

**ADCS Position Paper**

**BUILDING A WORKFORCE THAT WORKS FOR ALL CHILDREN**

March 2019

The Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd



## **Building a workforce that works for all children**

### **Executive summary**

The children's workforce is varied and comprises multiple professions, employers and services, from teachers, sports coaches, social workers, family support workers and school nurses to police officers. Some of these roles are part of the 'wider' children's workforce, which often provides non-statutory support and intervenes at a much earlier stage, yet there is little appreciation of the important role that members of the wider workforce play in improving outcomes of children and families.

The government continues to invest in new routes into social work and to progress a programme of social work reform. While efforts to elevate the status and celebrate the successes of social work are welcome, this has largely been at the expense of the wider workforce, which has borne the brunt of a decade of austerity. This is not an effective model for supporting children and families who we know benefit most from receiving help at the earliest possible opportunity. However, the children's workforce currently operates in a siloed context at the national level as a multitude of government departments hold responsibility for different aspects of children's services policy.

The sector lacks a clear voice to advocate for the whole children's workforce at the national level. ADCS members call for the government to appoint a national child, young people and families workforce lead to oversee a coherent workforce strategy which addresses capacity issues and ensures that adequate and up to date training is readily available to all. This role would be best placed in the Department for Education, which leads on the majority of children's policy matters, to promote the need for and value of integrated working across the whole workforce. Such a strategy should encompass all parts of the workforce and as such a working group consisting of representatives from all relevant government departments that hold responsibility for aspects of the children's workforce and other sector representatives, including ADCS, should be established to oversee its development.

There are many career progression routes throughout children's services and the opportunities to make a difference to people's lives are unrivalled. These should be championed both locally and nationally through quality training and qualifications as well as the provision of ongoing support for workers to develop and grow. Training and qualifications should include a common core that is applicable across the entire sector and consisting of a shared language and common ways of working. In recent years, children's and adults' services have moved to adopt strengths or asset-based approaches to practice and the relationship between the worker and the child and family are at the heart of this. However, these relationships are becoming increasingly difficult to sustain long-term in the context of a decade of austerity and sustained budget cuts.

There is now a real need to develop and invest in the wider workforce and ADCS urges central government to take this opportunity. The number of children and families coming into contact with children's services continues to rise and some of the challenges they face include new and emerging threats. Gangs, criminal exploitation as well as the increased prevalence of parental mental ill-health, domestic abuse and substance misuse are but a few examples. These are complex and multifaceted issues which require a workforce that is able to respond at the earliest possible opportunity; responding effectively cannot be the responsibility of statutory services alone.

Other recommendations made in this paper include greater investment in the early years workforce and leadership development being more readily available for all aspirant and serving directors of children's services. This must include a greater focus on, and investment in, training black, Asian and minority ethnic leaders for the future who are not already in senior leadership positions. The paper also explores opportunities for new apprenticeships to fill gaps in the wider workforce.

## **Building a workforce that works for all children**

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. In 2017, ADCS published the position paper [\*A country that works for all children\*](#). The paper set out our ambition for a country where every child has a happy, safe childhood; where they have every opportunity to thrive in life; where their emotional or health needs are supported early; and where they have access to an education system that prepares them for independent adulthood and the world of work. To achieve this, we need a workforce that can enable a country that works for all children.
- 1.2. The children's workforce is varied and comprises multiple professions, employers and services, from teachers, sports coaches, social workers, family support workers and school nurses to police officers. Each of these roles will come into contact with children and young people at different stages of their journey to a fulfilling life and contribute to improving children's outcomes. The 'core' workforce, consisting of those who work directly with children and families often holds statutory responsibilities and receives specific government focus due to the nature of this work. Social workers, teachers and child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) practitioners, amongst other professions, each face their own challenges. Limited budgets and reduced capacity have led to these becoming more acute services that intervene at a much later stage, placing additional pressure on services designed to support children and families earlier. It is essential that these core services are equipped and supported to provide the type of preventative work that they are also designed to offer.
- 1.3. The 'wider' children's workforce complements the core workforce, working with children, young people and families in a more universal capacity often 'intervening' much earlier. Roles such as youth workers, school support staff and family support workers will often develop important relationships with children and families and support them before they require intervention from children's social care. Although professionally accredited 'specialist' roles, such as social workers, are vital for helping the most vulnerable children, there is a gap in what is now available for children and families who may need help, but not statutory interventions, and little appreciation of all the important work that members of the wider workforce do to improve outcomes for these same children.

