

SEVEN

Realising the potential of the
workforce

Introduction

The greatest strength of the children's social care system lies in its workforce. From social workers to family support workers to residential care staff, the knowledge, skills and commitment of the workforce determines how children are protected and families are supported. Quality relationships between these professionals and children and families enable transformative work. But for too many children and families these relationships are a source of stress and fail to offer the help needed.

Many of the people working in children's social care have told the review that they are constrained by the way the system operates, and not supported by it. Social workers have told the review that rather than spending time with children and families they spend most of their working day on administration.

For the review's recommendations to be implemented and for these to have an impact on children and families, change is needed across the children's social care workforce. This means giving professionals the time and resources to build strong, respectful relationships with children and families, it also means supporting the development of expertise so that these relationships can bring about change.

The following chapter sets out recommendations which will:

- *develop expertise through a new social work Early Career Framework, provide an Expert Practitioner pathway for experienced social workers and introduce national pay scales*
- *take action to reduce reliance on agency social workers, which prevents children and families forming relationships with the professionals in their lives*
- *tackle bureaucracy and unlock social workers time so they spend less time referring and case coordinating, and have more time and access to resources to do direct work with families as part of multidisciplinary teams*
- *define the knowledge and skills needed by family support workers and support their development including through much greater use of apprenticeship training*
- *develop a new pipeline of leaders, capable of running quality children's homes*
- *invest in leadership development programmes, ensure leadership is rooted in practice and address the racial disparities across children's social care leadership*



Whilst the recommendations that follow in this chapter focus on some of the key workforces, there is a role for anyone working in or around children's social care, from designated safeguarding leads in schools, to mental health workers, personal advisors or the police. Everyone has a role to play and throughout the report there are recommendations that relate to these roles.

What makes a good social worker?

by a 13 year old child in care, A National Voice, Coram Voice

**One who listens,
One who is true,
One who can make decisions,
From the old to the new.**

**One who makes sure you're safe,
When you move to a different place,
One who can be happy to support,
For not only the child but the foster care too.**

**One who respects,
One who protects,
This neglected child,
Trying to make her smile.**

**One who has a sense of humour,
When one is upset,
One who is kind to her,
And just doesn't forget.**

**One who is resourceful,
And has lots of ideas,
One who is practical,
And wipes away her tears.**

**One that shows up,
Not letting her down,
One who is consistent,
Always around.**

**One who keeps in touch,
When one is worried or scared,
One who is good at communicating,
And is always prepared.**

These are the qualities of a brilliant social worker.

7.1 Reduce unnecessary bureaucracy to get social workers back to practice

“To increase efficiency: 1. Simplify forms and reduce repetitive questions including lengthy and unnecessary questions 2. Have one form for referrals to other services that they have to use 3. Train workforce especially management that keeping information succinct, clear and focused is better than ‘you need to write more’”
- Social worker responding to review via Call for Ideas

Children’s social care is complicated, bureaucratic and too often risk averse, and this has the combined effect of taking social workers’ time away from practice and reducing their ability to support children and families. Around a third of social workers employed by local authorities hold managerial or non-caseholding posts (Department for Education, 2021c).⁹⁷ Of the two thirds of social workers who do hold cases, only one third of their time is spent working directly with families (Johnson et al., 2021). This is a staggering misuse of the greatest asset the children’s social care system has - its social workers. Analysis of the latest workforce census shows that 2,780 children and family social workers left local authority children’s social work altogether in 2020/21, the equivalent of 8.6% of the workforce (Department for Education, 2022c).

Whilst rules, processes and checks are often necessary and many of the activities that take social workers away from direct work with families are important (whether this is preparing case notes that evidence important decisions or having management capacity to properly supervise staff), there is also too much unnecessary bureaucracy. Social workers report spending too much time completing administrative tasks, and 40% of respondents to a recent poll said they spend too much time case recording (What Works for Children’s Social Care, 2021b). Practitioners report a focus on process and timescales as hindering their ability to assess families effectively (What Works Centre for Children’s Social Care, 2021). Children and families tell us that social workers do not have the time to get to know them.

