

Feedback from Practitioners  
**TCSW Phoenix**  
Grass roots responses

A report to:

THE COLLEGE OF  
**SOCIALWORK**  
The voice of social work in England

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*Personal portfolios	
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### Authors note

This report has been produced in short timescales alongside frontline work commitments and it should be noted at the outset that there will be some inaccuracies. The intention has been to give as far as possible, the voice of the grass roots practitioners who have responded so thoughtfully to enable the executive to hear their voice clearly. I ask you to accept any inaccuracies as my own and in the spirit of TCSW Phoenix acceptable, to enable practitioners voices to be rapidly heard.

Sally-ann Rodbourne.

## Introduction

This group started when a group of frontline practitioners were discussing our shock late Friday into Saturday. I asked a simple question "Can't we go a bit Kirk ( A star Trek reference see kobayashi maru) ?

What would it take to keep TCSW alive long enough to at least have a discussion about what we want to do?

I'd read that the College was about 15,000 short of the number of Members it needed to be a viable organisation, independent of Central Government funding. I was hearing people say - if I knew I would have joined.

So I asked them to commit - I wondered if I could get 15,000 people to pledge to join in 10 days. A question audacious enough to get the attention of some members of the Professional Assembly who promised to bring my petition to the attention of the Professional Assembly on Thursday if I could get the pledges by then.

By Sunday morning, it was clear that the response at about 200 was very far short of the target. I recognised that it is unlikely that the immediate closure could be prevented and moved to asking Social workers what they would like to see instead - what they value, what they want changed and if they even want a professional College?

A group of 170 interested parties, largely practitioners supported feedback to the College with detailed inputs to the debate. This enabled me to gauge the key drivers and issues.

From that, with support of early birds in the group, yesterday, I developed the survey that gathered wider views from over 260 people.

## 1. Aims and Objectives of TCSW Phoenix

My aim was twofold

- 1) To refuse to accept the power of central Government to effectively close our Professional body without us discussing it.
- 2) To keep TCSW alive long enough to at least have a discussion about what we want to do and rescue the most important bits if need be.

The group has not been in existence long enough to agree common aims, but I have made my position clear to all participants.

## Day 1 What's the question?

It's less than 48 hrs since a group of us were expressing our shock in the [Masked AMHP forum](#) and a lot has happened in 48hrs!

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So this morning (again with some wise and knowledgeable heads guiding) I started this group. I'm going to see if I can summarise at the end of a long day.

**The first thing** to say is that many from the various executive and advisory bodies of the old college are listening, supporting and wanting to hear your messages. There is a key meeting on Thursday and I am confident that the consensus from this group will have at least a mention.

**Secondly** the very clear message no-one can have missed is that the old college is just that. I haven't heard anything since I asked the question in the early hours of Saturday morning that suggests in any way that Business as Usual is an option for TCSW without fundamental and probably constitutional change.

What is more interesting to me is why - this is my sense of what I'm hearing Am I hearing correctly?:  
It's too late from a grass roots support point of view to keep the current college because of it's:  
\*Non-elected board  
\*Fear of upsetting Government  
\*Unclear role and poor communication to social workers and the general public about both the role of TCSW and about Social workers.

Finally - Here is **what has been said today - in your own words:**

Any College has to be Independent answering to members.

For me, this was summed up in these two very different but powerful messages:

\*The Task Force did not have in mind an organisation government, nor indeed the chief officers, could close.

\*We need to do this ourselves! We make change and positive outcomes happen for vulnerable people every day...We can make it happen for ourselves!

**After that the most popular view was:**

\*A college should Lead in being the face and the voice to stand up for practitioners in the media and public. Promoting a positive but professionally responsible and accountable viewpoint - social work defining itself to others in a clear coherent manner.

**A frequent message:**

\*College has a role to maintain The PCF & a clear CPD framework

These roles were mentioned in this forum by more than one person:

- \*Recommending standards for best practice working environments (e.g. workloads) will require proper buy in from LAs. Employer Standards exist but get lip service.
- \*Specialist networks (AMHP, MASH, IntakeChild protection etc) virtual and face to face Mentoring, meetings etc
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**Other roles for a College were identified as:**

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## Day 2 Discussion detail

### My summary of yesterday's discussion:

There were distinct themes -

- 1) Possibility of integration with BASW
- 2) Discussion re what's membership worth
- 3) Who controls the decision making Practitioner vs management/academic
- 4) Who does what and is it worth having a College.

