

The children and young  
people's workforce

cwdc

Children's Workforce  
Development Council



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Refreshing the common core  
of skills and knowledge

**“90% of our time  
should be working  
with young people,  
not trying to find the  
right information from  
somewhere unknown.”**

**Becky Shorthose, Early  
Intervention Worker**



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## Foreword by Jane Haywood



The common core describes the skills and knowledge that everyone who works with children and young people is expected to have.

We asked you to help us refresh the common core. You told us that you liked it and there was still a need for it, but said it should be strengthened and updated to reflect how we have moved on in the past five years.

This report takes you through the journey we have been on to refresh the common core. You can read the detail of the consultations, hear what children, young people, families and carers said, and hopefully see how your views are now reflected in the refreshed common core.

You gave us a very strong message that everyone in the children and young people's workforce should have some awareness of all six areas of expertise. We have listened to your feedback and there is now an expectation that everyone who works with children and young people has an understanding of the six areas in a way that is relevant to their work.

Your help and support has helped us to make sure that the common core remains an invaluable tool. It will support you in ensuring children and young people receive a consistent and high quality service. I hope you find this report interesting and that it inspires you to pick up a copy of the refreshed common core today.

*Jane Haywood*

Jane Haywood  
Chief Executive

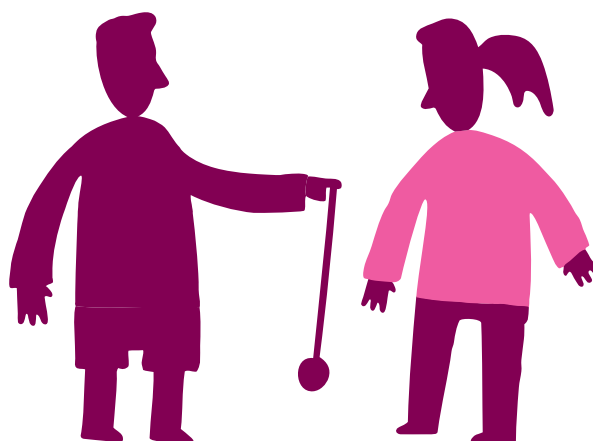
**The Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC), working with a range of national partners, was asked to find out if the content of the common core still included the right skills and knowledge to support excellent services for children, young people, parents and carers. We were also asked to find out what could be done to move towards universal usage.**

This report describes our investigations, what you told us, and what has been done as a result to refresh the text of the common core and encourage everyone to use it.

Consultations were carried out between July and December 2009, involving children, young people, parents, carers, practitioners and leaders. These discussions allowed us to build a picture of how the common core is already being used, and how it could be improved.

We used the key messages from the consultation to refresh the text of the common core. We kept the existing six areas of expertise, but the text was strengthened to reflect key themes such as the need to tackle disability and disadvantage. Refreshing the text has made the common core as relevant and up-to-date as possible for everyone working with children and young people of all ages, as well as their parents and carers.

Another thing you told us was that good communication and support would be needed to make sure the refreshed common core does not just sit on the shelf. So, the next stage will be to agree actions at national, sectoral and local level to ensure it is used widely across the children and young people's workforce.



## Background

The common core of skills and knowledge for the children and young people's workforce was first published in 2005. It came out of the Every Child Matters initial consultation, which supported the idea that everyone working with children, young people and families should have a common set of skills and knowledge. The six areas of expertise it identified were:

- Effective communication and engagement with children, young people and families.
- Child and young person development.
- Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the child.
- Supporting transitions.
- Multi-agency working.
- Sharing information.

The common core described the skills and knowledge that everyone working with children and young people were expected to have. The six areas of expertise offered a single framework to underpin multi-agency and integrated working, professional standards, training and qualifications across the children and young people's workforce. It was for people who worked with children and young people all the time, as well as those whose role only involved some contact with children and young people – including both paid staff and volunteers.

In 2008, as a result of the 2020 Children and Young People's Workforce Strategy, we were asked to review and consult on the content and use of the common core.



