



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

**UNISON Scotland's Submission to the Scottish Government on their
Consultation on the Common Core of Skills, Knowledge,
Understanding and Values for the Children's Workforce in Scotland**

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Introduction

UNISON is Scotland's largest trade union representing over 160,000 members working in the public sector. We represent social workers, social care staff, health and education staff who are part of the Children's Workforce for children and young people, many of whom will be affected by the Scottish Government's proposals.

UNISON Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Government on their consultation on the Common Core of Skills, Knowledge, Understanding and Values for the Children's Workforce in Scotland.

General Comments

UNISON Scotland supports the introduction of a common core in principle. We are, however, unclear about what exactly the common core is that the document is aiming for and therefore, to ascertain the purpose of the document, which made answering some of the questions quite difficult.

Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) addresses much of the content of the common core but it would be helpful to have explicit guidance that GIRFEC is the approach and the common core is about the people using that approach.

UNISON does not believe that this document adds to what is in place at present. The strength of the common core is that it is a tool to influence other things such as learning and development, recruitment etc. but the challenge is to make that happen.

We believe that the document lacks continuity. The common core should not be a set of competencies as there are already sets of competencies for the workforce.

The proposed common core does, however, cover all people who work in the children's service workforce which is welcomed.

However, we are concerned that the document is not strong enough in its present form to inform qualifications, job descriptions, learning and development, etc.

The document appears to contain a framework but we are not clear whether this really its purpose. In the bullet points in the grids on pp13 – 15, some are written as tasks, others as skills. Clarity on the purpose of the document and some consistency would be helpful. In addition, we do not believe the layout itself is clear.

We are aware that there is a document on the common core of the children's workforce covering England and Wales, which seems to be a

more comprehensive, clear document, which we should incorporate into the Scottish proposals. . It would also be helpful to know how this has been evaluated and implemented.

With regard to training, we would wish clarify whether joint initial training has been reconsidered. A common core of skills for those in their first year at university moving towards careers in social work, CLD and education should be introduced. The common core could then be introduced into induction and throughout workers' careers.

We believe it is also important to receive clarification on how the common core would be implemented in the third sector?

Questions

Q1. 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?

If the common core is fully implemented embedded and supported across the sector it could have a significant impact and allow workers to intervene, tackle inequalities and build capacity. However, to do this, it must involve families.

Advantages could include: improved professional communication, greater consistency in approach, greater integration of services, more flexible working, greater career development opportunities, more efficient use of training and development resources, better articulation between qualification frameworks, more responsive services geared around early intervention approaches for service users.

However, the common core does not 'equip workers', it merely identifies key principles. In addition, we are not sure whether it means that we are asking all staff to tackle inequalities.

The words earlier in the document 'awareness to deep understanding' are really helpful and should be repeated, particularly in the Proposed Common Core. This again points to the purpose of the document. There is a danger that the common core will only be pp13 – 15 and if that is the case then some of the key elements/messages from other pages such as 'awareness to deep understanding' need to get onto those pages.

Q2. What specific comments do you have around the skills, knowledge & understanding associated with "sound observation, judgement and decision making"?

This section does not include any positive context of observing skills, nothing about recognising strengths and achievement which would move

away from the deficit model. UNISON believes that skills should be recognised, as well as the value of team work and the support of advice and guidance from other professionals. There is no mention of child development or their happiness which we believe should be a key element for the children's workforce. We believe the document should be more aspirational and written in positive language and that it should be more child-centred and focussed on outcomes for children, young people and their families.

We are also concerned about the focus on vulnerable children. The document could be viewed as a deficit model, e.g. 'noticing signs that initially concern you'.

Q3. What specific comments do you have around the skills, knowledge & understanding associated with "appropriate and effective communication"?

This section could have included something about effective listening especially in relation to listening to children. The issue about "confidentiality at every stage" is ambiguous as some might not be clear about confidentiality in the case of child protection. It was felt that this could be better described.

There has to be absolute clarity about the purpose of the common core. Communication and engagement must go hand in hand, and developing and maintaining relationships is key to its success.

Q4. What specific comments do you have around the skills, knowledge & understanding associated with "effective partnership and multi-agency working"?

There is no mention of common assessment frameworks or local joint case management. This could have been an opportunity to reiterate GIRFEC ideas of shared protocols. There are difficulties establishing these, including technical difficulties of sharing IT and personal responsibility. There also should be more emphasis on the understanding of different professional's roles and more emphasis on relationships

Q5. What, if anything, is missing from the skills, knowledge & understanding or values?

As stated in answer to Q4 there is no mention of common assessment frameworks or local joint case management. This could have been an opportunity to reiterate GIRFEC ideas of shared protocols. Implementation of the proposed common core

Levels are missing from the core competences. In some councils there are sets of competences for all staff – which are their core competences. They demonstrate that there can be one set of competences for all with behaviours outlined at different levels.

In addition, 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.

We also believe that the complexity of the roles is not explored.

Q6. Describe briefly how you, your organisation, or your sector might implement the common core of skills, knowledge and values.

As stated in the general comments, without a clear purpose it is very hard to say how this could be implemented. We believe it would be really helpful if the document outlined what a children's workforce worker 'looked like' – in their initial training, induction and throughout their career. That might be more helpful, comprehensive and clear.

However, UNISON believes that job descriptions, induction, training and development must be implemented. Team planning and building is another area where a common core would be useful, in particular when integrating teams.

Q7. What opportunities are there in your organisation or service for the proposed common core to be implemented at the following 3 levels:

- **Strategic management** – Job descriptions, particularly of job families. initial training, recruitment and selection, policy and procedure development, career pathways, new structures and GIRFEC
- **Operational management** – Induction, professional review and development (PRD) good quality consultation, development of policy and procedure, frameworks and learning events.
- **Day to day working with children, young people and families?** –Clear expectations for staff, information for service users and guidance notes for service users, behaviours and competencies

Q8. What opportunities do you see for working collaboratively with other organisations / sectors to implement the common core?

GIRFEC ensuring shared assessments protocols and procedures. Joint training, working together to effectively support children and families

The introduction of commissioned services – working on contracts and initial discussions when working with partners.

Q9. What challenges can you identify around implementing the common core, and how might these be overcome?

There should be an emphasis on working with people, not seeing them simply as recipients of services and carrying out assessments based less on just needs and more on assets. There are always difficulties bringing people together. However achieving a collective approach by sectors and building closer relationships with colleagues with common elements of training are essential. It takes effort and time to build relationships and longer to change culture.

Culture change is required from existing services and job roles. The idea of core skills and competencies can only be a positive thing. However it will also be very dependent on training providers and raising the profile of working with children.

Monitoring and evaluation will be essential but this is not always carried out well.

It needs to be stressed that that this should not become just another document. People may nod and agree to the worth of a common core but really need to understand what it means - it needs to be a live, working document. Workers need to know what their roles and responsibilities are.

The document needs to be more user-friendly and easier to navigate. It needs to cover all ages of children – at present there seems to be a focus on early years.

Finally there needs to be clarity that the common core links with SCSWIS requirements.

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