

# **Towards a College of Social Work**

## **A UNISON social work briefing**

### **What's all this about a College of Social Work?**

One of the 15 recommendations made by the Social Work Task Force (SWTF) was that there should be a College of Social Work to act as an independent body to promote the profession of social work.

### **Aren't the new government getting rid of quangos?**

The intention is that the College will be an independent organisation funded through member subscriptions. It may in due course raise revenues through other activities such as quality assurance of training and conferences.

### **How's it going to get off the ground?**

The previous government provided £3m of start-up money and the current government has pledged to honour that. Staff from the Social Care Institute of Excellence (SCIE) have been working to facilitate the development of the College. Joint interim Chairs – Maurice Bates and Professor Corinne May-Chahal – have now been appointed and a recruitment exercise for interim Board members is underway.

### **What's it going to do for social workers?**

There is currently a consultation exercise going on about what social workers think the College should do. The closing date is **10 September**.

UNISON is encouraging members to fill it in – please go to:

<http://www.collegeofsocialwork.org/queschoicemay10.aspx>

Initial ideas the consultation has put forward include:

- information, guidance and resources on practice issues
- definition of what only social workers can do
- access to accredited continuing professional development
- advocacy with the media, the general public and allied professions to promote the real difference that social workers make and provide a source of informed comment when things 'go wrong'

### **How does that relate to what UNISON does?**

The College's primary aim is to promote the profession of social work rather than represent social workers. That said, there has been a recognition of the fact that social workers do not have endless funds to spend on joining things – especially as they have no choice but to pay professional registration fees which look set to rise (few employers reimburse). Most social workers value the security and access to advice, representation, support and a say in the workplace that they get through UNISON, as well as our professional registration representation. Because of this there is strong interest in forming a partnership with a trade union. UNISON has over 40,000 members who are social workers, so appealing to UNISON members will be key to getting a

critical mass of members for the College and the income to fund the work it wants to do.

UNISON has a wide range of partnerships with professional bodies including with the College of Occupational Therapists whereby people joining the College get UNISON membership as an automatic benefit.

UNISON has been involved in discussions with the College development team about options for making a College and UNISON membership package at an affordable fee. Once the interim Board is in place we hope to progress these discussions further.

UNISON has been developing a strong campaigning voice on social work issues and the College will want to build on that by working with us and others on key issues such as the representation of social work in the media.

### **What is UNISON's position ?**

We are very clear that the establishment of a College will not be the answer to all of social work's problems. In a recent survey UNISON members ranked the SWTF recommendations in order of priority. The top three were: a national standard for employers; national requirements on supervision; national training and support programmes for front-line managers. Down the bottom at 15th out of 15 was the establishment of a College. We will want to support anything that gives social work a better public image and to ensure that the College is run by and accountable to social workers and involves service users. However we do not want the College to become a distraction from getting on with the other parts of the reform agenda which are urgently needed to make a difference to the quality of working life for social workers.

### **Isn't there already a professional body – BASW?**

The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) is a professional association which represents professional issues on behalf of its members – it has around 12,000 members. It doesn't currently fulfil the range of functions envisaged for the College. BASW's current position suggests that it may see itself merging into the College once the College is established.

### **Where can I find out more?**

You can find out a lot more from the website [www.collegeofsocialwork.org](http://www.collegeofsocialwork.org) Do take part in the on-line consultation that ends on 10 September. There is a question in there about partnership with a trade union which gives UNISON members the opportunity to say how important this is to them. We will provide updates on significant developments.

To find out more about UNISON's work on social work, visit [www.unison.org.uk/socialwork](http://www.unison.org.uk/socialwork)