Then there were some stand-alone comments that stood out:

- Concerned re a huge void at time when the profession needs direction and leadership more than ever.
  - Disregarding the economics, there are a lot of people who want to save something and that isn't a bad legacy in itself
  - We need to get involved. (Said in context of being member lead and in context of lack of grass roots comments on what is happening)
- And a view from 2 people corrected by 1 that the TCSW 'was neither wanted or needed' comment was made by Isabelle Trowler - actually from an unnamed Whitehall Source.

and some interesting contrasts:

"college needs to do more in terms of winning hearts and minds of social workers and if my radar is correct, I think there are many who have yet to see the real value"

Vs

"I have seen first hand how outputs from the college have translated into local policy and practice developments and for the benefit of people using services."

### 1) Possibility of integration with BASW Most supported this:

working with BASW for discounted membership for those who want to be a part of both and doing some joined up work.

BASW is a possibility - it has an infra structure, members and a UK based organisation.

But the challenges to this were clear in the differing positions of the voices of caution:

Re-imaging a relationship for TCSW with a union...it should also be possible for people to choose to join TCSW and not the partner union if they wish to... Otherwise I can see an ongoing dispute!

i chose not to join as i was unhappy with TCSW inability to co-work with BASW

personally there are reasons I'm not a member of BASW and that hasn't changed I think there's room to do something different

### 2) Discussion re what's membership worth

The vast majority felt "£10.00 is about right" [this was the most popular comment today] ... but ... you're talking to the converted/not sure about others.

Are there 2400 people who would pledge £100 now to allow legal trading to continue while decisions are made?

TCSW also needs to change if it's going to earn our cash!

I'd pay for a professional body like the RCN that got on the today program this morning and berated the government for it's unworkable policies ...but government knows it will still work to support the implementation of said unworkable policy... then once the time for fighting is done and policy has become law - [I want a professional body to] give me the best possible advice and support on how to do the impossible.

How much per person does 240k mean - not as simple as 2000 members @ £10/m need to consider overheads linked to the membership offer.

Wonder how much 'ploughed into' Frontline and Think Ahead

### 3) Who controls the decision making Practitioner vs management/academic

As well as comments about the purpose "college to stand up for practitioners"

today there were clear united views regarding control

...need it to be member/practitioner led/driven instead of management and academic led, they should be back up should we need it

The social work voice (ironically) has been underplayed in the College and would welcome a model that strengthened this. A professional college needs to achieve a balance between the expertise that

practicing social workers bring from the front line and the contributions from other stakeholders (such as academics and policy makers). I think that practicing social workers really value being listened to and are much more likely to engage with a professional college that is shaped by their expertise.  
Welsh experience - More respect and support for our work from Welsh assembly

#### 4) Who does what and is it worth having a College.

There were several comments well summarised by this one:  
Confused about the plethora of organisations involved in representing, certifying, designing accreditation etc. Between TCSW, Skills for Care, HCPC and the chief social workers, it's a mystery to me. So I join the organisations I understand - a union, BASW; and the ones I am obliged to join to maintain my registration - HCPC. confusing to have an organisation that is paid for by government and employers but is also asking for individual membership.  
we pay for HCPC and then professional body

This was contrasted by some discussion re double payments in most health professions e.g. Nursing (RCN and NMC) with costs given to illustrate

Professional orgs in a former career were one sole organisation that did all of those things. [union, regulation...]

A similar structure to the medical colleges,

A Deanery model for NQSWs - short attachments in the first 2/3 years pq training working closely with 'consultants'.

