

A CONSULTATION ON THE COMMON CORE OF SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE & UNDERSTANDING AND VALUES FOR THE CHILDREN'S WORKFORCE IN SCOTLAND

INTRODUCTION

The Scottish Government is seeking views on the common core of skills, knowledge & understanding and values for all those working with children, young people and families. Once implemented the common core will support the development of more effective and integrated services which in turn will promote more flexible development and career progression for the workforce and will make communicating across organisational boundaries and cultures easier.

A Consultation on the Common Core of Skills, Knowledge & Understanding and Values for the Children's Workforce in Scotland



RESPONDENT INFORMATION FORM

Please Note this form **must** be returned with your response to ensure that we handle your response appropriately

1. Name/Organisation

Organisation Name

Association of Directors of Social Work (ADSW)

Contributions from Aberdeen, Angus, Edinburgh and South Lanarkshire Integrated Children's Services Partnerships.

Title Mr Ms Mrs Miss Dr *Please tick as appropriate*

Surname

McBride

Forename

Fred

2. Postal Address

Social Care and Wellbeing

St. Nicholas House

Broad Street

Aberdeen

Postcode AB10 1BY

Phone 0131 469 3072

Email

frmcbride@aberdeencity.gov.uk

3. Permissions - I am responding as...

Individual

/

Group/Organisation

Please tick as appropriate

- (a) Do you agree to your response being made available to the public (in Scottish Government library and/or on the Scottish Government web site)?

Please tick as appropriate Yes No

- (b) Where confidentiality is not requested, we will make your responses available to the public on the following basis
Please tick ONE of the following boxes

Yes, make my response, name and address all available

or

Yes, make my response available, but not my name and address

or

Yes, make my response and name available, but not my address

- (c) The name and address of your organisation **will be** made available to the public (in the Scottish Government library and/or on the Scottish Government web site).

Are you content for your **response** to be made available?

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(d) We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

Please tick as appropriate

Yes

No

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

1. General Feedback

The introduction of a Common Core of skills, knowledge, understanding and values for the Children's Workforce in Scotland is welcomed. There is recognition that the establishment of a Common Core will be challenging nationally and locally (particularly in the Third Sector) but that it would add value and strengthen future recruitment, learning and development.

In preparing this multi-agency response ADSW has undertaken broad consultation through the lead officers for Integrated Children's Services Partnerships and includes the feedback from; Aberdeen City, Angus, Edinburgh, South Lanarkshire and one independent respondent. The locality responses include feedback from local authorities Education and Social Work Services, Health Boards and Third Sector organisations. The partners welcomed the opportunity to provide a response to the consultation document.

The following main aims are endorsed by the partnerships; to remove unhelpful barriers that exist between different organisations, workers and sectors allowing them to work and communicate more effectively together and to equip the workforce with the skills, knowledge and values to intervene early, tackle inequalities and build capacity with children, young people and families and communities to better help themselves.

Partners welcomed the approach that the Common Core takes to consider the needs of the broader children's services workforce as a whole and to introduce a consistent and coherent way of working which enables the workforce to have access to learning and development opportunities that are shared across professions, embedding a working together ethos from the outset. This will underpin more detailed core competencies and appraisal systems that exist in children's services across the sectors and settings.

The general principle to develop a Common Core is supported and will further underpin the implementation of Getting it Right for Every Child. It would be helpful if the final document made more explicit reference that Getting it Right for Every Child provides a common practice framework for how we work together to assess and plan to support children and families achieve better outcomes and that the Common Core is about the people using the approach and ensuring the minimum level of skill, knowledge and values is evident across the workforce to better support multi-agency working.

The Common Core makes welcome links to other key national drivers for the delivery of high quality services to children, young people and families, in particular; Getting It Right for Every Child, The Early Years Framework, Equally Well, Achieving Our Potential and Curriculum For Excellence.

Any future document published following the consultation to sit alongside the Common Core Implementation Plan should be strengthened by ensuring a better flow between the sections and by reframing the context to make more explicit links to key messages in the wider policy context. Clarifying the future use and purpose of the document would inform the structure and content i.e. is it intended to be a Framework supported by the Implementation Plan?

The section relating to the Highland Pathfinder on page 9 could be strengthened by making specific reference to the recommendations that the Common Core aims to address. To ensure consistency with Getting it Right principles, the language in the report should focus on 'strengths, resilience, achievements and potential' and 'effectively targeting resources to provide appropriate, proportionate and timely support to those who need it', rather than a deficit model referring to 'identifying concern' and focusing on 'vulnerable children'.

