



OUR 2020 VISION

BASW has set out its vision for the next five years following consultation with members. Below, PSW outlines the responses from members that shaped this vision – one based on strength, independence, being a voice for the profession and promoting social work and social workers

A strong independent voice for social work and social workers' – that's what members told BASW they want from their professional association. They said they also want to feel supported, defended and part of a collective that promotes a feeling of professionalism with a strong commitment to those who use and need social work services. BASW members want to see negative perceptions of social work challenged; government and policymakers lobbied; ethical and good practice promoted; and education and training opportunities delivered.

The findings come from independent research carried out earlier this year to gain an understanding of the aspirations and priorities of the Association's membership. A draft statement of its vision and aims was welcomed at the Association's Annual General Meeting this year. Feedback from the AGM and a further consultation with members was taken into account in the final document, which is included with this month's *PSW*.

The vision is now being turned into a three-year business plan setting out how the Association will work to meet the aspirations of its members.

Nearly 2,400 members responded to the research. Asked to state their main reason for joining BASW, the top response was being part of an appropriate body for professional interests. The next priority was insurance, followed by being able to access advice and representation. Other popular reasons for joining were enhancing knowledge; strengthening social work's collective voice; helping to develop the profession and

accessing BASW's publications such as *PSW*, *Practice* and the *British Journal of Social Work*.

Reassuringly, the research found BASW members believe the Association is already doing some things well. It was rated highly as an independent voice for the profession and for promoting good practice founded on ethics and human rights. The Association was also praised for the support it provides through insurance and representation and advice.

Areas members felt the Association did not perform so well in were addressing negative perceptions/promoting a more positive view of the profession and lobbying government and policymakers.

Unsurprisingly, members said these two areas were the most important for BASW to focus on, followed by providing advice on professional issues and holding local and regional events and activities.

The research also asked members to state which practice issues they believe will be of biggest concern over the next five years.

The top response was excessive bureaucracy, followed by a target-driven culture and caseloads. Also featuring highly were recruitment and retention; being managed by other professionals and non-social workers doing social work tasks.

Structural issues expected to cause greatest concern over the next five years were reduced budgets and services; a lack of appreciation of the value of social work; privatisation of services and negative perceptions of social work.

You can read the full research findings at: www.basw.co.uk/vision

BASW's 2020 vision

Strong – We will build strength through unity of vision and purpose, and will strengthen the Association by increasing our membership, our services, and our influence across the four countries of the UK, in Europe and globally.

Independent – We will maintain our independence from governments and from employers in order to be able to act in the best interests of the profession.

Voice – We will ensure a strong voice in the media, and to governments and their agencies, in order to speak up for social work and social workers, and for all people and groups who use social work services, and will campaign and lobby in order to have the best possible influence on policy, legislation and practice.

Social work – We will ensure that the profession retains ownership of its values, ethics, knowledge, education and practice, and we will defend, develop and strengthen social work as a unique profession rooted in social justice and respect for human dignity and worth.

Social workers – We will provide professional advice, support for practice, and training and development opportunities, and represent and defend social workers individually and collectively.

A profession united

Included with this issue of *PSW* you will find the Association's newly agreed 2020 Vision and aims for the future, a strategy for the next five years created in close consultation with members and founded on the Code of Ethics enshrining the values and principles of our profession.

You will see that our ambition is to be “a strong independent voice for social work and social workers”, something which we hope is cause for hope and optimism for the future when it is most needed.

For a strong and independent voice for our profession has never been more necessary than today. Not just in England, where the closure of The College of Social Work has come as a hammer blow on top of reports of low morale, savage austerity measures and an increasingly target driven direction for statutory services, but across all the countries of the UK.

Identity

We are a profession united by our Code of Ethics and by our stand against austerity and the denial of human dignity and rights. We are united with the international community of social work, through our membership of the International Federation of Social Workers.

BASW's diverse country and regional membership base is a huge strength. It means we can and do draw on a wide range of experiences working with very different administrations, parliaments and assemblies across Britain to strengthen social work's identity and influence.

In each of these countries, austerity is leaving its mark and endangering human rights and human dignity. In each of these countries we seek to ensure the voice of social work is heard.

Independent

A strong, independent and ethically-driven member-led professional association is what our members told us they want and is what we aim to deliver over the coming years. We look to our members and to the wider community of social work to help us achieve that.

We take no joy in the demise of The College. It is a brutal blow to the aspirations and efforts of all those who have worked so hard in building this social work organisation.

But there is no doubt that the withdrawal of government support for this model of professional association represents an opportunity to finally bring to an end a period of division and dispute within social work in England.

We now have an opportunity to unite around protecting and promoting the values and ethics and professional practice that we all support.

BASW emerged wounded from the failed merger discussions with The College and needed to embark on some serious reflection about its future. The Association experienced internal divisions and quite public fall-outs as a response to the existential threat posed by the development of The College.

Stronger

But despite the enormous strains, BASW has emerged from this stormy period stronger, more mature, and united. We have a growing membership and are financially viable. We have reflected and we have learned. We are living proof that self-reliance, and a member focus rather than government patronage and funding is a more sustainable base for protecting and promoting social work.

So in many ways it is no coincidence that

BASW is now able to launch its newly agreed 2020 Vision. We believe this vision – based on continuing to strengthen our independence and our voice – will have resonance with our members and many others beyond. Growing our membership means stronger representation for social work and social workers. It gives social work and social workers a stronger voice and it is clear from government announcements and actions since the election how much this voice is needed. Our strength and independence is increased by the greater income that ensures our financial stability and viability. So we wish to encourage not only those who have been members of The College, but all social workers across the UK to consider joining their member-led professional association.

In unity is strength and we need the widest contribution from all areas of social work to realise our common ambitions. Together, we now have an opportunity to build a better future for social work.

Let's make sure we use it.

Guy Shennan (BASW Chair)

Maggie Mellon (BASW Vice Chair)

Luke Geoghegan (Chair, BASW Finance & Human Resources Committee)

Bridget Robb (Chief Executive, BASW)