Leaders within TCSW have also shared their views:

- Geraldine Nosowska: adults faculty chair clear voice and influence on policy. the college's mission for social workers to lead their own professional development and ensure excellence, and for social workers to have a clear voice and influence on policy. This goes back to the SW Task Force.
- The Children's faculty chair was cited as want[ing] the college to continue but wants it rebranded.
- Ken Terry Board member: When I was elected to the Board two years ago the decision on our financial model had already been established...Although £240,000 appears a large sum of money if the majority of our members were willing to pledge £100 each we would easily meet this. The only problem is that we have only a week to do this...Legally the duty of the Board [with] insufficient funds we have to cease trading...Sadly we are fast reaching the point when we will be unable to pay our loyal and hardworking staff. My personal view is that the only viable option would be a merger with BASW provided they set up a separate charity distinct from their union.  
Staff are in the group - listening but not talking openly as staff yet today.



## Day 3 – Voice of TCSW Phoenix two questions many responses

The participants were asked two questions - a direct message from the frontline to today's decision makers.

They were asked, "Please would you make a post with one "magical wish" and at least one "message to the board of TCSW""

I'm afraid I have not been able to distill and summarise them yet – but here is the voice of the front line directly to you.

[ I am not sure I could distill it to one. Message to the Board is to be open and reflective so we can all learn from this process - however painful. My wish is that we encapsulate and don't lose this genuine desire to work together to sustain a voice for social work

[23 June at 20:23](#) · [Unlike](#) · [3](#)

Please keep going in whatever way is feasible..a professional body and perhaps professional training guidance and education resources and commission to local authorities for specialist tasks/training resources..

I see from further reading that Whitehaall dd not feel that our profession 'needed' a voice or support. In a climate of austerity that is a bad move because you need to engage those who are compassionate enough to keep going through challenge.

TCSW is something that has given us a voice and supports good outcomes for the people we work hard to support in a meaningful way.

[23 June at 20:35](#) · [Unlike](#) · [5](#)

Pre-eminent for me is the continued existence of the PCF which has helped to create competency/capability frameworks and it underpins social work education and by extension practice education. As a BIA for DOLS, I was also very pleased about the development by TCSW of the BIA capability framework...

[23 June at 20:48](#) · [Like](#) · [4](#)

I was gutted by the closure of the college

[23 June at 20:52](#) · [Unlike](#) · [1](#)

A magical wish - regional bodies, set up to promote social work in its local area, run by social workers and service users with the aim of a moving towards a pedagogical framework, utilising the common third. Each regional body will have an adult and child focused branch. The regional bodies will converse with an established central body, perhaps BASW, who will advocate on behalf of the profession. This will provide a space for social workers to organise themselves locally and nationally to share good practice as well as develop and promote the profession.

However the profession is doomed to remain disorganised due to a lack of practise wisdom on the frontline and demonisation of outspoken social workers. Social workers need to become structurally competent, whilst feeling confident to practice autonomously and challenge appropriately, to achieve this they need to feel supported to remain in the profession, on the front line. Perhaps regional body membership will achieve this?

[23 June at 21:10](#) · [Edited](#) · [Unlike](#) · [5](#)

I'm not a member because I'm a basw member. When I called tcsw it was unbearably hard work to get a straight answer to my relatively straightforward question (about membership packages and insurance amounts). Also insurance didn't cover enough for a few contracts I have.

[23 June at 21:10](#) · [Unlike](#) · [1](#)

have my own professional insurance but I would like to see the continuation of the framework.

[23 June at 21:23](#) · [Like](#) · [1](#)

An all UK body

[23 June at 23:04](#) · [Like](#) · [2](#)

The Scottish Gov. have some amazing ideas around social work practice

[23 June at 23:13](#) · [Unlike](#) · [2](#)

I hope that the PCF continues to function as the practice framework and I think it's very valuable to have a practice framework that can function across different areas of work. My wish would be to have a SW organisation that can be an umbrella groups with local groups under it (like the CAB is organised, for example), and where we can share practice wisdom in a more innovative way (eg. unconferences, 20x20 presentations, etc) and continue to include people who use services, carers, and providers with a view to explicitly encouraging microprovision and community based working. (And my other wish -- I wished for three wishes as my first wish - is for it to adopt an explicitly feminist organising principle.)