### **2. A national voice**

- 2.1. Many parts of the children's workforce are disconnected at the national level as currently myriad government departments hold responsibility for different aspects of children's policy. It is difficult to see how those services that sit outside of the Department for Education (DfE) are given priority in their respective government departments, for example the demands of an ageing population always take precedence over meeting the needs of children in the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC). The sector lacks a clear voice that advocates for the whole workforce and **ADCS members call for the government to appoint a national child, young people and families workforce lead to oversee a coherent workforce strategy which addresses capacity issues and ensures that adequate and up to date training is readily available**. This role would be best placed in the DfE, which leads on the majority of children's policy matters, to promote the need for and value of integrated working across the whole workforce. However, a working group consisting of representatives from all relevant government departments that hold responsibility for aspects of the children's workforce and other sector representatives, including ADCS, should be established to oversee the development of a such a strategy.

- 2.2. There are many career progression routes throughout children's services and the opportunities to make a difference to people's lives are unrivalled. These should be championed both locally and nationally through quality training and qualifications as well as the provision of ongoing support for workers to develop and grow. Although not all professions or services in the wider children's services workforce are universally understood, they play an important role in improving children's outcomes. ADCS members are concerned that attractive career opportunities can be overlooked or portrayed negatively and the vital work that they do is not recognised.
- 2.3. Previously there was a much greater focus on the professional development needs of all those who make up the children's workforce. While it existed, the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) improved access to qualifications and skills, increased support for employers, and wider integrated working. The context in which we operate today is very different and ADCS does not seek a re-creation of the CWDC, however, since its closure, there has been less visibility on the children's wider workforce. **There is an urgent need for a central repository of resources available for the whole workforce to access.** This should be resourced by central government and it might be that bodies such as the What Works Centres as well as the new regulator Social Work England, when it becomes fully operational, will contribute their shared learning to this.

### **3. Future aspirations**

- 3.1. To build a workforce that works for a country for all children, better integration at the national level is urgently required. ADCS is keen to work with the government to enable more efficient joined-up working between the many services that support children and families. This will require the government to first acknowledge that the current structure of children's services at the national level hinders effective joined-up working, but also to work towards a system of greater collaboration between the myriad government departments that hold responsibility for the various parts of the children's workforce. It is essential that the government values the whole workforce and does all it can to facilitate greater integrated working for the benefit of children.
- 3.2. All those who work with and support children and families hold the same ambition of providing them with the best opportunity to thrive in life and it is only through a well-resourced wider workforce that this can be achieved. A decade of austerity has forced local authorities and many other organisations to significantly reduce their offer, which may in time harm our long-term ambitions for children and families. ADCS members urge the government to provide adequate funding to reverse this trend and allow for a strong and functioning workforce to deliver a country that works for all children.

### **4. The challenges and current context**

- 4.1. The government continues to invest in new routes into social work and to progress a programme of social work reform, much of which was set out in the DfE's 2016 paper [\*Putting children first: delivering our vision for excellent children's social care\*](#). There has been a lack of focus on the wider workforce at a time when levels of need in communities are growing. Social workers and teachers play an essential role in children and young people's development and it is right that these professions receive focus and investment, however, this should not be at the expense of the wider children's workforce. Children and families should receive support that caters to all of their needs to give them the best possible opportunities in life but the erosion of

many of the vital services that meet these needs such as early help workers, health visitors and youth workers has made this far more difficult.