97 We have assumed that social workers classified by the Department for Education (DfE) children’s social care workforce statistics 2021 as a ‘case holder’ or ‘senior practitioner’ are involved in holding cases and working directly with children and families. This may overestimate the proportion who are holding cases as there will be variation in the responsibilities of senior practitioners.





David

Social workers must have time to invest in working with children and families.

As an experienced social worker, I've spent time in many different areas of practice. Like many of my colleagues, one of the key things I came into the job to do was to spend time working directly with children and families. This is one of the most satisfying and rewarding aspects of being a social worker. However, I have often found that achieving this in the current system is extremely difficult. Often, nothing more than the statutory minimum is all we have time for. High caseloads, frustrating IT systems, paperwork, preparing for inspections – all of these everyday battles will be familiar to every social worker, often preventing them from spending time on the front-line of practice developing important relationships.

One young person I worked with had been removed and placed into residential care a considerable distance away from our local authority. My workload meant I only had time to visit him once per month. The desperately frustrating part of this was that nearly every time I visited him, I would have to deliver some dreadful news (i.e., your younger sister is going into care, your parent has relapsed and the plan is for you to remain in foster care, etc.) The opportunity to spend time with him to fully know him, have fun, play football together – key features of relationship building – were few and far between. My ability to help him process what was happening in his life, as well as give him space to talk about this, was significantly hindered.

Spending time with a child is the primary way to build trust – it is hard, if not impossible to shortcut this process. Building trust and rapport is an essential way to encourage the child to share their thoughts and feelings about what is happening in their life. Sharing their worries is an effective way to overcome the adversity children have experienced.

Equally, work with families is extremely valuable because it provides space and time to understand their difficulties, including the root causes, which generates compassion and understanding. The best working relationships I have had with parents is when I've had the time to invest in the relationship, and get to know their strengths and the challenges they face, providing the basis for offering impactful support and interventions.

It's hard to think of anything more rewarding than being able to say you've helped keep a family together, helped a parent or child work through trauma, or kept them safe from harm. But to deliver the best results, social workers must have the time to invest in working with children and families and be given the chance to use the skills that brought them to the role in the first place.

In our evidence gathering, including through our programme of deep dives with ten local authorities, we have tried to unpick what drives unnecessary paperwork and time away from practice (The independent review of children's social care, 2022c). Multiple drivers often interplay to create the perceptions that rules exist or that a particular course of action is not possible.

- **National policy, legislation and guidance:** These can put requirements on how resources should be used or work should be done, and are disruptive when poorly aligned or duplicated. This might be driven by regulation, guidance, statutory data collections or conditions on national grants.
- **Impact of inspection:** Both social workers and local authority leaders feel that a significant amount of time is being spent recording information, not because it is important or adds value to decision making, but because they are preparing for inspection. Leaders have a lack of confidence in undertaking new ways of working because they are unsure if Ofsted will agree.
- **Local infrastructure issues:** Social workers report duplicating work because of poor IT and case management systems. Getting sign off for small financial decisions was also frequently described as painstaking and bureaucratic. These problems can be compounded where administrative support is not available.
- **Quality assurance and risk aversion:** Children's social care works with potentially dangerous situations and so checking decisions and providing a second opinion is important. When done well, social workers describe feeling supported to hold risk. However, audits can easily become compliance checks rather than a meaningful consideration of practice.

None of these drivers are easy to tackle but progress is possible. Efforts by the Department for Education (DfE) to reduce teacher workload, through a combination of action on national drivers and supporting local areas to interrogate their systems, demonstrates that national government has a role to play. Between 2016 and 2019, teacher working hours reduced on average by five hours a week with less time spent on non-teaching activities. This meant the number of teachers working out of school hours dropped, whilst the number of hours spent on non-teaching activities also fell (Walker et al., 2019).

We need a similar focus and clear action to address workload pressures and get social workers back to practice, with a goal of 75% of social workers holding cases and working directly with families and 50% of social worker time spent working directly with families. This would increase the total hours spent with families by 69%.

