualifying and post qualifying levels. Examples might include Joint evaluation of the curriculum of social work and PQ/CPD programmes, with mechanisms for influencing and changing content.

- Implementing, reviewing and monitoring the involvement of service users across the whole spectrum of training for social workers.
- Developing opportunities for shared research and promoting the evidence base for social work decisions.

Suggested content of partnership agreements		Appendix 1
Area	Indicative content of agreement	
Aim and purpose of agreement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the shared objectives of the partnership? • What is the range and focus of the partnership? e.g. does it cover the full spectrum of social work education or practice learning/CPD only? • Has the agreement been formalised through the signatures of senior managers 	
Priorities and targets for period of the agreement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What period of time does the agreement cover? • What numbers of placements have been agreed? • What other priorities and activities for PQ/ASYE/CPD/research have been agreed? 	
Management of the partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is the partnership structured? • What sub-groups have been formed to undertake the work? • How will they be supported and resourced? • What are the strategies for managing disagreements? e.g. more or less placements than first agreed • What would be the role of any third party in resolving conflict? 	
Roles and responsibilities <i>Expectations should be mutual, and detail will help avoid assumptions.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the joint responsibilities of employers and HEIs? • What are the separate responsibilities of employers and HEIs? • What is each partner expected to do regarding e.g. recruitment and selection of students, development of the curriculum, provision of practice learning etc? • How will changes be made to the arrangements and whose responsibility will this be? 	
Quality assurance/measures of success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What quality assurance systems will be used e.g. QAPL, QAA and how will they interlink? • What other measures of success will the partnership use? 	
Resources and finances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What will each partner contribute in terms of time/staff/administration resources/financial costs? 	
Timescales and review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When/how will the agreement be reviewed? • How will the partners give each other constructive feedback? • How much notice must be given of changes to the agreement outside review period? • How will revisions be made as a result of the review? 	

Documents used by the partnership work stream

Appendix 2

1. *Strengthening employer engagement in the planning, development and delivery of social work education*. This research was commissioned from Salford University by the SWDP. It considers models of partnership in other professions, models of partnership in the UK and internationally, and the outcome of an employer survey. It makes a number of specific recommendations of issues that could be considered in developing effective employer/HEI partnerships in social work. (Skills for Care website – social work section).
2. *Submission from JUC SWEC to SWTF – Models of partnership working*. This submission describes the strengths and activities of eleven partnerships in the UK, illustrating the wide range of activities and arrangements that can contribute to good partnership working.
3. *Higher Ambitions, the future of universities in a knowledge economy (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills)*. This places partnership in a wider context of government strategy for sustaining the strength of higher education in an increasingly competitive environment. It stresses the importance of employers becoming active partners with universities, and sets out expectations of universities and employers in producing a skilled workforce.
4. *Evaluation of SWDP funding 2009-10 (summary)*. This describes the activities which resulted through the distribution of funding to employers directly or via regional networks. It illustrates the use of financial levers and objective setting.
5. *Feedback from employers on partnership (Learn to Care)*. Responses to this questionnaire circulated by Learn to Care stressed the value of having clear objectives set for partnerships.
6. *The Standards for the Practice Learning in the Degree in Social Work*. (Northern Ireland Care Council). These standards are used by the NICC to approve and monitor practice learning arrangements. A set of standards, with rationale and criteria, are provided for course providers and practice learning providers.
7. *Partnering for success - steps and tools. (Tribal/Department for Education)*. This toolkit includes a partnership questionnaire and a template for a partnership agreement.
8. *Stepping higher: Workforce development through employer-higher education partnerships (HEFCE/Universities UK/CBI on education 2008)*
9. *Supporting higher education in further education colleges (HEFCE 2005/09)*
10. *Code of practice on indirectly funded partnerships (HEFCE Report 99/63)*
11. These are a range of documents published by HEFCE on good practice in partnership and partnership agreements, relevant to all employer/HEI partnerships.

Regulation and accountability:

- Standards of education and training guidance. (Health Professions Council)
- Proposed Standards for Employers and Supervision Framework.
- Higher education and employer collaboration partnership statement: social work (Universities UK).

Papers produced by partnership work stream:

- Discussion paper – key principles and options
- Report of partnership seminar held on 14th September 2010

Paper produced by practice learning work stream:

- Partnership and practice learning – early ideas

Membership of the Social Work Reform Board

The Social Work Reform Board met for the first time in January 2010 and is chaired by Moira Gibb CBE, who also chaired the Social Work Task Force. The member organisations on the Reform Board bring together representatives of social workers, employers, educators and service users to plan how, together, they can make reforms happen and report to government on progress.

The Social Work Reform Board has formed three main working groups to bring together relevant parties to develop plans to make the Social Work Task Force recommendations a reality. The working groups involve the different stakeholders interested in the social work reform programme. Their role is to inform and develop the recommendations and draft proposals for consultation to ensure that final arrangements work in practice. The main working groups focus on education, career development and standards for employers.

The Social Work Reform Board is also informed by the Social Workers' Reference Group, which ensures that the views and perspectives of social workers are at the forefront in developing the reform programme.

The following organisations send representatives to attend Social Work Reform Board meetings:

- A National Voice
- Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS)
- Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS)
- Association of Professionals in Education and Children's Trusts (Aspect)
- Association of Professors of Social Work (APSW)
- British Association of Social Workers (BASW)
- Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Services (CAFCASS)
- Children England
- College of Social Work
- Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)
- Department for Education (DfE)
- Department of Health (DH)
- General Social Care Council (GSCC)
- Health Professions Council (HPC)
- Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Social Policy & Social Work (SWAP)
- Joint University Council – Social Work Education Committee (JUC-SWEC)

- Local Government Association (LGA)
- Local Government Employers (LGE)
- Mind
- NHS Confederation
- Princess Royal Trust for Carers
- Shaping our Lives
- Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE)
- Unison
- Universities UK (UUK)

Government officials from the Devolved Administrations have observer status on the Social Work Reform Board and the following organisations also attend its meetings:

- Care Quality Commission (CQC)
- Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC)
- Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)
- Ofsted
- Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)
- Skills for Care (SfC)
- Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE)

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