

Scottish Executive Response to the Report of the  
21st Century Social Work Review

changing

lives



**changing**

**lives**

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Peter Peacock  
Minister for Education and  
Young People

# foreword

Social workers undertake some of the most demanding tasks society asks of any group of staff. Very often their work goes unseen and unrecognised. Too often the only time we hear of social workers is on those occasions where, among the many things that go right, something has gone tragically wrong. Over many years, society has come to expect more of social work and has asked social work to do more. Local authorities have been key to delivering social work services over many years and they have operated increasingly with a range of other providers in the public, private and voluntary sectors and with users of services and carers. Their task has been complex and demanding but, since the mid 1960s, some forty years ago, when the foundations of today's social work services were laid, there has not been a considered overview or examination of how social work was performing and whether it was equipped to meet the challenges and expectations placed upon it. For many within social work and more widely there is great uncertainty about future direction and a lack of confidence amidst rising public expectations and growing complexity of need.

It was in recognition of the need to reflect on current performance and future direction, to bring fresh clarity and purpose to social work, that Ministers commissioned the 21st Century Review of Social Work. We invited a review

group of highly experienced practitioners from within social work and the other professions and sectors with which modern social work interacts to report to Ministers. William Roe was invited to chair and lead the deliberations of the group and I am grateful to him for providing the leadership we sought. The group have taken over a year to complete their task, during which time they have engaged widely with the profession and stakeholders and published an interim report as a basis for seeking further views and refining their findings and proposals to Ministers.

I very much welcome the findings of the 21st Century Social Work Review. The review group have responded to their challenging brief with a commendable clarity of vision for the future of social work services in Scotland. I would like to thank them for the rigorous and participative approach to their work, which has produced such clear and persuasive conclusions. I would also like to thank the many hundreds of people from varied backgrounds who have participated in the work of the review for their openness and honesty about both the strengths and the weaknesses of social work.

The review has clearly told Ministers that the current approach and the responses we collectively make to ever growing demands are unsustainable. This is a stark finding and the report

not only provides us with the opportunity and an exciting agenda for change, it places an obligation upon us to drive and facilitate change.

*Changing Lives* sets out a compelling vision of the future of social work services in Scotland and some clear but challenging actions that will be required to make that vision a reality. I was particularly keen to signal our support for the review group's findings and the direction of travel they envisage with an early response that accepts the findings in principle and builds upon the consensus for change that I believe the review has developed over the last year. Considering the full implications of the report's recommendations will obviously take longer and will need to engage many stakeholders at national and local levels. We will do this over coming weeks and months and we will set out a further and more detailed response later in the year in the form of an implementation plan to drive the changes envisaged.

Our commitment to put the needs of the people and communities who rely on social work services first will require changes across the public sector. The report of the review recognises and deals with this challenge very effectively, setting out an overall package of reforms which I welcome as both challenging, yet achievable. Throughout the period of the review, an ad hoc sub-committee of the Cabinet has kept closely in touch with its progress, ensuring that portfolio ministers making the primary policies affecting social work have been directly engaged. This group will now evolve into a Cabinet Delivery Group overseeing the implementation

of change, demonstrating our cross Executive commitment to the development of social work. Local authorities will remain at the heart of future service delivery. I am committed to working with them and their partners in the public, voluntary and private sectors, who they will work ever more closely with, to deliver change.

Among the many recommendations we will act on and which arise from this report, I will highlight at this stage the following actions we will take forward as being particularly important. We will:

- establish a system for setting national priorities in social work services as the basis of providing clarity of purpose and prioritising future action;
- deliver a culture of continuous improvement in service delivery through a new performance improvement framework;
- establish a rolling process for driving social work service redesign at the local level on an inter-agency basis;
- invest in developing the leadership the profession will need into the future;
- strengthen the role of the Chief Social Work Officer and emphasise a responsibility for professional leadership and governance;
- create the framework and support for front line social workers to have more devolved authority and operate more autonomously within an accountable framework;
- support the creation of new opportunities for skilled front line

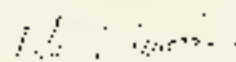
social workers to remain in front line practice for their whole career;

- encourage the development of a new para-professional role to work under the direction of social workers and equipped to work across professional boundaries, promoting joined up working;
- ensure that people who use services and their carers have ever greater choice and involvement in decisions about their own care and the design and delivery of services, through new approaches to the co-production of services;
- expect our universities and colleges to work together and with stakeholders to review current programmes of education and training to ensure they equip our next generation of workers with the skills they will need to meet the demands of modernised practice and that our universities and colleges are active participants in the change process;
- legislate to give Ministers and Parliament powers in setting national priorities and the performance improvement framework and provide a new foundation for social work services based on improving personal and community wellbeing;
- deliver additional resources to support the change process following further consideration of a detailed

implementation plan and steer required changes in a co-ordinated way through a Cabinet Delivery Group of key Ministers.