Improve technology

A big driver of time away from practice is poorly configured IT systems. Across local area visits, social workers told us that clunky IT systems meant frequently entering duplicated information into mandatory fields, and filling in word documents for information already on systems (The independent review of children's social care, 2022c). In a social worker poll, 80% reported having their work disrupted on a fortnightly basis by poor case management systems, and three quarters reported that they were not consulted before a new system was brought in (Stevenson, 2019). Better case management systems can make a significant difference to time away from practice. In North Tyneside, work to improve IT systems led to a 48% time saving on child and family assessments (Flavell et al., 2020).



We propose a National Data and Technology Taskforce in Chapter Eight, and one of its priority actions will be to improve case management systems.

Establish feedback loops to challenge unnecessary rules and bureaucracy

There should be a mechanism for front-line workers to directly challenge rules and bureaucracy that get in the way of meaningful work with families, to be listened to and for action to be taken.

Local authorities should establish a feedback loop that enables their staff and children and families to query local processes that do not add value. For example, a light touch survey of workers that enables local leaders to know if they are succeeding in making systems less bureaucratic. National government could support this by publishing example templates that areas can use. At a regional level, regional Ofsted inspectors and DfE leads should meet regularly to discuss and debate the impact of inspection and policy on levels of bureaucracy.

At a national level, the mechanism for challenging rules and regulations through the National Reform Board should also enable front-line workers to report specific drivers of bureaucracy that are nationally driven (see Chapter Eight for more information on the National Reform Board, which will include representatives from front-line practice and people with lived experience). Where specific issues are found - whether in national guidance, policy or inspections - the Board should respond publicly on how it should be improved. This feedback should be routinely communicated back to practitioners.

Challenge the culture that pulls social workers further from families

The entire system needs to be firmly rooted in the reality of front-line practice and understand the experiences of children and families. The conventions that pull social workers away from direct work with children and families as they gain more experience, also need to be challenged. This is in part about career progression and ensuring promotion does not mean that the most experienced social workers have the least contact with families (we cover this in more detail later in this chapter). However, we also need to change the expectations around how social workers at all levels maintain registration.

Social Work England should introduce a requirement that a registered social worker needs to spend 100 hours each year in direct practice.⁹⁸ Social workers conduct many kinds of meaningful and important work but it is crucial that leaders, inspectors, policy makers and academics keep up with the realities of front line practice. This requirement would bring thousands of experienced social workers back in regular contact with the complexities of children's social care. It would provide opportunities for experienced social workers whose roles are focused on managing or teaching others, to keep a hand in practice. Practice in this context would mean client facing work that needs the knowledge and skills of a social worker. For example, spending two weeks working in a duty team, facilitating family group decision making, undertaking fostering assessments or working to support victims of exploitation. Spending time shadowing, quality assuring or case auditing would not count. Social Work England should carefully consider the application of this, to ensure that it does not result in children and families working with a revolving door of professionals and having to repeat their experiences to more people than necessary.

⁹⁸ Whilst we are making this recommendation specifically about children's social work, social work is a general qualification and so this recommendation would apply to adult social care too with similar benefits.

Families do not operate from nine to five, indeed much of family life happens in the evenings and on weekends. At the moment many social workers are providing support to families outside the normal working day, by working additional unplanned and unrecognised hours. Three quarters of respondents to the DfE's longitudinal survey were found to be working more than their contracted hours, either all the time or most weeks, and more than half feel stressed by their jobs (Johnson, Claire et al., 2021). This is not sustainable for social workers. It is also not built around the hours that fit the lives of the children and families the system exists to serve. For example, the review has seen examples of schools finishing the teaching day early on Fridays so that referrals can be made in time for social care to pick them up before 5pm.

The DfE should fund trials to develop evidence of effective ways to increase social worker availability for families outside of normal working hours. Trials should then lead to the most promising approaches being scaled. Areas that might be worth exploring include changing some working hours to cover mornings, evenings or weekends, letting children and families have greater choice over when social workers should visit, and replacing the out of hours duty offer with something more comprehensive. This would both improve the experiences of children and families and could improve social worker retention and job flexibility.