- 4.2. Despite the government's ongoing focus on social work reform, the profession continues to face significant challenges in the retention of workers. A diversity of routes into the profession is welcome, but social workers operate in an increasingly challenging environment due to limited resources despite an increase in demand for their skills. The extra pressure that this places on social work increases levels of stress and directly impacts on the number of workers staying in the profession. As such, the number of social worker vacancies remains at an unsustainable level ([DfE, 2019](#)).
- 4.3. At a time when front line and early help services are experiencing a real strain on resources, ADCS believes that the DfE's investment of £23 million to date into the National Accreditation and Assessment System (NAAS) would be better used to support these services with a particular focus on retention; this should also extend to further developing the role of the principal social worker. The apparent areas of duplication in the role and remit of practice leaders and principal social workers is another example of the lack of clarity of these reforms and this feels like an obvious omission. The NAAS is one of many recent reforms aiming to help improve the quality and confidence of the child and family social work workforce, but the intended impact of these reforms on the retention of a skilled workforce has not been clearly or coherently articulated.
- 4.4. The role and expectation of child and family social work has changed significantly over the past thirty years since the *Children Act (1989)*; recent ADCS [research](#) (2018) tells us that initial contacts made to children's social care have increased by 78 per cent over the past ten years alone. At the same time we are seeing an increased prevalence of poor parental mental ill-health, domestic abuse and substance misuse. These challenges cannot be met by social work alone and there is now a need to focus on and develop the wider children's workforce to meet these needs at the earliest possible opportunity.
- 4.5. Multiple factors have limited the ability of the children's workforce to meet these challenges:
  - A 49 per cent real terms cut to local authority budgets since 2010 (NAO, 2018) and a projected £3 billion funding gap for children's services alone by 2025 ([LGA, 2018](#)) constrains the ability of public services to support these families;
  - ADCS [Safeguarding Pressures](#) (2018) research shows that over the past ten years the number of referrals to children's social care has increased by 22 per cent with the primary reasons being 'abuse or neglect' as well as 'family dysfunction';
  - Over the past five years, funding for early help services has fallen by 26 per cent ([Action for Children, 2018](#)), yet almost 90 per cent of local authorities in England are reported ([Guardian and LGA, 2019](#)) to have overspent on children's social care in the 2017/18 financial year.
- 4.6. Inevitably, vulnerable children and families are impacted the most and these challenges are felt even more by the context in which they currently live:
  - There are over four million children currently living in poverty, two thirds of whom are in working families ([Child Poverty Action Group, 2018](#)). This number is expected to surpass five million by 2020/21 ([Institute for Fiscal Studies](#) (IFS), 2017);

- Families with children face higher levels of poverty than any other demographic group ([Children's Commissioner and IFS, 2018](#));
- Living in poverty puts children at a greater risk of multiple individual and family-level vulnerabilities such as domestic abuse, adult substance misuse and poor mental health, ([Early Intervention Foundation \(EIF\) 2017](#)), which increases the likelihood of them coming into contact with children's social care;
- The 2015 freeze on benefits and tax credits for working families for four years, as noted by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2017), poses a significant barrier to social mobility.

4.7. It is clear that as demand continues to rise, the complex and overlapping social care, health and educational needs of children and young people can only be met by broadening focus beyond social work to the wider workforce. Currently, the workforce operates in a siloed context. This is particularly true of education and children's social care, exacerbated by a decade of education reforms designed to separate the work of schools from the role of local government. Consequently, supporting the most vulnerable pupils becomes ever more difficult, especially when the number of pupils falling out of sight due to exclusion, 'off-rolling', becoming home educated or attending an illegal school continues to grow. Schools are the eyes and ears of the safeguarding system and their relationships with children and families are invaluable in spotting and responding to risks at the earliest possible stage.