The publication of the report and the outline of actions above is only the start in turning the review group's aspirations into reality. A reality that needs to engage the hearts and minds of all of those working in social work services. Above all, it needs to make a real and measurable difference to those people who use services, whether out of choice or because they are compelled to do so. *Changing Lives* gives us a unique opportunity to make fundamental and lasting change in social work. That goal can be achieved by supporting change and making full and effective use of all of the £2.4 billion that we spend every year on social work services.

Social work needs to be back on a sustainable course, as part of a whole public sector approach to meeting the needs of Scotland's most vulnerable individuals, families and communities. The actions set out in this response will ensure we can achieve that outcome and I invite all those with a role to play to embrace the challenges with enthusiasm and confidence.



Peter Peacock  
Minister for Education and Young People

# introduction

*The 21st Century Social Work Review* was commissioned at a time of great uncertainty about the future direction of social work services, illustrated by a lack of clarity and confidence amidst rising public expectations and growing complexity of need, punctuated by a series of critical reports following tragic incidents. The review has given a much clearer understanding of the context in which social work finds itself in the early 21st century and how to make better use of the significant resources that society invests in social work.

*Changing Lives* has told us very clearly that **“more of the same won’t work”**, that our current approach to the delivery of social work services in Scotland is unsustainable. Despite the undoubtedly excellent work and commitment of local authorities and many people across the country, it is obvious from the review group’s report and the wide range of evidence that underpins it that we are not consistently doing the right things well. As a result:

- we are not making the most effective use of our skilled social workers;
- we have a social work profession lacking confidence in itself, with uncertainty about its role and a lack of sufficient attention to development over many years;
- high profile service failures have led to tragedy and consequently driven services to a more risk averse culture than that needed;
- services have become over managed, yet under led, limiting and

constraining the practice and autonomy of social workers at the front line and acting as a barrier to people receiving the type of help and support that they need, when they need it;

- there is not sufficient focus on achieving clear outcomes for people, with the result that too much effort is placed on processes and not enough on securing outcomes; and
- there is insufficient clarity about priorities and under-developed performance improvement systems.

Addressing these challenges will not be easy. Social work services need to transform themselves through a major programme of cultural change and service re-design. It will require the active commitment of all with an interest in social work services and strong, enabling leadership both nationally and locally. This response sets out the foundations of that change programme. It does not attempt to give a point by point analysis of the recommendations set out in *Changing Lives*. Instead it sets out our long-term aspirations for services and outlines the six main pillars of our proposed change programme.

We propose to spend the next few months in further dialogue with local authorities and other key stakeholders considering the detail of the review’s recommendations and how they may be taken forward, before publishing a full implementation plan later in the year.

# The Future Direction of public services

The recommendations set out in *Changing Lives* set social work services squarely in the context of the whole delivery of public services. Our aspirations, set out in *Partnership for a Better Scotland (2003)* and amplified in subsequent policy, make it clear that we expect to see a whole system approach to the design and delivery of services that puts the people who use them at the centre and which focuses on prevention rather than crisis management. *Changing Lives* highlighted these three aspirations in the context of social work very clearly. Our long term goal in setting out the foundations of our change programme is to ensure that services are:

- delivered as part of a whole joined up system;
- personalised to meet the needs of the people who use them and their carers; and
- focused on prevention and early intervention rather than crisis management.

## Enabling a whole system approach

The current and future needs and aspirations of individuals, families and communities will only be met if we can bring to bear the expertise and capacity of the whole system. We need to be sure that every part of the system plays its role and properly articulates with every other part. Many of our top priorities, such as improving health, tackling crime and anti-social behaviour, creating an entrepreneurial culture, and regenerating our most deprived communities, cannot simply be 'delivered' by one agency. Public service delivery models need, increasingly, to reflect a more diverse and individualistic society with changing aspirations and expectations.

