

# HM Government: Children's Workforce Strategy

## Update – spring 2007. Building a world-class workforce for children, young people and families

### The Response of the General Teaching Council for England

#### Introduction

- 1) The General Teaching Council for England (GTC) is the independent professional body for the teaching profession. Its main duties are to regulate the teaching profession and to advise the Secretary of State on a range of matters concerning teachers and teaching and learning. It is tasked with contributing to the raising of standards of teaching and acting in the public interest.

#### General comments

- 2) The General Teaching Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Update and the questions it poses for the next steps of the Children's Workforce Strategy (CWS). As an active member of the Children's Workforce Network (CWN) the GTC has seen first hand the commitment of those involved in diverse services to children to delivering change in support of the *Every Child Matters* (ECM) objectives. In particular, we pay tribute to the work of the Children's Minister in pursuing the ECM agenda from strategy to delivery, and striving to ensure that her colleagues across Whitehall are attaching the same priority to children's outcomes.
- 3) The GTC has recently published a report of conversations about ECM with nearly 500 teachers nationally, and that report is appended to this response as it may provide further insights into next steps for the children's workforce strategy.
- 4) Although there has been progress against the initial priorities set out in the 2006 CWS, it has not been even across all areas, and even where there has been good progress – such as in early years workforce reform – there is still much to do. It is, after all, a ten year strategy. The GTC's main message to government is that the Autumn Refresh should not contain many new priorities, but should seek to develop and amplify those identified last year.

### *Refresh 'commissions' to CWN*

- 5) In our view, the CWN has been able to make a positive contribution when the tasks it has been given are quite clearly defined; it has been less easy to pinpoint an intervention where they have not. While the GTC welcomes the Minister's invitation to the CWN to be more pro-active in setting the agenda, if the Refresh does task the CWN with work, precision about the task would be welcome.

### *Sufficient high calibre children's practitioners*

- 6) In particular, the government should focus on those initiatives most likely to assure the capacity of practitioners – especially frontline practitioners – to respond effectively to the ECM agenda. Much of the recent activity associated with ECM delivery has been concerned with structural change in terms of service commissioning, delivery and accountability. We must not lose sight of the need for staff of the right calibre and quantity to deliver through these structures for children and families. Without sufficient well trained staff, services will be too little (thresholds too high to meet a broader base of need), or too late (not as effective or cost effective as preventative interventions).

### *Capacity and deployment*

- 7) There are two further facets to workforce capacity on which the GTC would place emphasis over the next phase. First, there is a need to ensure that children's practitioners are deployed in ways that make it possible for them to work as the ECM agenda necessitates. For example, if we want special educational needs co-ordinators to be meaningfully engaged in teams around children, then the post of SENCO cannot be fulfilled on top of a full teaching timetable.

### *Capacity building training and development*

- 8) The other significant component of capacity is training and development. In order to be of service to children, and to be effective in multi-agency settings, practitioners need first and foremost to be effective in their own discipline. They also value opportunities for inter-professional training such as those associated with the introduction of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), and there is a strong belief that these opportunities also help to break down cultural barriers that can impede inter-professional working. The GTC would like to see the government review mechanisms for the specification, funding and quality assurance of training and development opportunities within the children's workforce, in order to:
  - establish where there are opportunities to encourage more inter-professional learning;
  - identify and remove barriers and disincentives to inter-professional learning.

These objectives should not be pursued at the expense of effective specialist training in disciplines.

- 9) The GTC believes that more could be done to enable providers of education and training to the children's workforce to make an effective contribution to the ECM objectives – particularly via better and earlier involvement of the further and higher education sectors in ECM thinking and delivery.
- 10) The government may want to consider whether SSCs are well placed to further the cause of inter-professional learning, and if not, what more could be done to this end. There is also greater scope for considering thematic approaches to training and development across the children's workforce, whether or not inter-professional learning is in play. For example, what might all practitioners specialising in work with disabled children need to know? What approaches to user voice might we want to develop across all leaders of children's services?
- 11) The Common Core represents the government's first attempt to ensure that all children's practitioners have a grounding in key knowledge and skills areas. The GTC does not suggest that revising the Common Core is a priority for the Refresh, but it may be advisable to set some evaluation in train for a review in the future. The advent of the Integrated Qualifications Framework (IQF) is, potentially, a new vehicle for common approaches in training and development.

#### *Capacity in children's service leadership*

- 12) There have been positive responses to early involvement with *Championing Children*, and there is clearly an appetite for more materials to make the framework of practical use.
- 13) The GTC would observe that while senior managers may increasingly be involved in, and developing capacity for, inter-agency work, there is a danger that middle managers may be as a consequence 'confined' to their own setting, for understandable operational reasons. The GTC would welcome a focus on distributed ECM leadership in order to:
  - ensure that the 'vision' translates into tangible improvements in children's service delivery
  - make middle management roles attractive to a wider range of people
  - support succession planning into leadership roles from middle management.

#### *Shared values*

- 14) The GTC welcomes the Update's acknowledgement of the work it has undertaken with the General Social Care Council (GSCC) and the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) on the values that underpin effective inter-professional practice. The public consultation on the statement has recently closed and the majority of responses have been very positive and constructive, across a wide range of sectors. We welcome the commitment to reflect the statement in the IQF, and look forward to working with the government and

other children's workforce stakeholders to explore ways of bringing it to bear on practice.

## **Responses to the Update questions about next steps (Chapter 10)**

### *Integrating youth and children's workforces*

- 15) The GTC believes this has merit in the medium term but is not a priority, and cautions against another wave of structural change at this stage. In practical terms, the young people's workforce appears to be involved appropriately in developments such as extended schooling, and multi-agency teams.

### *Parenting*

- 16) The GTC recommends that the effective start up of the Parenting Academy should be the priority here for the next phase, although children's workforce stakeholders might usefully be encouraged to review how the views of parents influence and shape their own work.

### *Sector Skills Councils*

- 17) See comments above.

### *Local change and national developments*

- 18) In the schools sector, we have in the recent past moved from concentrating energies on improvement in individual schools, to a focus on how knowledge creation and transfer can fuel system wide improvement. There is not one answer to this question – among the approaches being used in education are networks, e-fora, clusters, school improvement partners, the encouragement of teacher research, and so on. The GTC would like over time to see consideration being given to knowledge creation and transfer around some of the key facets of ECM: inter-professional learning, integrated working, strategic workforce planning, commissioning and multi-agency leadership.

### *Calibre and diversity of young people's workforce*

- 19) The GTC observes that it is still unusual for practitioners from this sector to break through into children's services leadership, and that may be a loss to the sector.

### *Voluntary and community sector capacity*

- 20) The GTC has no comment to make.

### *Integrated working*

- 21) The main priority that suggests itself is to redouble efforts to ensure that all services are committed to integrated working, including where appropriate, through pooling resources and joint commissioning.

### **Presentational points**

- 22) The Update's three opening gambits – from the Minister, the CWDC and the CWN – detract rather than embellish. One introduction with multiple signatories might be better, with an appendix or boxed text explaining the particular contributions of the CWDC and the CWN.
- 23) There is an unnecessary amount of detail about process – e.g. start and finish dates for consultative periods – in the Update. The Refresh could usefully have a tighter focus on outcomes.

### **Post script in response to the new Prime Minister's reshuffle**

- 24) The division of the DfES into two new Departments, the Department for Children, Schools and Families, and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, will have implications for the delivery of ECM objectives. Though the split has much to commend it, there is a danger that ECM may be construed as an agenda for younger children, and it will be important to maintain a focus on the whole age range via the involvement of both Departments.

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