## **5. A workforce with shared values, practices and language**

- 5.1. Children and families will often come into contact with a range of professionals and volunteers who support different specific needs but ultimately are working towards the same goal. The relationships that they form with these individuals can be crucial in developing greater resilience, coping strategies and behaviour change, and research shows that the strength and continuity of these relationships is essential ([National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2015](#)). Indeed, the importance of strong, positive relationships across communities as well as with individual workers has been explored by the [Carnegie Trust](#) (2018) who argue that public policy should be driven by compassion for those who need support as well as evidence-based planning.
- 5.2. Hearing the voice of children and young people is central to many successful approaches to supporting them. Indeed, the *Children Act (1989)* and *Children Act (2004)* both underline the importance of this when making decisions. A child-centred approach helps to create stronger relationships with practitioners. By listening to the wishes and feelings of children and families, practitioners can develop a more collaborative way of working. Key to this is having a stable relationship between the child and worker, which must be sustained long-term.
- 5.3. In recent years, children's and adults' services have moved to adopt strengths or asset-based approaches to practice and [key findings](#) from the DfE's Innovation Programme projects have shown that the use of a clear practice framework that builds on assets rather than focussing on deficits is a common feature across successful projects. At the heart of this is the relationship between the worker and the child and family, yet these relationships are increasingly difficult to sustain in the context of a decade of austerity and sustained budget cuts. When services are removed or forced to reorganise, research and experience tells us it can be highly frustrating for children and families who experience an 'ever changing cast of workers' ([Morris et al, 2018](#)) supporting them.

- 5.4. Professionals and volunteers will often interact with each other in various settings, whether this be through health professionals working in schools, or youth workers in hospitals. However, a multitude of government departments hold the responsibility for different aspects of children's policy. Funding and policy responsibility of education, social work, youth work, children's health, aspects of contextual safeguarding (such as youth violence, child sexual exploitation and radicalisation), immigration and youth justice all sit in different parts of government, yet they are absolutely interconnected. As such, **ADCS members agree that we should seek to use and develop common approaches based on shared values across the whole workforce.** The use of restorative and relationship-based practices to support children and families is one such example, in which professionals seek to work *with* children and families so that they can find their own solutions to problems rather than the state intervening further in family life. This approach has been applied by a number of local authorities, for example through the Leeds Family Valued programme. The [evaluation report](#) (DfE, 2017) from this programme noted that the use of restorative practice created more 'open, harmonious and skilled social work practitioners and teams...which secured better outcomes'. However, the report went on to say that if such a system is to be successful, it needs to be applied across the whole workforce so that social work is not restorative in isolation.
- 5.5. There are examples of qualifications that seek to integrate practice across services, such as the [Early Intervention Qualification](#), and similarly, ADCS has supported the development of four new apprenticeships for children, young people and families practitioners and managers aimed specifically at staff working in early help and residential care roles, offering a new route into the sector. The formation of the apprenticeship fills an important gap in terms of training and professional development, partially caused by austerity measures, demonstrating how apprenticeships help build a workforce that is adaptable to meet the evolving needs of children and families. Coherent training and consistent qualifications must be the first step to delivering a workforce with shared values and practices and **ADCS believes training that is delivered or commissioned for different parts of the wider workforce should seek to build a common core into their professional development offer which includes integrated working competencies.**
- 5.6. It is important that the government is alive to workforce implications as policies are developed and that this is factored into decision making and priorities. Without planning and foresight, workforce issues are compounded on the ground. Indeed, the extension of Personal Advisor (PA) support to all care leavers up to the age of 25 under the *Children and Social Work Act (2017)* was a welcome move, however the workforce must be given the tools and support to deliver this reform in a sustainable way. **ADCS would therefore welcome the development of an appropriate higher level apprenticeship route for PAs working with care leavers to meet these needs.**
- 5.7. In recent years, multi-agency working in local areas has become more embedded yet a lack of co-ordination at the national level remains an obstacle to fulfilling shared ambitions. Despite this, government [legislation](#) and [guidance](#) are clear that organisations and services that support children and families should co-operate as widely as possible to improve their wellbeing. However, the absence of national data on the children's workforce as a whole is a barrier. **ADCS members ask central government to develop a co-ordinated workforce strategy, informed by timely and accurate data, covering the full range of professionals working with children, young people and families. The DfE should oversee this strategy as the lead department for children.** The strategy should draw in population data and seek to address the needs of the workforce and ensure that training is both current to reflect today's

challenges, as well as accessible. Including the views of the child and family in such a strategy is essential, indeed [research](#) from the Social Care Institute for Excellence (2011) has shown that implementing the views of young people can lead to significant improvements in provision. The strategy should also keep in view the impact of policy decisions taken in isolation on children's outcomes and the implications for the wider workforce.