Integration of services around the needs of groups of users is a central theme in policy across the Executive. The *Joint Future* approach seeks to integrate health and social care staff. *Integrated Community Schools* have acted as a

catalyst for change in the way schools work with other agencies around the needs of the school population. The creation of *Community Justice Authorities* will bring together social work, prison service and other local authority services, promoting a more integrated approach to reducing re-offending. At a structural level we have sought to achieve co-terminosity between local authorities and community health partnerships where possible, enabling effective partnership on the ground and creating the opportunity through community planning to develop services around the distinctive needs of local communities.

Nevertheless, despite all of this progress, the review's findings chime with concerns from many other parts of the system. The lack of common boundaries make effective planning difficult. A plethora of plans focuses too much attention on the plan and not enough on making it happen. Different governance and funding streams make joint working unnecessarily difficult, leading to duplication of effort and reporting arrangements don't focus enough on outcomes and thus don't promote whole system working.

We need, therefore, to find new ways of delivering public services to Scotland's most vulnerable people. We've learnt a lot already about what is needed through joint inspection of child protection arrangements. The development of integrated children's service plans and proposals set out in *Getting it Right for Every Child*, will

take this further, requiring new ways and new levels of integrated working. These approaches allow us to concentrate effort and expertise where it is most needed and make the best use of expertise. They are at the heart of our current thinking on public sector reform. The findings of the review will help shape further thinking about how best to fashion the optimal structures and processes for effective delivery of social work services.

#### **Developing personalised services**

In *Partnership for a Better Scotland* (2003), we set out a commitment to ensure that "*public services are designed and delivered around the needs of individuals and the communities within which they live*". Personalisation of public services, to better match the needs and aspirations of the people who use them, underpins much of current and developing public services policy. It is an entirely positive and unstoppable trend and one which services must embrace through developing greater diversity and flexibility of provision, re-focusing the roles and skills of workers and developing the expertise of the individuals and families who need help.

Personalisation is not a new trend, we can already demonstrate significant reductions in people in institutional care, with individuals far exceeding our expectations of their ability. However, it is clear that the principle of personalisation needs increasingly to be the philosophy on which social work services are founded. In effect

that will mean:

- a far greater emphasis on self assessment and self managed care;
- increased recognition of the role of unpaid carers;
- mobilisation of community resources;
- more involvement of people who use services and their carers in designing and developing services;
- increased choice and flexibility in service delivery; and
- the efforts of skilled professionals being increasingly focused on supporting those people who are unable to exercise choice. In particular we need to understand the implications of personalised approaches for those people who are subject to statutory interventions, balancing the tensions between choice and control.

*Delivering for Health* addresses some similar themes, such as the development of expert service users, the importance of unpaid carers, the need to develop anticipatory care services and the need to streamline access to services. This creates substantial potential for synergy around implementation. We need to take further the principles of personalisation and try out new applications in the delivery of social work services using the learning to inform wider policy and practice developments across the whole public sector.

### Shifting the focus to prevention

For social work to play its proper role in both preventing problems and intervening earlier to address them, it is vital that it is properly connected to other professions and agencies. The intervention triangle set out in *Changing Lives* emphasises the need to properly articulate and manage these relationships. *Getting it Right for Every Child* emphasises the need for all agencies to collaborate in supporting children in need. Similarly, *Delivering for Health* recognises the need for prevention and anticipatory care services and *Scotland's Criminal Justice Plan* emphasises the need to develop safer stronger communities through reducing re-offending. Successfully delivering all of these policy goals will require social work to contribute to a joined up approach to prevention, ensuring that people get the right help when they need it.

Of course there is still a need to get better at prevention, to understand what works and apply it consistently, to target effort at some of the most persistent problems in society allied with approaches to some of the big issues, for example, tackling poverty and improving parenting skills. We recognise that none of this will be easy, nor will it produce quick results. Service re-design and integrated work with health, education, police and early years will enable joined up approaches to prevention. Over time, our approach to public sector reform and the development of shared outcomes for services will help shift effort towards prevention.