[Yesterday at 07:03](#) · [Edited](#) · [Like](#) · [3](#)

Co-production and a closer relationship with communities would seem to make a lot of sense particularly in the context scarce resources. People are incredible at coming up with creative solutions in meeting their needs if presented with the opportunity...[See More](#)

[Yesterday at 07:50](#) · [Like](#) · [1](#)

Protection and promotion of the PCF; local/regional groups with string links to centre/ one organisation (so prob BASW).

[17 hrs](#) · [Like](#)

[9 hrs](#) · [Like](#)

As a student, I did not feel I'd benefit from TCSW membership in my first year but thought about joining when in placement. Should students be encouraged to join from day 1? Should universities be members? I don't think mine is but individual members were. Should TCSW or other organisations be better represented in universities so that students really understand how they may benefit them in future?

[53 mins](#) · [Like](#)

My magical wish is for an organisation which:

- promotes high academic and practice standards (eg PCF)
- has a strong and critical media profile to counteract misrepresentation and vilification of SWs
- Is supportive of good employers and critical of bad ones that don't provide proper career structures, CPD frameworks & training, adequate study time etc
- Is member-led and reflects the views of front line SWs as well as academics
- Is a genuinely national organisation (maybe with a regional structure) rather than London-centric
- Is cheap enough to retain existing TCSW members and attract sufficient new ones.

I appreciate that getting all of these things may require miracles rather than mere magic, but you did ask.

As I've posted before, I didn't join TCSW and feel guilty for not doing so. I always meant to get around to it but never did. It felt like joining would be from a sense of duty to my profession rather than a need to be in it because it was so relevant or personally beneficial. From my Yorkshire base it seemed remote, London-centric, policy-driven and not at all like the exciting, campaigning, leadership body I envisaged from the SW Reform Board proposal.

## Day 4 Survey results:

269 participants responded to the following:

Q1 The College of social work is threatened with closure. Grass roots practitioners have made it clear it needs to change. Would you be willing to make a one off payment to allow it to close/change in a controlled way and to give enough time for members to keep ownership and control over the products and intellectual property of the college.

–Yes 65.30%175

–No 34.70%93

Average pledge (Mean and mode) was £50 (£47.69 mean)  
With one of “as much as it takes”

Q2 A joint venture with BASW is now being seriously considered. Do you agree with BASW and a College being under one umbrella organisation?

–Yes 81.78%220

–No 18.22%49

Some clarified the reason for the answer:

- 9 Join forces, united under one org
- 3 No but if it's the only option then yes
- 3 Umbrella org
- 2 Little confidence in BASW
- 2 No keep choice
- 2 Should always have been 1
- 1 BASW only College closes
- 1 BASW take over college ends
- 1 collaboration
- 1 Complementary
- Neither appears to represent me or voice out loud my
- 1 concerns.
- 1 Unsure

Q3 And one final question: What would you want to save from TCSW?

- 2
- 5 PCF
- 1
- 6 Want more outspoken professional representation/voice (Media attention)
- 1
- 3 ASYE
- represent the profession in the policy making arena Lobbying Challenge
- 7 Government, society and the profession
- 6 CPD
- 6 The Specialist Groups. Communities of interest
- 5 psw networks

- 5 Free of gov control especially key players need to be seen to be free of gov control
- 5 publications- papers / intellectual
- 4 career and progression info,
- 4 to be respected as other professions ( dr's nurses, teachers etc... )
- 4 More member lead e.g. The chief social worker role must be elected by social workers
- 3 advocates and represents SW especially in medically dominated field.
- 3 practice guidance,
- 2 Fact sheets on the web
- 2 different needs for independent SW's and LA SW's.
- 2 The social work values and principles
- 2 Post graduate certification
- 2 support to improve working conditions \*Pay
- 2 focal point for social workers, we seem to be losing our identity
- 1 Student support
- 1 academic focus
- 1 Research.
- 1 avoid duplication
- 1 More adult focus
- 1 mentoring
- 1 networking
- 1 Track CPD - Online Portfolio
- 1 insurance
- 1 Not London centric
  
- 1 The professional home....a place where we all belong and can grow and flourish
- 1 Athens password to journals.