**“Having the common core ensures there's a consistent quality, so whoever a young person chooses to approach will know how to talk to them, how to recognise if things are wrong and how to bring in other services if they're needed.”**

Joanna Nichols, Teenage Pregnancy Strategy Co-ordinator

What follows is a summary of the consultations carried out between July and December 2009. They were conducted by independent consultants on behalf of CWDC using different media. The consultations allowed us to gather views about how the common core was being used, assess its strengths and weaknesses, provide a rationale for refreshing the text of the common core and develop a plan for moving towards universal usage.

## 1.1 Desk research

The consultants reviewed documentation of the common core. They also asked children, young people, parents and carers about the skills they thought the people working with them should have.

The consultants also reviewed initial training and qualification documents to see if the common core featured in them, and was identifiable.

In addition, a number of organisations gave written responses to an online questionnaire.

## 1.2 Online questionnaire

A total of 981 respondents from England completed the questionnaire. The largest numbers of responses were from people who said they worked in education or early years. The lowest numbers came from the sport, justice and 'mainstream' health sectors.

## 1.3 Stakeholder discussion groups and focus groups

A total of 44 focus and stakeholder groups were held. These covered a broad range of occupational groups and a balanced regional spread, as well as the different sectors of the children's workforce. The members of each group were identified by sector networks, third sector bodies and the consultants themselves. In addition, the consultants held four focus groups with parents and carers, including with fathers and teenage parents.

The Communication Trust held six focus groups with children and young people with special educational needs and learning disabilities.

## 1.4 One-to-one interviews

The consultants carried out 22 one-to-one interviews, mainly with government officials, and senior people in a range of organisations, including CWDC.



## 2 What you told us

This section outlines findings from the consultation and a review of evidence.

### 2.1 Purpose of the common core

The majority said they liked the common core, and that they still felt there was a need for it.

The consultation and review of materials suggest the unique value of the common core is that it sets out the areas of expertise that all people working with children and young people should have, rather than skills that are relevant to particular roles or sectors.

Many of those consulted, in particular in the discussion groups, said the purpose of the common core and its primary audience were not clear. Some groups provided their own ideas about the purpose of the common core. Most frequently they said it was a description of the skills and knowledge needed to support safeguarding and child protection, or to provide a practical basis for joint and integrated working. A frequent view was that a clear statement of purpose is needed, and that it should be provided by government or CWDC.

### 2.2 Knowledge of the common core

The findings support existing evidence that awareness and use of the common core is patchy and differs across sectors. Of the 981 respondents to the online questionnaire, 38% stated that they had 'some knowledge' and 32% 'good knowledge' of the common core.

Respondents were most likely to come from the early years and education sectors and least likely to come from the sports, justice or health sectors. Participants in the stakeholder discussion groups were selected to provide a sector and geographical balance and were more likely to classify themselves as having little or no knowledge of the common core.

### 2.3 What is 'common' and what is 'core'?

In the discussion groups the consultants asked whether the six areas of expertise in the common core were both:

- Common: applies to everyone in the children and young people's workforce (core and wider), even though the detailed application may be different for different workers and/or different ages/groups of children and young people.
- Core: necessary to the roles of people in the children and young people's workforce for them to contribute to one or more of the five Every Child Matters outcomes.

Almost without exception those taking part in the discussion groups agreed that the six areas of expertise were both common and core.

In terms of making the common core more useful and relevant, responses are summarised in the table below.



Table 1: Types of support required

Type of support	%
Knowing that the refreshed common core was built into initial training within the children's workforce	74
A dedicated website with supporting materials	73
Knowing that accredited qualifications were based on the refreshed common core	72
Regular newsletter with examples of good practice	56
Local briefings on the refreshed common core	55
Regional briefings on the refreshed common core	36
Other	4
I don't see a need to build the common core into my work	2
<b>Base: 981 (multiple replies possible)</b>	

This pattern of findings was also reflected in the stakeholder discussion groups.

### 2.3 Benefit of the common core

The online questionnaire asked respondents to indicate the benefits of the common core.

