1. Introduction

1.1 The Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee (JUCSWECEC) and the Association of Professors of Social Work (APSW) represent the providers of social work education and the key generators of research and professional knowledge for the sector in the UK and internationally. APSW and JUCSWECEC derive expertise from the breadth of our organisations and membership. Our members share a willingness to engage with policy makers to make best use of this expertise and we welcome the development of productive discussions and planning fora to take forward the future of social work education.

2. Our joint response to this consultation is as follows:

2.1 We commend the democratic approach that has led to the compilation of this statement, in particular, the involvement of staff currently delivering child and family social work. The knowledge and skills statement reflects what is already core teaching on social work and post qualifying programmes and is clearly a helpful summary. However, the statement contains a mix of broad statements alongside some very detailed and prescriptive recommendations which seem to focus narrowly on the referral and assessment functions of local authority social work.

2.2 We are unclear as to the status of the document as we note that neither the DfE nor the DH has yet issued a formal and full response to the reviews of social work education commissioned from Sir Martin Narey and Professor David Croisdale-Appleby. We have discussed the risks of policy incoherence in previous statements. The ongoing lack of resolution of their differing recommendations continues to cause concern about the feasibility of serious planning for all engaged in the delivery of social work education.

2.3 The social work qualification remains a generic award. The development of a separate statement for children and families is undesirable in the absence of a clear statement about why the generic nature of social work education is being abandoned. To date the parallel statement for adult practice knowledge and skills has yet to be produced, to comment on one without the other may result in some skills and knowledge simply ‘falling through the gap’.

2.4 It is unclear how the statement aligns with the research evidence on the interconnectedness of relationships across the life course and the importance of understanding families holistically and ecologically.

2.5 The Rotherham Inquiry by Professor Jay highlights the risks of social work being reduced to functions that focus on the individual child within their individual family. In particular, skills in community assessment seem core to an effective response to organised child abuse of various kinds and to effective family support and maintenance.

2.6 The consultation documentation proposes that the statement be used to: inform curricula on qualifying social work programmes, assist employers in assessing whether social workers have achieved the requisite knowledge and skills after their first year in practice and serve as the basis for the proposed Approved Child and Family Practitioners’ Status Test. We have reservations about whether a brief summary statement of this nature is capable of performing such diverse functions. Moreover, the relationship between this statement and a range of others in existence remains unclear.
2.7 We note that the professional capabilities’ framework (PCF) is currently being used to guide curricula and assessments on both qualifying and post-qualifying programmes. It is unclear how this will fit with the proposed statement, and the production of yet more (unrelated) guidance runs the risk of further contributing to the confusion already noted in the reviews about frameworks for social work education.

2.8 The specialist standards and requirements for post-qualifying social work education and training: children and young people, their families and carers, published by the GSCC in 2005, after extensive consultation with practitioners, managers and educators, outlined requirements for 'consolidation of competence' cross referenced with the national occupational standards and, what was then, the 'common core of knowledge and skills for the children's workforce'. This detailed work could usefully inform the current statement. There needs to be further thought to facilitating a clearer relationship between the statement, the PCF and other regulatory frameworks for setting the standards for social work education, training and practice.

2.9 We consider the proposed development of the Approved Child and Family Practitioners' Status Test needs further thought as it has implications for social workers' registration with the HCPC, for the employability of social workers and for the choices they may want to exercise during their career.

3. Conclusion

3.1 APSW and JUCSWEC have welcomed the recent opportunities to contribute to the forums and discussions focused on future developments in work force education and support. We continue to be keen to play an active role as the Government’s response to the reviews becomes clear.

Response submitted on behalf of APSW and JUCSWEC

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