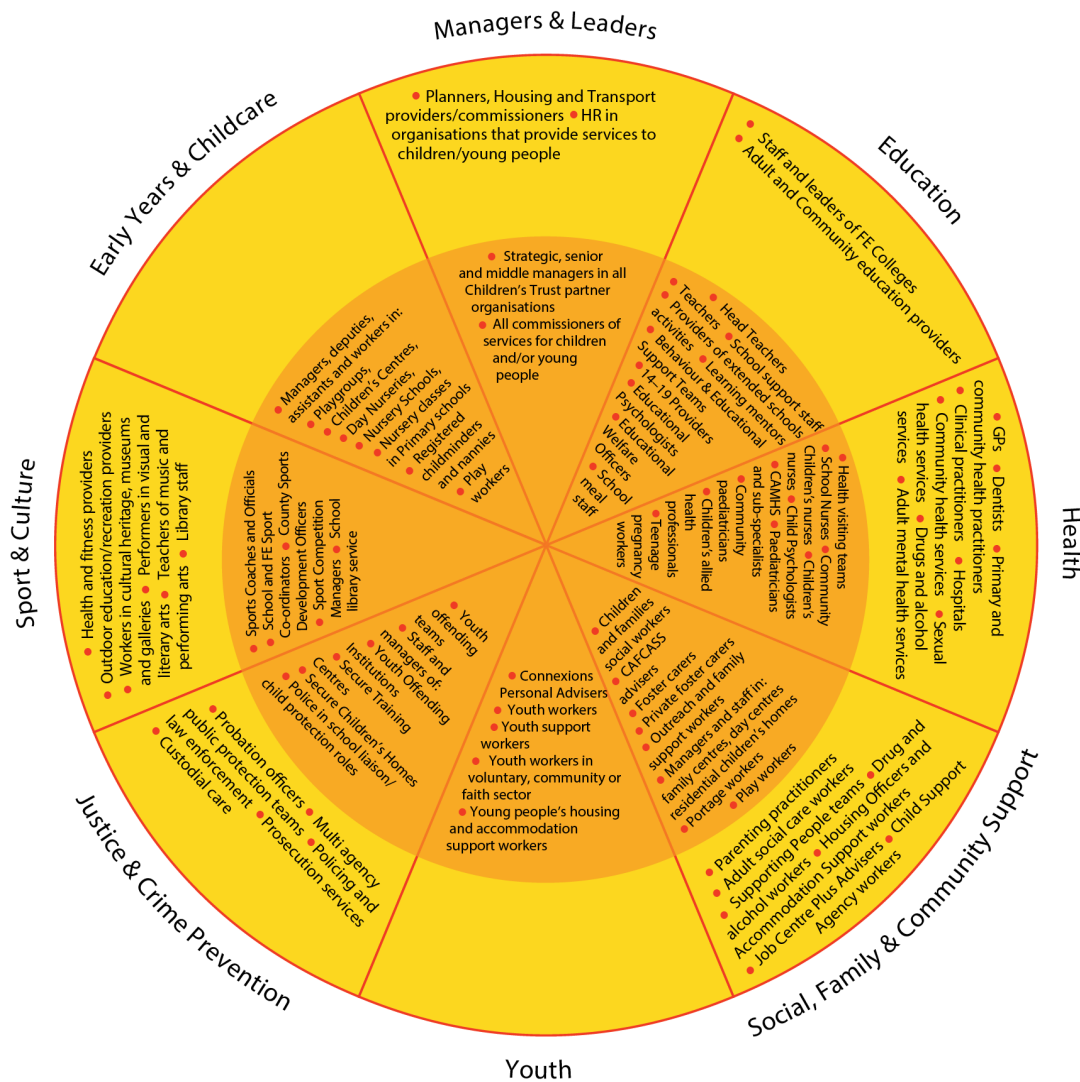
## 6. Early help

- 6.1. The value of early help is widely acknowledged; [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#) (DfE, 2018) notes that intervening early is far more beneficial to the welfare of children than reacting later. Receiving consistent, long-term support is key for children and families who face difficulties, yet the services that support them at the earliest possible stage are suffering due to a lack of investment. As public sector budgets continue to shrink, spending is understandably prioritised on child protection, leading to non-statutory services being cut or reorganised in order to protect resources for statutory services. In a [report](#) published last year, the EIF (2018) concluded that time limited, single-issue funding pots driven by short-term government policies are a significant barrier to effective early help. Such short-termism will not provide 'quick wins', nor cashable savings.
- 6.2. As leaders of children's services, we know these decisions are counterintuitive but a 50 per cent reduction in funding is driving ever harder decisions to be taken. ADCS is convinced that long-term, sufficient investment as part of a wider strategy to support early help services must be put in place by the government; this should not only be seen as a long-term investment but, more importantly, as an opportunity to meet the wider needs of children and families, including those who otherwise may not have come to the attention of children's social care. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has announced that funding for its flagship Troubled Families Programme will end in 2020. However, ADCS [research](#) (2018) suggests that this funding is integral to, and underpins early help provision in many local authorities. Indeed, 75% of responding local authorities stated that local early help services will be cut or significantly reduced due to the loss of this funding; clearly there are workforce implications attached to this disinvestment. Skilled, family workers will be lost.
- 6.3. Early help can take a variety of forms and many parts of the workforce cater to different needs of children and families. The ['2020 Children and Young People's Workforce Strategy'](#) detailed the various roles in the children's workforce and how they interact with one another (Figure 1). The strategy identifies eight 'segments' comprising the many professionals and volunteers who support children and young people and ADCS recognises the primacy of these roles in improving children's lives. Many of these segments are central to delivering effective early help yet their importance is often overlooked in the development of policy or investment priorities at the national level.



Figure 1: Children and young people's workforce (Source: Department for Children, Schools and Families)

- Core Children's Workforce: People who work or volunteer with children, young people and their families, or are responsible for their outcomes all the time.
