Into the Workforce

*Report from a study of
new social work graduates
Funded under the
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FRONTISPIECE

The newly qualified are the practitioners of today, the supervisors and educators of tomorrow and the managers and employers of the future. In deciding to examine separately the perceptions of new graduates as to the fit of their professional education to their tasks and then the responses and opinions of managers and employers as to the appropriateness of their new employees' preparedness for their roles, it has proved possible to quickly identify the points of agreement and those of (disagreement). (I hope) the disparities will be studied to consider how bridges might be built to span the divides. Service users and carers deserve (this) attention to help make even better a profession that is clearly growing and moving forward as a result of the hard work being put into expanding the training preparation of its new recruits.

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I SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Chapter 1: Current social work jobs

- While two-thirds of first-year graduates have found social work jobs, quite a high proportion (c. 15%) are still looking for a job in social work some months after graduating – before the public sector cuts beginning to take effect in 2010 and since.

- More than four out of five graduates not currently working in social work express an intention to take up employment in social work in the future. There is thus no evidence of qualifying in social work 'just to get a degree'.

- Many new graduates are going straight into child protection (CP) work; that is where many vacancies are. But not all graduates have CP experience, because the number of relevant practice placement opportunities for students is limited. CP cases used to be regarded in the past as too complex for newly qualified social workers to handle effectively, until they had accumulated experience in lower-risk cases.

- Over half of first-year graduates employed in social work expect to stay with their current employer for at least the next two years. A quarter expect to start looking for another job within the next two years, and around one in ten are already looking. While not a perfect predictor of the future, intentions to leave do provide a guide to actual job-changing. Not having supportive colleagues influences propensity to look for another job most strongly, apart from graduates wanting to move from the private/voluntary sector into statutory social work.

- Line managers identify several factors affecting retention:
  - social work is often a difficult job;
  - reserves of personal resilience are needed to cope successfully;
  - capacity problems in social work teams can lead to high workloads and a lack of support;
  - poor quality managers.

Chapter 2: Working life

- Job satisfaction (enjoyment) is high (80%+).

- However, job satisfaction depends to some extent on job-related factors, particularly:
    - Values (ability to put their social work values into practice, and transmit them to others)
    - Job engagement (a mix of wanting to learn, and emphasis on the wishes of service users and carers)

  Having a manageable workload has a much smaller effect on job enjoyment, or on retention.

- The impact of graduates' beliefs about how well they are able to put their own values into practice, and transmit them to others, on job enjoyment and other measures may be a surprise. But this fits well with the strong and pervasive altruistic motivations of most students and graduates towards the social work profession, and implies that more attention in managing caseloads to facilitate the way individual workers' practice accords with social work values would reap rewards.

- Only half of first-year graduates are satisfied with the amount of contact time with service users and carers; considerably lower than student satisfaction on this measure (c.80%) with practice placements. Graduates in Children's services are even less satisfied with contact time.

Chapter 3: Support in the workplace

- Graduates generally rate highly the supportiveness of both their colleagues, and their line manager. Supportiveness affects job enjoyment.

- A third of new graduates report having no induction, and these are slightly more likely NOT to be enjoying their job.

- Supervision frequency falls short of the recommended once a month, especially in the second year of employment (22% less than once a month). There is some evidence of less frequent supervision being associated with job-changing.

- The content of supervision is dominated by management oversight of cases, with development opportunities less prominent.

- What graduates would most want their supervision to cover more is help in applying theory to practice, followed by reflection and self-awareness. Their attitudes towards theory are mixed, suggesting insufficient explicit attention being given to its application in normal working life, by managers, supervisors or indeed fellow workers.

- Training is both widely available, and appreciated, though how well it is geared to the development needs of new graduates is uncertain.

- The prevalence of Personal Development Plans (PDPs) almost doubled between the two first-year graduate cohorts (2008: 32%; 2009: 61%). This increase may be attributable to the introduction of CWDC's and Skills for Care's NQSW Frameworks, which emphasise PDPs to employers as a good tool for planning training and development activity.

- Line managers describe a range of support strategies for new graduates:
  - extra, more frequent supervision
  - reduced caseloads
  - shadowing of more experienced workers
  - allocating less complex cases
  - joint working with more senior social workers on more difficult cases

- But it is clear that being able to deploy these fully would depend on current workloads. Neither peer supervision nor practice observation seem very prevalent.

