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# Common Core Skills and Knowledge for the Children's Workforce

Draft three – 13<sup>th</sup> October 2004

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## Consultation Response

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***Please contact***

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The British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF Adoption & Fostering) is the leading charity and membership organisation in fostering and adoption in the UK, we:

- promote the highest standards of child-centred policies and services
- speak out on behalf of looked-after children
- influence UK-wide policy and legislation
- provide information and advice
- promote greater public understanding of adoption and fostering
- support our members in their work

BAAF's main activities are the development, promotion and advocacy of best policy and practice; the provision of advice and information to our members and to the general public; training, consultancy and seminars; child placement services including the publication of our flagship monthly newspaper, Be My Parent. We also publish a quarterly professional journal, Adoption and Fostering, books and guides for professionals, academics, parents and carers and research studies. The main users of our services are our members comprising local authorities across England, Scotland and Wales, voluntary adoption agencies, independent fostering agencies and also individual social work, legal and medical professionals and carers.

## FEEDBACK FORM –Draft Prospectus

Please return this form to [Common.Core@dfes.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Common.Core@dfes.gsi.gov.uk) by **13/10/04**

Each draft of the Prospectus can be accessed via the Common Core website at:  
<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/commoncore/ad.shtml>

### Introduction

BAAF is a multi-disciplinary membership organisation and draws on the perspectives of social workers, health professionals, including paediatricians and nurses, lawyers, researchers and academics, adoptive parents and foster carers and a range of other people with different perspectives. Having discussed this recent draft, while there are many aspects of it that are recognisable and important in identifying the way that different professionals and carers respond to and understand children, there was a serious concern about the objectives of this project and what it is intended to do.

Although the curriculum for professional trainings has developed over the years, the evolution towards a child or indeed a 'customer based perspective' has become increasingly important in all public sector professions. But this must be set within the context of the specific roles and responsibilities of the professional concerned. It would be cumbersome, inefficient and may even be dangerous for everybody who has professional contact with children to feel that they have a responsibility to assess a child's general development across a range of dimensions and to feel they have a responsibility to communicate effectively with children as though everybody was a counsellor to the child and to start to implement action to correct any problems, especially where they might be imprecisely perceived by the non specialist. This is not to say of course that a general level of concern for children and a need to action or raise concerns when children are at risk is not the responsibility of all professionals.

It is very difficult to see what this common curriculum adds to this process. Child care centred professions should have developed a core syllabus specific to their roles and responsibilities. This should contain an appropriately articulated set of value, knowledge and skill requirements which in practice are regulated by the appropriate professional body. Above all these should relate to the specific roles that these professionals occupy that enables them to responsibly and accountably discharge these responsibilities. The skill and knowledge requirements of paediatricians and paediatric nurses are different because their roles and responsibilities are different. Although there may be core components about the way they effectively communicate with children or understand their developmental needs these are determined in practice by the specific task that the professional is undertaking. While therefore it may be important for a 'looked after' children nurse offering sexual health counselling to flexibly relate to the needs of a young person with a drug habit or a ear infection, too much role flexibility may create confusion for the young person. A well trained, well supported professional will know how to set appropriate boundaries to their work and their contact with a young person and training may be a very important aspect of this. But it is very difficult to understand what part the 'common core' might play in this. At an early stage of professional development, the professional needs to learn and become competent in core task knowledge and skills. Advanced practitioner skills enabling appropriate and responsible extension into more complex tasks are precisely that – advanced. Indeed it is often one of the marks of the emergent professional to see too many tasks being undertaken, losing focus on the essential tasks and creating confusion

for both professional and patient in the process.

Setting an appropriate core knowledge and skill curriculum for any professional is a sensitive task which requires expertise from the professional body concerned. As the curriculum is set out here, many of the items are either of such complexity requiring detailed knowledge especially where they might be acted on or of a relatively common sense nature, that describing them in the way that they are here makes them more complex than they need be. Child development is either a highly complex field of study or a relatively straightforward one requiring 'common sense' sensitivity and empathy. Too many of these items have a 'sound bite' feel to them which may quickly unravel in the hands of the inexperienced or the poorly trained.

Similarly, teaching the wrong thing at the wrong time can be ineffective and potentially dangerous. The necessary debates about these important issues are not addressed in the introduction and there is no evidence from the professional bodies concerned about their views on what is proposed here and the wisdom of proceeding in this way.

It is also not clear in the section on 'What this means for you', what it actually does mean. Are social workers or medical or nursing students or lawyers going to find themselves being required to follow this syllabus? Will this be a pre-course requirement? Is it going to be 10 hours or 100 hours or more. How will it be examined and how will DfES ensure compliance by the professional or the higher education bodies?

There remains a significant question mark about the approach taken here. There is no doubt that there is a need to ensure that children have opportunities, services and resources that promote their development. There is no doubt that professionals need to develop and improve their understanding and skills in being 'child centred'. Above all, these are best met by parent/s who are well supported themselves, have the resources and opportunities they need and know who to turn to for help when they get into difficulty. Whether a generic training suggested here will or can achieve this has yet to be established.

## **The Six Headings**

### **Child and young person development**

### **Safeguarding children and protecting their welfare**

### **Effective communication and engagement**

<b>Supporting Transitions</b>
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<b>Multi Agency Working</b>
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<b>Sharing information</b>
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<b>Case Studies</b>
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<b>Case Study - Teacher</b>
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There are no case studies
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<b>Case Study – Police Officer</b>
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<b>Case Study - Childminder</b>
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<b>Case Study - Nurse</b>
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<b>Case Study – Voluntary Sector</b>
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<b>Case Study – Social Care</b>
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<b>Case Study – Bus Driver</b>
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<b>Glossary</b>
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**Other Comments**

**Overall feel of the Prospectus**