Table 2: Needs met by the common core

Achievement	Score
Provides practical guidance on skills and knowledge required to work with children and young people	0.99
Ensures consistent understanding across different parts of the children's workforce	0.85
Sets performance standards for all members of the children's workforce	0.80
Provides a good starting point for drawing up job roles and descriptions	1.02
Is a good basis for induction programmes	1.26
Helps identify gaps in individual's skills and knowledge	1.03
Helps in the development of workforce development strategies	0.99
Encourages joint working across the children's workforce	0.81
Helps focus on the need to work in partnership with parents and carers	0.81
Helps focus on meeting the needs of children and young people	0.99
<b>Base: 673</b>	

[Score is the mean level of usefulness where +2 = very useful, +1 = somewhat useful, 0 = neither useful nor not useful, -1 = not very useful, -2 = not useful at all]

### 3 What children, young people, parents and carers want from those who provide help and support

The consultants reviewed existing evidence of what children, young people, parents and carers want from the people who work with them. They also held a series of focus groups with children and young people with special educational needs and learning disabilities.

Respondents said benefits of the common core included:

- It focuses on meeting the needs of children and young people.
- It focuses on the need to work in partnership with parents and carers.

These are positive responses, but not among the most positive benefits identified.

When they were asked how the common core could be improved, participants supported:

- Meeting the needs of vulnerable children and their families, in particular disadvantaged children and those living in poverty (58%).
- Working in partnership with and empowering parents and carers (50%).

Children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities emphasised three particular areas to be included in the common core:

- Excellent listening and communication skills.
- Positive, supportive and friendly attitudes.
- Knowledge of young people and their specific strengths and needs, so they can be supported appropriately.

They said:

“They need to listen.”

“They need to speak to us like adults so they can understand our condition.”

“They have to have lots of energy, not be tired or grumpy.”

“It would be better if people could understand what is wrong so if you did something wrong they knew if you were doing it on purpose or if it’s because of your condition, instead of getting in trouble for things you can’t help and not for things you can help.”

Parents and carers agreed that the six areas of expertise were important. They were particularly clear about the need for professionals to treat them and their families with respect. They favoured appropriate exchanges of information among professionals so that parents and carers did not have to repeat information many times.

They said:

“I find that the best places are where you are not patronised and are dealt with as an adult.’

“We’re always repeating ourselves to different organisations.’

A number of practitioners emphasised the importance of knowledge and skills around taking the perspective of parents and carers - and effective communication with them.

## 4 What you told us about specific issues

The 2020 Children and Young People's Workforce Strategy raised specific questions about:

- How to embed the common core in training, including initial training.
- How it supports integrated and joint working.
- Which communication methods and materials are needed to promote its use.

Views on these questions are outlined in this section.

### 4.1 How to embed the common core in training, including initial training

For occupational groups such as teachers and social workers, initial training is carried out by higher education institutions to standards set by professional or sectoral bodies. For social work, medical training and other occupations, standards relate to work with both adults and children. It would seem that some of the areas of expertise in the common core are clearly embedded in core standards for initial training. However, the areas of expertise relating to joint working and information sharing do not appear to be fully embedded in the professional standards that underpin initial training, although the consultants were told that higher education institutions delivering initial training are likely to cover these areas of expertise anyway even where it is not an explicit requirement.

Looking to the future:

- Some participants supported merging the common core with the CWDC common induction standards.
- Work is under way to develop a unit or units for the Qualifications and Credit Framework in England, based on the common core.
- It is already a requirement that qualifications included on the integrated qualifications framework should reflect the common core.

The discussion groups in sectors such as health, justice and sport made it clear that the common core will only be implemented if it is incorporated in skills and knowledge frameworks. This has not happened to date. Some of these comments also suggested the level of detail in the common core would make it difficult to reflect below the level of the main areas of expertise.

Another solution suggested by a few groups was to develop a 'self assessment' or 'team assessment' tool linked to online learning resources for self-development around the common core.



## 4 What you told us about specific issues

### 4.2 How the common core supports integrated and joint working

There were three distinct findings in relation to integrated and joint working:

- Support for retaining and updating the common core to reflect recent developments in integrated working.
- Support for joint training and briefing events on the common core as a way of supporting integrated working.
- Some evidence that the sections on joint working and information sharing can be omitted from standards and qualifications.

A number of participants in discussion groups said the six areas of expertise in the common core provided a practical checklist for the skills and knowledge needed for integrated working.