# A Change Programme for social work services

Social work services need to play a full and active part in delivering our vision for public services as a whole. They need to be part of a joined up approach, which really puts service users and their carers at the centre and which focuses on preventing crises rather than managing them. The recommendations set out in *Changing Lives* gives us a framework to drive forward that change.

Our proposals for delivering that change are based on six key pillars:

- national priorities and a focus on performance improvement driven by achieving the right outcomes;
- transforming services and the way they are delivered;
- a strong, autonomous and accountable social work profession;
- a capable, well prepared and supported workforce;
- a new approach to practice governance that promotes excellence and organisational learning; and
- enabling and empowering leadership at all levels.

## **A focus on performance improvement**

We propose to develop national priorities for social work services. This will allow all service providers to focus on an agreed set of goals. The performance improvement frameworks and national priorities will allow everyone to focus on what really matters. It will also allow us to review and rationalise data collection requirements as part of our approach to efficient government and provide a basis for working with regulators to reduce the inspection burden on services.

At the heart of our change programme is a new focus on performance improvement, driving up standards and ensuring that services are focused on achieving the right outcomes for the people who use them and their families and carers. This approach has already delivered real improvements in the education sector, reflected in the *Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act (2000)* and the learning from this has informed the thinking of the working group developing the framework for social work services.

The performance improvement framework for children and families services, based on our aspirations for children, is now almost complete. Work is underway on developing performance improvement frameworks for other areas of social work services. The new frameworks will drive up standards and develop a focus on performance improvement across the sector, while streamlining business processes and significantly reducing the number of existing performance indicators. Performance against them will form part of reporting by Chief Social Work Officers.

Achieving improvements in performance across the whole sector is a significant challenge. It will require a change of culture across social work services, with everyone having a role to play. Social work education providers in particular will have a vital role in ensuring that their students are committed and equipped to continuously improve their performance.

### Transforming services and the way they are delivered

Delivering services that are more personalised around the needs of the people who use them and which are able to deliver the sorts of outcomes we require of them will not be a quick or easy option. It will require new approaches to service design, commissioning and performance assessment. It will require strong accountable professionals and a well informed, competent workforce. Commitment will be needed at all levels to the principles set out in *Changing Lives*, as will the capacity to make real and lasting changes across social work and partner agencies. Developing that capacity will require greater acknowledgement of the contribution that the private and voluntary sector can make through new approaches to commissioning and more imaginative management of the market.

The capacity to deliver change on such a scale is limited and we need new capacity in both skills, people and resources to support the change process. We therefore propose to invest support and resources in developing new approaches and managing the process of lasting change. That will include:

- developing, with stakeholders, new approaches to commissioning which make most effective use of the knowledge and expertise or all partners; and
- supporting the change process through new investment in service re-design, bringing additional expertise and capacity to bear to support local change, test out new approaches and promote good practice and shared learning through interactive networks.

### A strong, autonomous and accountable social work profession

Changing Lives concluded that “*social workers’ skills are highly valued and increasingly relevant to the changing needs of society. Yet we are far from making the best use of these skills*”. An essential pillar of our change programme therefore will be to strengthen the profession, ensuring that social workers have the confidence and competence to address the increasingly complex needs of society’s most vulnerable people.

A strong accountable and autonomous profession is vital to our aspirations for social work. Social workers need to be equipped to fulfil a challenging role, helping people to change their lives, to open up choices and help raise aspirations. Service users should be encouraged and supported to break out of, rather than accepting or being locked into, their current circumstances wherever that is achievable. Social workers need to be confident to make constructive use of authority to

promote change when it is in the best interests of the individual or community. Transforming the delivery of services will require the efforts of social workers to be focused on doing those things that they are best equipped to do, enabling experienced workers to develop and expand their careers without moving out of practice and developing a strong focus on research and development to inform effective practice. It will also require social workers to be clear about their personal professional accountability for their actions and be supported to practise more autonomously.