Recommendation: *A nationally led programme should get social workers back to practice through: action on technology to reduce time spent case recording; a mechanism for challenging unnecessary workload drivers; requiring all registered social workers to spend time in practice, and trialling flexible working models around the lives of children and families.*

7.2 Develop expertise through an Early Career Framework

As we set out in Chapter Three, poor support and development for social worker knowledge and skills are a significant problem in child protection and mean children are less safe. One of the most significant ways to strengthen the child protection system is to improve the knowledge and skills of social workers working with children and families where there is significant harm.

Providing support in the early years of social workers' careers is also important for ensuring they are happy and satisfied in their work, improving retention and increasing stability for children and families. Of the 3,630 social workers who left permanent local authority social work roles in 2020/21, 77% left children's social care altogether while 23% moved to agency roles (Department for Education, 2022c). The majority of those that left children's social care had been in their local authority for less than five years (Department for Education, 2022c). The highest proportion of social workers who moved to agency roles were in the early stages of their career aged 20-29 (Department for Education, 2022c). At present social workers receive some support in their first year post qualification through the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE), but beyond this limited offer in their first year there is little support to help build knowledge and skills in the early years of their careers.



A related issue is the lack of career progression for social workers seeking to build expertise by remaining in practice, rather than moving into management roles. This issue was clearly raised in the Munro review, but more than ten years on there has been little action and front-line progression options remain limited (Munro, 2011). The varied and at times modest additional pay, status and professional development associated with roles such as Advanced Practitioners, has not gone far enough to address this long term career structure problem.

In teaching, a statutory induction programme has been created with an evidence based Early Career Framework endorsed by the Education Endowment Foundation. This programme is based on evidence that suggests that extensive induction for newly qualified teachers helps reduce churn and attrition (Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017), and that support and learning opportunities can help to manage the stress that often drives teachers to exit the profession (Ashby et al., 2008). Exploratory research ahead of the Early Career Framework delivery, indicated that teachers who were in their second and third years of teaching valued ongoing support, increasing responsibility and the opportunity to develop (Walker et al., 2018).

There should be an equivalent Early Career Framework for social workers to cover the first five years in the profession, leading to the role of “Expert Practitioner”. The Expert Practitioner pathway would be a new alternative to management, that allows social workers to hone their knowledge and skills, and see their pay increase as they progress in their careers whilst remaining in practice. The first two years of the Early Career Framework should replace the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (AYSE) with a more detailed curriculum to build knowledge and skill. Years three to five should give practitioners a choice from a set of modules that count towards the Early Career Framework. There should be a common national assessment in the second year of the Early Career Framework (replacing the ASYE assessment) and at the end of the Expert Practitioner pathway to demonstrate ability to meet the expectations set out in the Framework.

The Early Career Framework should include statements on “*what social workers should know*” and “*what social workers should be able to do*” at a given stage of the Early Career Framework. This might include (as an illustration) learning advanced skills in motivational interviewing in order to work with resistance, becoming qualified to carry out Achieving Best Evidence interviews as part of investigations, practicing methods to work with domestic abuse perpetrators and gaining deep knowledge of complex trauma, the impact of disability on children’s development, intra familial child sexual abuse and how to recognise non-accidental injuries and bruising. Progression through the Early Career Framework, and as a consequence progression through national pay scales, will be linked to successfully completing units. An “Expert Practitioner” level will be reached - paying a high salary - upon completion of the Framework and in time this title will be needed to undertake certain duties in children’s social care, such as undertaking section 47 investigations. Social workers who meet this criteria should receive an annotation on the Social Work England register indicating their level of expertise.

To support the Early Career Framework, the Department should work with an independent pay review body of experts, to set and introduce national pay scales which better recognise and reward the development of expertise. National pay scales would bring greater coherence to workforce plans across local authorities, ensuring that all employers are competing for talent by focusing on the right things, namely, valuing time spent with children and families and creating the right conditions for excellent social work practice.