Many of those consulted emphasised the key role of Children's Trusts in setting an agenda for integrated working. They also pointed to the potential role for the common core in helping to define a workforce development agenda – at strategic level – for Children's Trusts.

Those responding to the questionnaire supported improvements in the areas set out in the table below.

Table 3: Areas of the common core that need to be improved

Specified need	%
Encouraging members of the children's workforce to work together in an integrated way	60
Meeting the needs of vulnerable children and their families, in particular disadvantaged children and those living in poverty	58
Safeguarding children and young people from online threats	56
Working in partnership with and empowering parents and carers	50
Working with children and young people with disabilities	49
Statement of behaviours expected of members of the children's workforce	43
Safeguarding children and young people	40
Supporting children and young people's communication and speech and language skills	39
Statement of values expected of members of the children's workforce	39
Supporting equality and diversity	36
<b>Base: 673 (multiple responses possible)</b>	

A range of proposals for improving the content of the common core also came from the discussion groups, both adding to and amplifying the issues set out above. These points are picked up in the section on refreshing the common core below.

#### 4.3 Communication materials and methods

Those consulted said the common core had not been promoted and that this had been a missed opportunity. There was general support for the usefulness of the common core, including among those who had not seen it before. There was a strong sense that the common core was well written.

Looking to the future:

- Questionnaire respondents chose: 'Promoting the common core to professionals and practitioners' as the action most likely to ensure the common core was used.

- They agreed with the statements 'Whilst the common core contains all the core skills and knowledge that members of the children's workforce need now, it needs to be updated to meet changing needs' or 'There are a few areas where the common core needs to be improved to fill some relatively minor gaps in the skills and knowledge it describes'.
- Most of those consulted wanted the refreshed text to be shorter or, at least, no longer than the current text.

Participants in discussion groups said there is a need to position the common core clearly in relation to Every Child Matters, the common assessment framework, and National Occupational Standards. But they also identified the need to 'future proof' the common core against changes to legislation and programmes relating to it.

## 5 Refreshing the content of the common core

### 5.1 Statement of purpose for the common core

Many people said a clear statement of purpose for the common core would be useful. This has now been included in the introduction to make it clear that:

- The purpose of the common core is to describe the skills and knowledge that everyone who works with children and young people is expected to have. The six areas of expertise offer a single framework to underpin multi-agency and integrated working, professional standards, training and qualifications across the children and young people's workforce.
- The common core reflects a set of common values for practitioners that promote equality, respect diversity and challenge stereotypes. It helps to improve the life chances of all children and young people, including those with disabilities and those who are most vulnerable. It also helps to provide more effective and integrated services.

- Use of the common core will vary by sector and role. Different organisations will find the most appropriate ways of giving expression to the six areas of expertise.
- The common core acknowledges the rights of children and young people, and the role parents, carers and families play in helping achieve positive outcomes.

### 5.2 Format of the common core

Following discussions and consultations, the format of the common core has been developed in the following ways:

- The refreshed text is no longer than the original text.
- It makes minimal references to specific policies or procedures so that it will still be relevant in coming years.
- The text will be supported by web pages providing references to key documents and also examples of the contexts in which the areas of expertise are applied.
- It will be available in both paper and electronic formats.
- For ease of reference and use, the paragraphs are numbered.

### 5.3 Strengthening the common core

You asked us to refresh the content of the common core to bring it up to date and to address a number of issues, including:

- Online safeguarding.
- Integrated working, as well as joint working.
- Early intervention and prevention.
- Supporting the needs of teenagers and adolescents.
- Involving service users, including parents as partners.
- Clarifying different types of transitions.

You also highlighted the need to strengthen the way the common core addresses issues of inclusion, disability and disadvantage. This includes the skills needed to understand and focus on the specific needs of individual children and young people, including cultural awareness.

We discussed adding a seventh area of expertise on 'inclusion'. Many of the people we consulted, however, were familiar with six areas and wanted to keep the existing framework. It was also felt that creating a separate area could sideline important issues. On balance, we agreed to keep the six areas and strengthen all references to disability, inclusion and disadvantage.

These changes to the content are based on responses to the online questionnaire and discussion groups.