It would be helpful to see the Common Core more specifically linked to the core principles and values of Getting it Right for Every Child to make clear how the workforce will be better enabled to consult with children and families, work in an integrated way to assess/plan and support families, record and sharing information, build resilience, safeguard and promote welfare, support transitions, etc. This would directly link the Common Core skills to the roles set out in Getting it Right for Every Child under the roles of Named Person and Lead Professional (it further supports the core tasks set out in We Can and Must do Better and These are our Bairns which aims to upskill the workforce to address the outcome gap evident between Looked After Children and the rest of their peers).

In reviewing The Common Core of Skills and Knowledge published by the Children's Workforce Development Council partners found the Workforce Wheel on page 5 to be helpful. The additional detail contained within the document under the specific skills is also helpful. There may be more opportunity to learn from CDWDC and share development tools and resources across the UK.

It is essential that future accredited qualifications are based on the Common Core so partners would welcome more direction within the document to clearly set out how this will be achieved and the wider links with recruitment and continuous professional development programmes across organisations.

Previously there had been discussions nationally about developing a Common Core for College and Year 1 University students in Childcare, Social Work, Education and Community Learning and Development. The Common Core can then be built upon through organisations recruitment and ongoing CPD programmes. The implementation of the Common Core in the Third Sector remains more challenging and further thought should be given to the coordination and support at implementation stage with SCVO.

Councils and their Integrated Children's Service partners continue to recognise that the workforce are one of our most valuable assets, therefore,

we are committed to investing in workforce development for all staff working directly or indirectly with children, young people and families. Local authorities are currently working in cluster groups with Health Boards and Police Forces to achieve best value through wider coordinating of training and development to support the implementation of Getting it Right for Every Child. These groupings should be further utilised to support future implementation.

Section 11

“the Getting it right programme has already identified a list of Principles and Values that everyone in the children’s workforce should have”.(an understanding of?).

We can encourage practitioners to understand the GIRFEC principles and values and we can explain that our organisations expect practitioners to promote and work to these values but we cannot instruct practitioners to have certain values.

Section 24

First bullet - Maximising the resources we have at our disposal for children and families is about equipping people to be able to work confidently and competently as single agencies or across agency boundaries as necessary. It is not only *“to work and communicate more effectively together”*. We believe this sends the wrong message about what we are trying to achieve if a common core is only relevant to multi-agency working.

Section 25

The benefit section is very much management oriented. It talks of the benefits to children and families and the benefits to organisations. There is nothing of the benefits to individual practitioners in being supported to identify and develop skills where they don’t currently exist or teams benefiting by better understanding their collective strengths and taking steps to address any skills gaps.

The bullet on creating more flexible jobs was immediately interpreted as a rationale for re-structuring and losing jobs, which perhaps reflects the economic climate in which this document will be introduced.

Section 26

The experience of Lanarkshire in attempting to implement a Core Competency Framework suggests that the interlinked areas that must be influenced that you suggest are too narrow.

The huge amount of work taking place at a corporate level within organisations’ personnel departments to define competencies for every post and level must be considered. It should be noted that some of these examples are very sophisticated in comparison to the common core suggested here. You recognise this below when you say the common core could be used to influence personal specifications and job descriptions but not within this section. Flowing from this is the significant effort that corporate workforce development departments have made to reflect the work done above in their

induction training and mandatory training.

Whilst we appreciate that the Common Core is designed to have generic application, it is so general that it may not relate to anyone other than unqualified workers. Those consulted were confused about whether the document is targeted at unqualified workers or applicable to qualified workers. They were not clear about which level of Common Core different services need to have.

The individual professions which adhere to their national competency frameworks such as the NES nursing competency framework must be considered.

Although you have mentioned '*management*', in our experience it is specifically the differences in the way professionals are supervised day to day, and the extreme differences in performance management and agreement on professional development objectives which act as barriers to implementing a Common Core.

A significant area for influence and action is also further education and training courses which could assist by encouraging cross profession training at undergraduate level.

For the reasons above, practitioners and managers who have considered this document are reporting confusion about the status of the document and where it fits in nationally and locally.

Section 28

Practitioners have been slightly confused as to how the Common Core provides additionality to the Getting it Right for Every Child national guidance and there is perhaps confusion between values, principles and competencies.

ADSW RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

- 1: Workers need to intervene early, tackle inequalities and build the capacity of children, young people and families. To what extent do you agree that the proposed common core equips our workers to do this?**

In principle, the proposed Common Core provides a basic foundation of key skills, knowledge and understanding which will go some way towards early intervention, tackling inequalities and building capacity.