Initial social work education will need to be aligned to ensure that qualifying social workers are at the stage where they can access the Early Career Framework as a newly qualified social

worker. The DfE should continue to champion a range of routes into the social work profession and focus on the quality of education being provided. The DfE and Social Work England should work together to ensure that initial education lays the right foundations for practice and that the Early Career Framework does not become a 'catch up' programme for social workers who were not offered the right learning opportunities as students. Social Work England has a vital role in approving and inspecting initial education for social workers. Their interest in ensuring newly qualified social workers are ready to practise safely and effectively with children and families is welcome, but should go further. In initial education, the practice educator role has a significant influence on student learning and must be of the highest standard. Social Work England should take on a greater role in overseeing practice educators as part of their responsibilities for initial education.

Initial social work education routes, including Teaching Partnerships, Frontline and Step Up, have been evaluated by the DfE but no comparable evaluation exists for traditional university based social work courses, which train the majority of social workers in England (around 4,000 enrol per year) (Skills for Care, 2021). Government funding for conventional social work courses is around £69 million per year, but evaluation is lacking as to the quality of this provision, how it meets the needs of students and the extent to which it facilitates the workforce retention and stability that children and families need (Cabinet Office, 2022). The DfE and Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) should work together to assess the impact of these university based social work courses so that every student is given the best start to their social work career.

Recommendation: *Introduce a five year Early Career Framework for social workers, an Expert Practitioner role and national pay scales.*





Mark

The importance of career progression and professional development.

I worked as a front-line case holding social worker for several years. I loved my job, but I wanted to acquire a specialism that would satisfy my desire to learn and provide ideas and tools to help children and families. With some support from the local authority, I self-funded a Masters. However, the course commitments and the demands of the role were unmanageable, therefore, I changed position and obtained a parenting assessment social worker role.

After a few years, I had developed an expertise in my chosen area of interest and relished being able to continue working with children and families. However, I had been qualified for a decade and could see no opportunity for career progression. Most of my peers had become team managers, worked for CAFCASS, or moved into other areas. I wanted to remain working with children and families and had no aspiration to move into management. I deliberated about moving outside of children and families social work, enquiring with other organisations and charities where I hoped I might find better opportunities for both career progression and professional development.

Fortunately, my local authority developed a new position for someone with a specialism and ample practice experience who could enhance practice, procedures, and policies, promote innovation, and introduce new ways of working from recognised sites of excellence. Importantly, the role would allow the successful person to continue to work directly with children and families. The role was graded at the same level as a team manager.

I jumped at the opportunity. I am now thriving in a position where my experience and expertise are valued. I continue to work with children and families (which is my passion and enriches my support for others), driving forward excellent practice based on research and experience. I also provide support, training and mentoring to less experienced social workers and appreciate being able to share learning and knowledge.

7.3 Tackling social work agencies

Whilst some level of agency work is arguably inevitable in any front-line profession, the rates in children's social work are inexcusably high at 15.5%, double the rate of adult social care (Skills for Care, 2020; Department for Education, 2021c). The latest workforce data shows that around 2.6% of social workers moved from permanent local authority employment to agency roles in 2021 alone (Department for Education, 2022c). Once social workers are in agency roles they are more likely to move around, contributing to the instability children and families experience.

Agency social workers cost more than a permanent social worker, reducing resources that might otherwise be available for children and families. Recent analysis conducted for the DfE has estimated the additional cost of employing agency staff at approximately £26,000 per worker per year (53% of the average social worker salary) (Kantar, 2020).⁹⁹ This means there is a loss of over £100 million per year that could be better spent on front-line activity to support children and families. This is another example of profiteering in the children's social care system.

With limited rules and recourse to control how agency social workers are employed, local authorities are often in the position of competing with one another to fill urgent vacancies. This allows agencies to push their rates up, increasing their profit and contributing to the funding pressures that local authorities are trying to navigate. We can learn from the NHS on how to reduce agency use. From 2016, all NHS Trusts have been required to adhere to new rules and reporting on their use of agency staff (NHS, 2019b). In parallel there has been an increased focus on making effective use of staff banks where temporary staffing is required (NHS Improvement, 2017).

Working with local authorities, government should develop rules to tackle the overuse of agency social workers. These rules could include expectations that all local authorities:

1. Require a high quality reference that relates to the standard of practice of any agency worker
2. Do not hire social workers that have not completed their first two years of the Early Career Framework
3. Use approved commercial frameworks to recruit any agency social workers
4. Work across their regions to establish and adhere to Memoranda of Understanding on agency social worker recruitment and pay

When national pay scales are introduced, these rules should be updated to integrate rates of pay for agency social workers.