The change programme will include:

- setting out in regulation the protected functions of the social worker, ensuring that we have clarity about those things that legislation requires only social workers to do and providing a strong foundation for more effective joint working and skill mix;
- developing, with local authorities, the Scottish Social Service Council and other stakeholders, a career structure for social workers, that provides a range of career options in practice and leadership. This will make sure that professionals are able to follow practice based careers that offer variety and progression while continuing to use their skills to help people;
- developing, with the Scottish Institute for Excellence in Social Work Education and partners, a

strategy for research and development that not only strengthens the evidence base for effective practice, but also develops the research capability of the workforce and provides practical resources for front line staff, allowing them to base their practice on the best available evidence. An early priority for this work will be evidence based approaches to risk assessment and management; and

- developing, with the Scottish Social Service Council, a clear framework of professional accountability for social workers.

#### **A capable, well prepared and supported workforce**

Developing social workers and other professionals in the social service workforce as accountable, autonomous practitioners will undoubtedly require a culture shift. It is an approach that we fully endorse and which is entirely in line with our commitment in *Partnership for a Better Scotland (2003)* to devolve decision making to the most local level and empower front line staff to take decisions wherever practical. Taking this forward will require investment in developing the whole workforce, building a learning culture and supporting learning for practice at all levels, making sure that everyone has the necessary skills to fulfil their roles. It will require the devolution of decision making and the right mix of skills in teams to ensure that best use is made of everyone's expertise.

In November 2005, we published the *National Strategy for the Development of the Social Service Workforce in Scotland 2005-2010: a Plan for Action*. The findings of the review and its recommendations are wholly in line with the actions set out in the strategy which will make a real difference to the capability and confidence of the workforce. We have already committed to implement the strategy and will ensure that the two strands of work are taken forward together. This will include:

- identifying and developing new specialist programmes, high quality educational resources to support them and supporting flexible methods of delivery; and
- additional investment to support learning and development for social service workers, promoting the development of new skills, professional autonomy and high standards of practice.

Developing the capability of the workforce will require all involved in the education and training of the social service workforce to ensure that their teaching and learning embraces the ambitious agenda for social work services set out in *Changing Lives*. Scotland's universities and colleges

have a vital role to play in shaping the workforce needed now and in the future, equipping them with the skills they will need as well as contributing to the broader vision of social work services. A critical first step will be for universities and colleges engaged in the learning and development of the social service workforce to work together and with stakeholders in reviewing their current programmes to ensure that they contribute fully to the change programme.

Making effective use of professional skills will require the right mix of skills and support in teams. As *Changing Lives* highlights, much professional time is currently taken up with work that doesn't require their level of expertise. We will therefore develop the concept of the paraprofessional worker working alongside and under the direction of social workers, with a common set of competencies and job profile, that articulate with other professions and agencies, producing workers who are capable of working across boundaries. Paraprofessionals will have a vital role in balancing the mix of skills in teams and ensuring we make best use of professional social worker time and expertise.

**A new approach to practice governance that promotes excellence and organisational learning**

Strong, autonomous and accountable professionals will challenge traditional approaches to the ways that services are organised and managed, requiring

a shift away from traditional line management arrangements towards more empowered front line workers. Because there is inherent risk in any decision taken by social workers, organisations will need new approaches to governance, based on devolution of decision making and clear accountability of workers, backed up by proper professional support a strong culture of individual and organisational learning and a commitment to promoting excellence.

We welcome the fresh approach to practice governance taken by the review. Making this concept work will require new approaches, changed management arrangements and skills development across the system. Over time, we anticipate that the combination of devolved responsibility and new governance arrangements will produce efficiencies in management costs that can be reinvested to support front line practice audit, education and organisational learning. However, it won't be achieved easily or quickly. We will therefore invest in developing new systems and approaches to practice governance, working with partners to develop and implement new guidance. As part of that work we are committed to re-defining and strengthening the role of the Chief Social Work Officer, with an emphasis on professional leadership and governance, whatever the management structure may be.

We will also develop, with key stakeholders, a toolkit to support devolution of authority and decision making to front line staff, learning from existing good practice and promoting safe and effective decision making within a devolved system.

### **Enabling and empowering leadership at all levels**

Effective, visionary leadership will undoubtedly be needed at every level in order to turn the aspirations of the review into real and sustainable change. The need for effective leadership has been recognised across the public service, with creative approaches being developed and deployed in health, education and police sectors. The review's acknowledgement of the similar challenges being addressed across the public sector creates the opportunity to find new approaches to developing leaders and champions for social work at all levels of the system. We have already seen the major impact of the Leading to Deliver programme, funded by the Executive and delivered in partnership with the Scottish Leadership Foundation. The programme has promoted innovation and creativity and developed a cohort of champions across social work services. We now need to expand both the scope of leadership development and the scale of such development. We will therefore develop a new leadership framework that articulates with those across other public services and encompasses leadership at all levels. We will use this as a basis for extensive leadership development activity within social work services.