- Wider Children's Workforce: People who work or volunteer with children, young people, and/or their families part of the time, or are responsible for their outcomes as part of their jobs.



## 7. Education

7.1. Schools and other education settings are the eyes and ears of the safeguarding system and can provide an opportunity to identify issues early. Pastoral and support staff, from careers advisors and teaching assistants to nurses in school, make a significant contribution to children's wellbeing and resilience by helping them to achieve their potential and make a successful transition from adolescence into adulthood while teachers play a central role in determining children's cognitive development, attainment and academic success. However, teacher sufficiency has remained a persistent problem over several years despite the availability of new routes into the sector. Year-on-year recruitment targets have not been met and class sizes continue to increase ([National Audit Office \(NAO\), 2017](#)).

7.2. The [NAO](#) (2016) estimates that schools will experience an 8 per cent real-terms fall in funding between 2014/15 and 2019/20 meaning that schools are increasingly forced to make difficult decisions, due to a lack of resources, such as reducing the level of classroom support. This can have a detrimental impact on children's outcomes, especially children who rely on additional support in school, such as those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), and consequently can lead to the use of increasingly specialist provision when they could have sustained a mainstream education placement with access to some extra support. It is often the most vulnerable learners who are most affected, yet the government's focus remains firmly on teacher recruitment. Priority should be placed on both teachers and support staff, it should not be either/or.

## **8. Health**

8.1. Since 2014, wide ranging reforms to services and support for children with SEND have been introduced, bringing with it unprecedented change across the public sector. The SEND reforms, although rightly ambitious, were not accompanied by a national drive to recruit and train the required numbers of occupational therapy staff and speech and language therapists, while the number of educational psychologists has steadily declined according to government [figures](#). The DfE recently announced an expansion of funding to train more educational psychologists from September 2020, however it will take several years until children and young people feel the benefit of this investment. The [Care Quality Commission](#) (CQC, 2017) has found that the system as a whole is fragmented and that the workforce faces huge challenges around heavy workloads, staff shortages and gaps in knowledge and skills. In a review of local area SEND inspections, [Ofsted](#) (2017) found that joint commissioning of services is underdeveloped in many areas and that the training of health staff on the SEND reforms has been variable.