- Among the learning and development methods and activities reported by new graduates themselves, shadowing and co-working cases occur most frequently, and all are generally rated quite highly.

Chapter 4:   Readiness to practise

- Three-quarters of first-year graduates feel well prepared for their present job by their degree studies. However, this is strongly affected by perceptions of their jobs – specifically Values and Job Engagement (see definitions above).

- This key finding implies that to focus on the content of qualifying degree programmes to improve new social workers' 'readiness to practise' is over-simplistic; aspects of the working environment also need attention.

- Job satisfaction is also closely linked with graduates' beliefs about preparedness: six times as many of those who feel unprepared are <u>not</u> enjoying their job (33%) in comparison with the small minority among those feeling they have been well prepared who are not enjoying their job (only 5%).

- Service users above all want social workers to demonstrate empathy and responsiveness, especially in times of crisis – including effective inter-agency liaison.

- Directors' overall satisfaction with the quality of their newly-qualified social workers has risen since the degree was introduced: rising to over half in Children's services and to more than two-thirds in Adults. Directors in Children's services seem consistently less satisfied than Directors in Adult services, and keener on specialist Childcare qualifying programmes.

- There is considerable agreement between employers and social work educators about the skills, knowledge and qualities required by graduates, in particular: interpersonal relationships, communication skills, analytical abilities, and values.

- Employers, however, seem to be looking for functionally ready workers needing little help to fulfil their tasks in the workplace, whereas educators are aiming more at providing students with a broad professional base of abilities and understanding to be built upon through practice experience and continuing professional development over time.

- While line managers recognise that it is not possible for qualifying programmes to prepare students fully for the realities of professional practice, and that much development can only come through experience, they also want students trained better to apply their learning in the practice context.

- Managers, educators and graduates themselves are conscious of the variability in quality between practice placement opportunities, in terms of the kind of work undertaken and the support available – and stress their importance to student learning.

- The following issues emerge as causing graduates themselves some level of anxiety in their present jobs, across a range of settings:
  - Knowledge of mental health conditions
  - Knowledge of child protection
  - How to deal with hostility, aggression and conflict
  - Assessing risk
  - Preparing reports for legal proceedings

- With a friendly and supportive team graduates are less likely to identify any 'knowledge gaps' – topics they wish they knew more about – and this is also influenced by whether they feel able to put their values into practice.

- Workplace learning is often expected to fill these 'knowledge gaps', but learning on their degree programmes dominates first-year graduates' expectations of how they should know about these topics, though to a lesser extent in the second year of employment. Self-study is mentioned much less often. Whether this emphasis on the degree teaching them everything they need to know reflects what graduates hear at work, or their own disappointment, is a matter for speculation.

- Employer commitment appears somewhat uncertain to sustaining newly-qualified social workers' professional development during the early transition period; recognition that expertise comes with time is mixed.

- This contrasts with the views of social work educators, who strongly believe that support in the workplace is crucial for developing professional competence and sustaining critical thinking.

- Nevertheless, two-thirds of second-year graduates believe that their professional abilities and overall quality of their practice have improved a great deal since starting their present job. Comparing their self-rating of their capability now – in terms of marks-out-of-10 – and when they first started, shows an average increase of 3.

- There are signs that the degree has brought about an increase in standards, but that at the same time employer expectations have risen since the degree was introduced, especially of practice knowledge and skills.

- For example, new graduates' analytical abilities are sometimes criticised by employers, despite acknowledgement that assessment skills improve with experience. Good standards of written communication are also required. However, neither of these is identified by graduates themselves as particular shortcomings.

- The findings overall suggest that while graduates, employers and educators all have ideas about how to refine the social work degree curriculum, this is not the end of the story: newly-qualified social workers require better opportunities in the workplace to develop and apply the theoretical knowledge and understanding acquired during their studies, in order to meet society's needs most effectively.

II INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the study

Into the Workforce was commissioned by the Department of Health (DH) in 2007 under the Social Care Workforce Research Initiative (DH Research Initiative, 2010). The project takes forward the DH funded *Evaluation of the New Social Work Degree Qualification in England* (Evaluation of Social Work Degree Qualification in England Team, 2008a, 2008b) which was a major multi-method longitudinal evaluation investigating whether the degree level qualifying programmes in social work which have been running since 2003-2004 have equipped students with the skills and competencies required by employers and service users (Department of Health, 2003). Alongside secondary analysis of enrolment data provided by the General Social Care Council (GSCC) and case studies of nine qualifying programmes in six higher education institutions (HEIs), the evaluation used information from seven 'waves' of online surveys administered to students enrolling on social work programmes between 2004-2007 and an online survey of Directors or their senior officials in Adult and Children's services which took place in 2006. *Into the Workforce* builds on this data by following up a group of students who have graduated and moved *into the workforce* and by obtaining employers' views of their performance. This section outlines the policy context for the study in order to set the scene for subsequent sections detailing its findings.