Recognising that some temporary social worker staffing will be required in children's social care, we should seek to reduce the excess cost and profiteering of agency staff so that it can be reinvested in supporting children and families. There are a small number of existing models of

99 The initial quoted figure of £22,700 has been adjusted here to be in 2022 prices.



staff banks within individual local authorities, such as 'Connect2Kent'¹⁰⁰, 'Connect2Hampshire'¹⁰¹ and a Social Care Casual Bank in West Sussex.¹⁰² Building on these models, government should provide seed funding for local authorities to establish not-for-profit regional staff banks to rival agencies and become the first point of call when a local authority needs a temporary social worker. In time, these banks should be the main source of agency staffing.

Recommendation: *The government should introduce new national rules on agency usage supported by the development of not-for-profit regional staff banks to reduce costs and increase the stability and quality of relationships children and families receive.*

7.4 Developing the wider children's social care workforce

The workforce that supports children and families goes far beyond social workers to a range of other professionals. Whilst the development of all parts of this workforce is important, we have identified two priority areas where action is needed.

Family support workers

The Family Help model will bring together a wider multidisciplinary workforce to support families. At present there is no plan for supporting the family support workforce, to the extent that we do not know the number of family support workers who exist nationally. The Early Intervention Foundation has advised that the Supporting Families Programme could have had an even greater impact if there was central investment in training and professional development for these practitioners, including identifying the strongest practice models and 'common elements' of effective approaches (Early Intervention Foundation, 2021a). Family support workers have told us they do not always feel valued.

The DfE should take responsibility for this workforce and in the long term there are a wide range of actions that would support their development. As a first step towards a national strategy, we recommend that government introduce a Knowledge and Skills statement for family support workers. This would establish expectations for the role and it would focus on knowledge and skills, such as providing effective parenting support and understanding the signs of abuse. Some areas have already developed Level 4 Apprenticeship courses for staff providing family help. As a new Knowledge and Skills statement is introduced, relevant apprenticeship standards should be refreshed to align with new expectations for the family support worker role.

¹⁰⁰ <https://www.connect2hampshire.co.uk/#/>

¹⁰¹ <https://www.connect2kent.co.uk/#/>

¹⁰² <https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/jobs/featured-jobs/social-care-casual-bank>

Residential care workers

“Make residential work worth doing as a job in its own right as opposed to ‘getting experience’ for other jobs.” - Care experienced young person

In 2021, there were 2,462 children’s homes in England, providing 9,699 places for children (Ofsted, 2022b). These homes need skilled and dedicated leadership to ensure the standard of care remains high, and yet the turnover and vacancy rates are unacceptably high; Ofsted report that at any one time around 10% of children’s homes do not have a registered manager in place (Ofsted, 2021c). The recruitment of staff, including managers, with the right qualifications and experience is a long-standing issue that affects both the cost of provision and the kind of care that young people receive (Thornton et al., 2015).

In its interim report, the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) recommended that, starting with children’s home managers, the DfE should introduce professional registration with an independent body for residential children’s home staff to address the absence of regulation for this workforce (Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse et al., 2018). In response DfE commissioned research and launched a Call for Evidence, which demonstrated an appetite from the sector for additional training that would help improve the quality of care, and consensus that professional standards should be introduced for those in care roles (Department for Education, 2021i).

These findings have been confirmed through the review’s engagement with the children’s residential workforce. We have also heard that complex and outdated regulations drive the existing Ofsted registration processes towards feeling overly bureaucratic, particularly given these registration requirements are repeated each time a manager leaves a home (The independent review of children’s social care, 2022).

Professional registration and leadership development for children’s home managers

There should be professional registration for all children’s home staff. New registration should start with residential managers given their leadership and influence on the care provided to some of the most vulnerable young people. Following early implementation of this review’s recommendations, we anticipate the residential care system will be much more stable and by this point registration should be required for all residential children’s home staff. As with family support workers, the standards for regulation should be used to align and update the apprenticeship opportunities for children’s home staff.