8.2. Health services are not tailored to the wishes and preferences of children and the use of overly clinical language can be a barrier. The use of common forms of training for health workers and school staff could minimise this confusion. The announcement of mental health leads in schools is a positive step as the number of children and young people requiring mental health provision continues to rise ([NHS](#), 2018). This is a rare example of the DfE and DHSC working together and there is now an opportunity to develop integrated working, shared values and practice and a common language across health, education and children's social care.

## **9. Youth**

9.1. Effective youth work provides a non-stigmatising way of steering many children and young people away from risk, while youth clubs offer a safe place to be outside of school. Indeed the government's [Civil Society Strategy](#) (2018) acknowledged the 'transformational impact' that youth services can have on young people's outcomes. However, this has been threatened by a shortage of qualified workers; the National Youth Agency (NYA) estimates that there are around 3,000 practicing youth workers working without a formal qualification. The NYA's development of a level six youth work apprenticeship is another example of how the sector is attempting to remedy the shortage, however, this should be led by the government and incorporated as part of a comprehensive wider workforce strategy.

9.2. Youth provision has recently suffered and [figures](#) released by the DfE (2017) revealed that spending on youth services fell by a third between 2014/15 – 2017/18 while the [LGA](#) (2018) estimates that more than 600 youth centres have closed in recent years. Responsibility for youth provision sits with the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and 95 per cent

of the available budget is spent on the government's flagship National Citizenship Service, yet just 12 per cent (98,000) of eligible young people took part in 2016 (LGA). While this offers valuable support, its seasonal nature gives it a limited reach.

- 9.3. The youth justice system has had huge success over recent years, partly due to the work of multi-agency Youth Offending Teams which have a demonstrable impact on the lives of individual children and families, through the use of preventative and community-based work as evidenced in Charlie Taylor's independent [review](#) (2016). The strength of relationships with children and families is central to meeting this work. Indeed, youth offending services have long used restorative and child-centred responses when supporting children and young people in conflict with the law and this is supported by [research](#) (Howard League, 2015). Youth services are a key part of early help and as such, ADCS is clear that they should be resourced sufficiently and the value of these skilled practitioners as part of the wider workforce, particularly at a time of rising levels of serious youth violence and criminal exploitation, such as the threat of 'county lines', is fully recognised.

## 10. Early years and childcare

- 10.1. The early years are a crucial period in the development of a child and present the best opportunity to close the attainment gap. As demonstrated in the [Field Review](#) (2010), evidence shows that a child's life chances are largely predicted by their development in the first five years of life. Although DfE [research](#) (2015) has found that children's centres can improve maternal mental health as well as the functioning of families, they are being lost from communities, while charity [Save the Children](#) (2018) has raised concerns over the number of staff in nurseries without suitable qualifications. Although it is positive that the early years are receiving a greater policy focus, as shown by the announcement of the [early outcomes fund](#), the sector is in need of long-term sustainable funding to realise the true benefits of early help in the early years. Investing in the workforce must be a key priority.
- 10.2. The government has pledged to invest £6 billion by 2020 on the expansion of the 30 hours "free" childcare offer for working parents and carers of 3 – 4-year olds, including those in households earning up to £199,000 a year. Even with this vast investment, the level of funding on offer is insufficient and providers are withdrawing or even closing. **ADCS urges the government to review parental eligibility criteria to prioritise access for the most vulnerable. A proportion of this investment should be re-directed to support the development of this vital workforce in order to address capacity issues and improve access to training and development.**

## 11. What we need to develop and sustain a workforce that works for all children

### 11.1. Shared language

- 11.2. As part of a wider workforce strategy, ADCS believes a shared language which is recognisable across all domains, supporting a common understanding of the shared moral purpose that unites us all is urgently required. Engagement with partner agencies and the community will be essential. A shared language should also seek to empower children and families and seek to change the narrative around the most vulnerable, particularly children in care.
- 11.3. Articulating our collective endeavour to give children and families the opportunity to thrive should sit at the heart of this narrative. Such a language should extend to adult social care workers who impact on the outcomes of children and young people via their work with parents

and as such they must be aware of their needs. The language should be simple yet aspirational and express our shared ambitions for all children to be able to say they:

- Live in a safe environment, free from poverty
- Are supported at the earliest opportunity
- Have the opportunity to thrive in life
- Have access to an education that supports them to grow and develop
- Are listened to and valued.