However it is important to highlight that the framework requires to work in partnership with The Scottish Governments vision for all children, young people and families for example Getting It Right, Early Years Framework, Health For All Children.

If the Common Core if fully implemented, embedded and enhanced across the children's service workforce in all sectors it could have a significant impact and better enable workers to intervene early, tackle inequalities and build capacity using common skills, approaches and language that further underpin Getting it Right for Every Child.

The advantages of the Common Core would be improved professional communication, greater consistency in approach, further reducing the barriers to enhance the integration of services, more flexible working, greater career development opportunities, more efficient use of training and development resources, better links across qualification frameworks and a more consistent response to early intervention approaches with service users.

There is a need to acknowledge that the "children's workforce" includes a diverse group ranging from volunteers, kinship carers to professionally qualified workers. Workers across the various agencies will require different levels of competencies depending on their role, agency context and so forth. At this stage it is not clear how this generic Common Core framework will strengthen or bring added value to what exists currently.

It is viewed by some that this general/generic framework may be of more assistance to "non-statutory" agencies to assist them in developing a 'baseline' 'minimum' standard thus ensuring uniformity and a level of competence across Children's Services.

The partnerships are of a view that more detailed description of the skills set out in the Common Core is required so that organisation can build on the framework and maximise the human resource of the children and family services workforce. The Common Core doesn't in itself equip the worker but identifies the key principles that should underpin all qualifications and CPD activities to ensure workers have the skills required to work effectively with children and families in any service setting.

Having three key areas is in some way helpful but the partners were concerned that the Common Core does not cover everything and is not descriptive enough to ensure a minimum standard. Ensuring clarity that different staff will require anything from 'an awareness to a deep understanding' is helpful and should be repeated throughout the document. This could be further strengthened by encouraging organisations to make reference to and define levels within their own recruitment processes and CPD programmes.

The Common Core identifies observation, judgment and decision-making but all these need to be built from an ability to form relationships of trust with the child and this should be clear in the document and make reference to the roles of Named Persons and Lead Professionals supporting Getting it Right for Every Child approaches locally.

2: What specific comments do you have around the skills, knowledge & understanding associated with “sound observation, judgement and decision making?”

There were differing views across partners regarding the use of the generalist statement under each skill set that workers will need anything from 'an awareness of these areas to a deep understanding depending on their role". Whilst the inclusion of the statement was considered helpful there were also concerns that the statements were not specific enough to give real clarity and direction to make a difference.

When adopting the key elements within the Common Core organisations/services will be required to work within an established context of support and supervision and indeed appraisal/ professional review and development. The document should make more detailed reference to how the Common Core can direct and enhance these internal HR and Training frameworks in future.

For some single agencies, in particular Social Work it was felt that specific areas were implicit and needed more emphasis i.e. the assessment of risk in order to safeguard and promote welfare and recognising and understanding the impact of cumulative neglect.

There were some concerns about the language and whether it was consistent with the language set out in Getting it Right for Every Child. Particular criticism was made that the document at times reads as a deficit model with a focus on vulnerable children with little focus on identifying strengths, resilience and achievements. This could be improved by ensuring the language is more positive and aspirational. The language should also focus more on the skills required to assess wellbeing, developmental needs and how to assess and measure outcomes.

There should be more specific reference to the required knowledge and

understanding of attachment and resilience and the impact of substance misuse and parenting approaches.

There is a need to further explore and define the skills required to assess inequalities, particularly in relation to health and poverty and about how factors co-exists. This could be termed 'understanding adversity and vulnerability'.

3. What specific comments do you have around the skills and knowledge associated with “appropriate and effective communication”?

There has to be absolute clarity about the purpose of the Common Core and how it supports wider recruitment, supervision and appraisal systems in children’s services.

Communication and engagement must go hand in hand, and developing and maintaining relationships is key to its success. The skills and knowledge identified around communication are positive and the honesty in communication is more and more recognised as producing more effective results. Partners agree that ability in written communication is essential and recording interactions with child and family needs to be clear, evidence based and differentiate fact and interpretation. It is important to strongly emphasis the need to avoid the use of jargon in different roles/agencies/professions and how the Common Core supports the move towards and shared language.

Need clear guidance or statement on “confidentiality and consent” this is often cited as a barrier to sharing information with the degree of “openness” varying from one agency to another. There should be a clearer message about the need for understanding consent and confidentiality at all stages, including child protection.

Need “awareness of self” e.g. how individuals either promote/inhibit good communication. This section should also set out the need for effective listening and the importance of gathering and listening to the views of children and families at every stage.