The quality and clarity of contribution to the review from the users and carers panel in particular underlines the vital contribution that people who use services and their carers can and should make to the design and delivery of services. We recognise the good work that many providers already do to engage service users in shaping services. However, we agree with the review's conclusion that delivering truly personalised services will require a new approach, developing citizen leadership alongside professional leadership. We will develop this approach further, in partnership with the Scottish Consortium for Learning Disability, and support its implementation across social work services, ensuring that people who use services and their carers have a strong voice in the way that they are designed and delivered.

#### **Driving the change process**

Achieving the transformation in social work services to which we aspire will not be easy or quick. The change will need to be owned and led both locally and nationally and will need to engage people at all levels and in all parts of the system. This will include:

- at Cabinet level, a Cabinet Delivery Group of key Ministers will oversee the change programme, ensuring the active engagement of portfolio Ministers and a strong impetus for change;
- a National Social Work Services Forum will be established, chaired by the Minister for Education and Young People. This will bring together practitioners, leaders, policy makers and academics from social work and partner agencies to take a lead on the development of

social work. This forum will help to influence and direct the type of whole system change envisaged by the review;

- tight programme management arrangements will be established for each workstream, managed by the Social Work Services Policy Division and engaging people from across the sector, overseen by a small steering group;
- a variety of regional and national networks will bring together partner agencies to develop new approaches and share learning around key strands of the change programme;
- at local level practitioner fora in each local authority area will ensure that front line practitioners across public, private and voluntary sectors have a real voice in shaping practice. A national forum will create, for the first time, a direct means for front line practitioners to have an influence on the development of policy and practice. They will be charged with organising an annual conference as a celebration of practice; and
- underpinning all of this, the Social Work Inspection Agency will play a crucial role in leading social work practice, ensuring that inspection processes drive change at local level.

The Executive will support the whole change process with additional funding.

### **Legislating to embed change**

*Changing Lives* has set out a compelling need to change the direction of social work services, making them fit to face future challenges and demands. The review is a watershed in the development of Scottish social work. Many regard the 1968 Social Work (Scotland) Act as the birth of social work as we know it today. Modern legislation will ensure that we provide a new foundation for future service delivery, consolidating change across the whole system. It will mark social work's coming of age as a mature profession, focusing services on promoting wellbeing, rather than the more paternalistic welfare model underpinning current legislation. We will take forward further discussion within the Executive and with interested parties on the scope and shape of any new legislation in the wider context of public service reform.

It will be particularly important for any new social work legislation to:

- shift the focus from the language of welfare to that of wellbeing, recognising the partnership between individuals and the state and reflecting new principles of personalised services, while recognising the compulsory nature of some practice;
- embed national priorities and performance improvement arrangements, ensuring that services are focused on the right outcomes, backed by a culture of performance improvement;
- set out new governance arrangements for social work, which ensure a proactive, systematic approach to managing risk and promoting excellence;
- enshrine the role of service users and carers in the design and delivery of services, through the development of citizen leadership programmes; and
- position social work services within the context of wider public services reforms.

# next steps

This response to *Changing Lives: The report of the 21st Century Social Work Review* sets out the Scottish Executive's broad agreement with the findings of the review along with outlining a change programme to take forward the development of social work services in the context of wider public sector reform. We have chosen to give an early response in recognition of the need for change and the broad consensus of opinion behind it. It is by no means exhaustive, but creates the capacity for early change to start, while engaging stakeholders in shaping the detail of that change and enabling more detailed consideration of the implications of the review's recommendations.

Over the coming months, there will be extensive dialogue with all interested parties on the detailed implications of the review's findings. This will inform a full implementation plan, which will in effect form the second stage of the Executive's response, to be published later in the year. The plan will include detailed funding proposals, outcome measures and performance monitoring arrangements.



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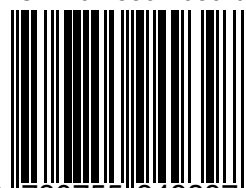
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