11.4. A strong leadership offer

11.5. The role of the director of children's services (DCS) as a systems leader is vital for building capacity in the workforce by shaping the multiple systems that impact on the lives of children and their families. However, the average length of time in a permanent post for a DCS is approximately three years ([ADCS, 2018](#)). Children's services are able to perform better under consistent leadership and this ultimately improves the lives of children and families, yet poor retention of DCSs will remain an obstacle. **As such, ADCS would welcome investment in development opportunities for both serving, and aspiring DCSs.** In a context where senior leaders must find solutions to complex problems with diminishing resources, it is vital that they have the tools and support to meet these demands. Previously, training for aspiring DCSs was funded by central government, however this is no longer the case. While training is available, such as through The Staff College's Aspirant Directors of Children's Services programme, this must be paid for. The government should ensure that training is widely available to encourage the pipeline of future leaders.

11.6. It is essential that all workers feel that they have the opportunity to progress into senior leadership, regardless of their background. There are some senior professions where there is parity in terms of gender, for example there is currently an equal number of male and female serving DCS's ([ADCS, 2018](#)), however, more needs to be done in improving other forms of diversity. Workers from under-represented groups, such as those from black, Asian and other minority backgrounds (BAME), can often face systemic barriers on their journey to leadership as well as experience a higher turnover of staff. Despite increasing numbers of people from a BAME background entering the workforce, they do not often progress to senior leadership positions. ADCS is clear that those who have the ambition and capability to become leaders should have the opportunity to progress. The workforce must reflect the communities with whom it works through both direct work with children and at senior level. It is key for those from under-represented backgrounds to see that they too can aspire to a career in children's services, or as a leader if they wish, by seeing themselves reflected in the professionals who have such an important impact on their lives. **To some extent, improving diversity in the workforce is in the gift of individual DCSs, however, a more systemic approach is needed. ADCS members therefore request investment and a greater focus on training and support for the future BAME leaders of tomorrow, at a local and a national level.**

## **12. Recommendations**

ADCS remains committed to achieving a country that works for all children. We therefore need a fully developed and holistic workforce that can deliver this. ADCS members urge the government to implement the following recommendations:

1. The government to appoint a workforce lead to oversee a coherent workforce strategy to address capacity issues and ensure that adequate and up to date training is readily available. This role should sit in the DfE, however, a working group of representatives from other relevant government departments and sector representatives, including ADCS, should be established to oversee such a strategy.
2. A central repository of learning and development resources available for all members of the children's workforce to access which should be resourced by central government.
3. That training commissioned or delivered by relevant professional bodies to all parts of the wider workforce seeks to build a common core into their professional development offer which includes integrated working competencies.
4. The use of common approaches, based on shared values, to be applied across all teams and professionals who work with children and families and used to engage fully with communities.
5. To support the development of the early years workforce, the government's investment in 30-hours of subsidised childcare for working parents and carers with 3 – 4 year olds with a household income of up to £199,000 per annum should be reviewed, so that vulnerable children and families benefit from the subsidy and the remaining investment used to support the development of the early years workforce.
6. The government to ensure that leadership development for aspirant and serving DCSs is widely available to encourage a wide cohort of emerging leaders. This should include a greater focus on, and investment in, training BAME leaders for the future who are not already in senior leadership positions. Investment should also be made to improve the retention of serving DCSs and reduce the amount of churn in these leadership positions.
7. The development of an appropriate higher level apprenticeship route for personal advisors working with care leavers following the expansion of support up to 25-years old.

## The Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd (ADCS)

ADCS is the national leadership association in England for statutory directors of children's services and their senior management teams



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