There is a need to recognise that children have different communication needs depending on age and stage of development and that different skills are required.

4. What specific comments do you have around the skills, knowledge & understanding associated with “effective partnership and multi-agency working?”

Effective partnership & multi- agency working is currently strong across many areas, however, it is recognised that a better understanding of each others roles and how they support one another would be helpful. Communicating effectively, avoiding jargon and the use of Plain English in written communications is essential.

The statement “advantages of utilising the latest tools from the National policy Context to improve your practice” would be helpful if this was more explicit for people around the ‘Getting It Right’ practice model and tools, integrated working and person centred approaches. The need for skills in ICT is important to support integrated working, particularly when we begin to share information electronically.

In terms of different professional terminology & language – The Getting It Right approach should assist with moving towards a standardisation in this respect.

There should be more emphasis on the skills required to manage colleagues, partners and service users to build successful long term professional relationships. How attitudes and values effect the way we work with other professionals and service users and how the Common Core will assist to remove barriers.

Practitioners raised concerns they don’t have a shared understanding of how children present when they are in trauma, or interpreting non verbal cues of children with limited verbal skills, observing the behaviour of young children and how communication changes in adolescence.

The need to respect children’s rights should be strengthened and the skills to enable young people to do that at different ages and stages should be clear.

5. What if anything is missing from the skills, knowledge & understanding or values?

The statements are very general and would benefit from more detail, depth and more specific definitions e.g. tiered levels of competency and skills ranging from basic awareness to advanced/specialist levels.

As the ‘Getting It Right’ values underpin all our work it is suggested that they need to come first and not at the end of this section of the document.

It is the view that the format and layout of this section is not particularly helpful indeed it is open to misunderstanding and different interpretations, therefore, reformatting this section may prove beneficial.

It is suggested that there is a need to include a greater focus on outcomes and make reference to appropriate tools for example be explicit about the impact of our interventions and the difference we can make.

It is important to also look beyond the Common Core and consider qualities, values, personality and attributes for example empathy, patience and understanding. Relationships and engagement are missing from the document. Nothing will be effective if we don't build and develop relationships – this should be stated at the outset. Relationship-building is not just a role but a responsibility.

In addition to what's listed it's important that members of the workforce have knowledge and understanding of the national context including key policy drivers for example:-

- Getting it Right
- Early Years Framework
- Equally Well
- Achieving Our Potential

It is equally important for the workforce to have an understanding of legislative frameworks including regulation and inspection requirements, child protection policy, procedures and processes. Basic awareness and understanding of data protection, human rights and equalities legislation.

With regards to the development of babies, children & young people we can't over emphasise how important it is to gain a comprehensive understanding of key milestones. It has become apparent that too many members of the workforce particularly in private sector do not have this level of knowledge. Given the focus and importance of getting it right for the birth – three age group particular focus should be given to 'Early' childhood development including knowledge of theories of play.

There was a range of views from partners about the need to define levels in relation to core competencies and so the document should at least make reference to the need for organisation to be clear about this over and above the Common Core. Effective outcome focused supervision should also be included.

Lack of definition of children's workforce that includes specific needs of foster carers who care for majority of children who are looked after. They are not classed as workers but hold a unique role in improving outcomes for children.

Some of key issues for carer are in terms of direct care and dealing with challenging behaviour in their own homes. A whole area of skill is related to keeping the child safe as well as themselves and their children safe when looked after children are living in their home. Overall, more focus is needed on core skills for foster carers.

Implementation of the proposed Common Core

6. Describe briefly how, your organisation, or your sector might implement the common core of skills, knowledge and values?

Work with partners to develop a generic induction for children's services staff new to the sector that is based on the common core framework.

Review current procedures and practices across agencies to achieve consistency and standardisation in relation to the common core. For example recruitment processes, job descriptions, job adverts and personal specifications.

Rationalisation of and streamlining of multi agency continued professional development opportunities.

Continue to build on our existing multi agency training strategy for example Child Protection Committee and Getting It Right to ensure that the common core skills and knowledge are integrated.

Explore opportunities to bring children's services staff together to share good practice, expertise and knowledge for example at development events, mentoring networks and shared service events.

Achieve local agreement on the adoption and implementation of the common core at a senior strategic multi agency level. Thereafter develop an associated local implementation plan informed by the national one resulting from this consultation.

Common core as emanating from an appraisal process and then providing training to assist the person who is not able to demonstrate the core skills.

7. What opportunities are there in your organisation or service for the proposed common core to be implemented at the following 3 levels?