Alongside regulation, we need enough children’s home managers with the knowledge and skills to effectively lead residential settings in the coming years. A new leadership programme for children’s home managers should be established, designed to integrate the required Level 5 qualifications with additional high quality training. Working alongside the strongest children’s homes, the new national leadership programme should attract candidates from a broad range of backgrounds and invite a wider range of professionals to become children’s home managers, including teachers and social workers. A bursary should be made available to help high potential individuals transition into these roles.

The introduction of new regulations and a leadership programme for aspiring managers will raise standards of practice and support so they are well-equipped to take on these challenging



roles. Training 700 new managers over five years would mean that by 2030 management vacancies in residential children's homes should be less than 5%, and the average length of service for a children's home manager should be at least three years. This will support wider changes that will see residential care focused on providing a highly specialised and healing environment for the most vulnerable children.

Recommendation: To support the development of the wider social care workforce, government should produce a Knowledge and Skills Statement for family support workers; appoint Social Work England to set standards and regulate residential children's home managers; and fund a new leadership programme that could train up to 700 new managers in the next five years.

7.5 Supporting leadership

Leadership is a critical factor in improving children's social care, and every other public service.¹⁰³ This review has been inspired and influenced by truly remarkable leaders who, despite a dysfunctional system, are able to lead life changing work for children and families. Conversely, local area failure and poor practice is often linked to poor leadership (Wilkins & Antonopoulou, 2018). Yet, we do not have sufficiently stable, diverse or experienced leadership in children's social care. Around a quarter of local authorities experienced a change in their Director of Children's Services during 2020/21, compared to just 5% of local authority chief executives (ADCS, 2021b). Similar issues exist with elected lead members, with short political cycles driving turnover.

We believe the primary action to improve leadership should be to improve the conditions in which leaders are working.

- The National Children's Social Care Framework will clarify leaders' purpose and objectives, and inspection will be amended to reinforce this
- Radical transparency in data will help leaders to be evidence driven, able to target their attention at the most stubborn challenges in their areas and learn from those managing the most effective services
- Reforms to multi-agency working, including bringing education into the safeguarding partnership and reinvigorating the Director of Children's Services role as a champion for children and families across an area
- New investment to rebalance the system will move leaders away from crisis management and facilitate a focus on making effective use of funding that delivers improved longer term results.
- Reducing bureaucracy and supporting the workforce will free up time, bring leaders closer to practice and address the high workforce turnover that limits long term sustainable change

¹⁰³ See for example <https://www.isospartnership.com/research-cs1>, and <https://innovationcsc.dev.bbdttest.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/3.-Seven-features-of-practice-and-seven-outcomes.pdf>

However, we need to support and grow the leadership pipeline now. The DfE should continue to invest in existing leadership programmes at every level. Through contracts for these programmes, the Department must expect the same level of precision and rigour for knowledge and skills that will be a feature of the Early Career Framework for social workers. This should include reviewing the curriculum for the existing leadership programmes to ensure that they include knowledge and skills to support leaders to implement the reform programme set out by this review and the *Relationships Protect* programme specifically. In addition to this, in Chapter Nine we set out a national implementation programme for leaders in each local authority. In Chapter Eight, we set out a more robust intervention regime to address long term underperformance and weak leadership.

There is also a need to improve the diversity of leadership in children's services. Only 6% of Directors of Children's Services who shared information with ADCS identified as an ethnic minority (excluding White minorities) (ADCS, 2021d) and, 23% of the social worker workforce are from these ethnic minority groups (Department for Education, 2021c). A survey by the Principal Social Workers Network and What Works for Children's Social Care found more than 28% of social workers had experienced racism from colleagues or managers (Gurao & Bacchoo, 2022). There has been a lack of focus on supporting the progression of ethnic minority leaders. Existing DfE leadership programmes should have a focus on developing cultural competence. There should also be a positive action pathway with clear targets across programmes for ethnic minority social workers to address underrepresentation in leadership roles.

Recommendation: *The Department for Education should strengthen existing leadership programmes to better align them with the review's reforms and increase the diversity of leadership.*