### 5.4 Refreshed text

The refreshed text of the common core can be downloaded from CWDC's website. <http://www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/common-core>





## 6 Getting everyone to use the common core

Throughout the process, the consultants asked how universally the common core was being used, and how people thought it would be possible to get everyone to use it.

### 6.1 Raising awareness and use of the common core

Both the questionnaire and discussion groups suggested:

- The common core is more embedded in some parts of the children and young people's workforce than others.
- Sector is the biggest factor in how embedded the common core is. This is a bigger factor than whether people are working in core roles or are part of the wider workforce.
- In the third sector, larger organisations are more likely to be aware of and use the common core and have it embedded in qualifications.
- A key issue for the third sector is how relevant the common core is to volunteers – particularly those who volunteer for very short periods of time.

Most people agreed in principle with the aim of getting everyone in the children and young people's workforce to use the common core. However, a number of key obstacles were highlighted:

- For smaller third sector organisations, funding for training is an issue. Some called for a national common core training programme for the third sector.

- Because the common core only applies in England, there is an issue around initial training. Currently, accredited qualifications are based on UK-wide standards.
- Enforcement and motivation was thought to be a major issue. A frequently expressed view was that the common core would need to be built into inspection and regulation if it was going to be embraced by everyone.

### 6.2 Differentiating how the common core is used

There were differing opinions on whether the common core should be differentiated by level and job role, or whether the worker is part of the core or wider workforce. Those responding to the questionnaire were divided quite evenly between those wishing to see:

- One set of skills and knowledge for those who work with children and young people all of the time which are used in less depth by those who work with people as part of their role.
- Different levels of skills and knowledge related to different job roles.
- Different levels of skills and knowledge related to qualifications.
- For it to apply equally to all members of the children and young people's workforce.

These options were discussed in more detail in discussion groups. The key issue that emerged was the need to ensure that all members of the children and young people's workforce applied the six areas of expertise according to the context of their work.

Discussions with people from different sectors also suggest use of the common core will vary from sector to sector and role. Different organisations will find the most appropriate ways of giving expression to the six areas of expertise.

People who work exclusively with children and young people will use the common core in greater depth than people whose work only involves some contact with children and young people.

Similarly, some roles will place greater emphasis on one or more of the common core's six headings but all will need to understand the degree to which all aspects of each of the six areas of expertise will apply, in a way that is relevant to the context in which they work. However, the six areas of skill and expertise complement and support one another and everyone who works with children and young people should be aware of them all.

### 6.3 Implementing and communicating the common core

The common core supports the development of a single children and young people's workforce which has common values, skills, language and processes. It also supports a workforce that has strong specialist and professional skills. And because it links to qualifications, through the Integrated Qualifications Framework, it also supports an increase of skills in the workforce.

Many local areas are already using the current common core effectively in induction, training, job descriptions and workforce development strategies. However, use has not been consistent across local areas or across sectors.

There will now be coordinated activity to encourage everyone in the children and young people's workforce – in every sector – to use the common core. The activity will also make sure the common core is built into the workforce strategies of every Children's Trust in England.

#### Project scope

To achieve these goals over three years, we have identified four strands of activity:

- 1 To provide an overarching national framework of communication activities and qualifications.
- 2 To coordinate activities that are tailored to the characteristics and needs of each sector.
- 3 To make sure the common core is included in the workforce strategy of every Children's Trust.
- 4 To monitor, review and evaluate activities to measure the impact of the project.

An overview of the key activities at national, sector and local level is provided in Figure 1 (page 16).

## 6 Figure 1: Getting everyone to use the common core



The strands of activity are all linked. The project will make sure there is coherence between these different strands.



“The team have come down to Sinead’s level but still treated her like an adult... I don’t know what we would have done without them.”

Mrs Hughes,  
mother and grandmother

Further information on the common core including a download of the refreshed common core can be found [here](#) >

The Children's Workforce Development Council leads change so that the thousands of people working with children and young people across England are able to do the best job they possibly can.

We want England's children and young people's workforce to be respected by peers and valued for the positive difference it makes to children, young people and their families.

We advise and work in partnership with lots of different organisations and people who all want the lives of all children and young people to be healthy, happy and fulfilling.

For more information please call **0113 244 6311**  
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