- **Strategic management**
- **Operational Management**
- **Day to day working with children, young people and families**

Strategic Management

In order to integrate the common core within existing inter-agency and multi-agency arrangements this will require a senior strategic overview. Most areas are well placed with many opportunities existing locally for this to be implemented strategically. This could be undertaken via the following well established bodies:-

- Integrated Children's Service Partnerships
- GIRFEC Implementation Groups (local authority and wider

- Health board clusters)
- Joint Action Groups
- Community Planning Partnership
- Adult Protection Committees
- Child Protection Committees
- Voluntary Sector Children's Forums
- Single agency Senior Management Teams
- Strategic/planning Officers

Operational Management

Opportunities exist locally to raise awareness and promote the common core by engagement with the following:-

- Service groups
- Practitioner forums
- Professional Training and Development Services
- Head Teacher meetings
- Continued professional development plans
- Appraisal/ Professional review and development

Day to day working with children, young people and families

Opportunities exist locally for frontline practitioners to gain greater knowledge, understanding and practice skills via: -

- Form tutor training
- Continued professional development plans
- Supervision appraisal / Professional review and development
- Modelling of good practice
- Mentoring and coaching skills
- Observation and feedback
- Induction
- In service training (single agency)
- Multi agency training

It is important that children and their families are made aware of the core skills that all workers who come in contact with them should have. Therefore, written information outlining the common core framework would be helpful for families to receive.

Summary

- Strategic – initial training, recruitment and selection, policy and procedure development
- Operational – development of policy and procedure, development of frameworks and learning events
- Day to day working – behaviours and competencies

8. What opportunities do you see for working collaboratively with other organisations/sectors to implement the common core?

The Common Core without a doubt brings a number of opportunities to strengthen further the successful partnership working that is already in existence across areas.

Integrated partnership structures will be instrumental in taking this work forward and in developing the common core approach in particular the Early Years and Childcare Partnerships, Learning Partnership and Getting it Right Partnerships considering Interagency workforce development.

It links and dovetails with other key priorities locally for example Getting It Right, shared services agenda, and recent research on the 'Link Up' initiative (CAPSM). This led to a multi agency action plan to promote best practice.

To work alongside further education providers in terms of offering students practice learning opportunities across agencies.

Greater multi agency working arrangements should be developed to provide members of the workforce with opportunities to shadow colleagues and support the movement of staff across services to broaden skills, knowledge and experience.

Commissioned services – working on contracts, initial discussion when working with partners.

9. What challenges can you identify around implementing the common core, and how might these be overcome?

Particular challenges for implementing the common core may include:-

Getting all organisations to 'sign up' and agree on prioritising common core agenda, however agendas such as Getting It Right will assist with this.

Uniformity and the rationalisation of job titles across all children's services staff will be challenging. Currently there are hundreds of different job titles describing members of the workforce who work with children, young people and families across Scotland. Is one size likely to fit all?

The logistics and management of providing flexible career opportunities for the workforce to practice in different settings across children services will be challenging.

Tension between resourcing 'generic' skills, knowledge and understanding and need to continue with workers CPD/PRTL and 'specialist' skills, knowledge and understanding.

Competing priorities and diminishing resources – will the common core skill be guidance? mandatory? Accrue ring fenced central government funding?

It will be important to be clear how the common core will integrate with other workforce development plans and other national frameworks which are currently in operation for example The Continuous Learning Framework,

It will be important that the components of the common care are embedded and reflected fully into the standards of regulatory and professional bodies including the Sector Skills Council as we move forward.

There are likely to be significant implications for the voluntary and private sectors in participating in this agenda which will need to be addressed at the implementation stage.

There will be a need to be creative in delivery methods and rolling out training to enable the whole workforce to access learning opportunities for example easier access to each others Learning and Development programmes; resources and e-learning.

It is the view of a number of key partners that as it stands the common core framework doesn't provide "added value". It is suggested that it is developed further into a workable/usable framework, linked to specific outcomes. This will allow agencies to evidence that staff have acquired skills, knowledge, understanding and values and measure/benchmark against agreed standards for example similar to the Continuous Learning Framework. This would enable agencies to develop a realistic and achievable implementation plan.

In conclusion:-

How the common core will be implemented across the country is key to successfully supporting and developing the children's workforce.

It will be crucial that full commitment is given at a national level to the introduction, implementation and further development of the common core.

Greater clarity and detail around the content, delivery and implementation of the Common Core would be welcomed and we look forward to receiving a copy of the implementation plan arising from this consultation in the Autumn.