Study aims and objectives

The main purpose of *Into the Workforce* is to establish how well social work graduates in England have been prepared by their degree-level education to enter the social work workforce.

This has three aspects:

- Whether graduate social workers believe themselves to be well prepared;
- How newly-qualified social workers' own beliefs about their abilities and preparedness compare with the needs and expectations of employers;
- The nature of graduates' progress in the workplace over time, including what factors facilitate or inhibit role performance and progression.

The study methods are outlined in full in a separate Methods section. In summary, they were developed in order to identify and explore contrasts and similarities between the expectations and views of graduates and their employers, and to draw conclusions about the possible ways of responding to the issues that they have identified. As well as collecting data from graduates and employers in Adult and Children's services via online surveys, the study also draws on data from interviews and discussion groups with line managers and social work educators, and a repeat

of the 2006 Directors survey in 2009. The perspectives of people using services and cares were obtained by means of specially convened discussion groups with people with experience of using services and/or caring. In addition, advice throughout the study was obtained from the SCWRU User and Carer Advisory Group which meets three times a year and includes representation from older people, people with mental health issues, disabled people and carers. Two members of the Advisory Group were members of the SWDE Service User and Carer Advisory Group and so have provided continuity throughout the research. Regular updates on *Into the Workforce* were provided to the Advisory Group, and several meetings were devoted to detailed discussion of the project. These included discussions on the study design and content of the online surveys, interpretation of the line manager data, and feedback on the summaries prepared for the Interim and Final Reports, alongside an offer to comment on the full reports. The Group's comments were broadly consistent with the results from the two discussion groups with service users and carers (see below) and also helped inform interpretation of the results. The Group confirmed the relevance and value of the research and also expressed its view that greater priority needs to be given to the quality of the relationship between social workers and people using services and carers. Participants also wanted to see greater emphasis on how newly-qualified social workers developed skills in working in partnership with other professionals. They highlighted the importance of values in terms of the qualities social workers needed as they thought this led to better practice in working with service users and carers. They also argued that skills development was an evolutionary process.

Policy context

Regulation

Over the past 10 years, there have been major changes to the regulatory, policy, and labour market context in which social workers practise and in the higher education sector in which social work is taught. Unlike professions such as nursing or medicine, regulatory and registration schemes for social work in the United Kingdom (UK) have been established comparatively recently. In England and Wales, the *Care Standards Act (2000)* set up the General Social Care Council (GSCC) with responsibilities for England and the Care Council for Wales (Cyngor Gofal Cymru) with responsibilities for Wales. Different legislative arrangements established separate regulatory bodies for Scotland and Northern Ireland.

In essence, these changes mean that throughout the UK the title 'social worker' is protected and cannot be used by anyone who does not hold a social work qualification. In addition, all social workers wishing to practise must register with the relevant Care Council in the UK country in which they are based. As the

Department of Health's remit for social work education only applies to England, data collection for this study was restricted to England and the accounts of policy developments that follow do not apply to the UK as a whole.

In England, protection of title came into force on 1 April 2005 (General Social Care Council, 2010b), the date on which the Social Work Register also became operational (General Social Care Council, 2005b). Social workers are now required to re-register every three years and it is a condition of registration that they provide evidence of completing post-registration training and learning (PRTL) (General Social Care Council, 2010c).

Alongside the existence of a regulation and registration scheme, the establishment of a code of practice is thought to be an important mechanism for implementing or enforcing good standards of conduct and practice within a profession (Brand, 2006). The GSCC has developed codes of practice for both social care workers and employers (General Social Care Council, 2002b, 2010 updated). The Code of Practice for Social Care Workers is a list of statements that describe the standards of professional conduct and practice required of social care workers as they go about their daily work. The Code of Practice for Social Care Employers requires employers to adhere to the standards set out in their code, support social care workers in meeting their code, and take appropriate action when workers do not meet expected standards of conduct.

The *Care Standards Act 2000* also places a duty on the GSCC 'to promote high standards of conduct and practice among social care workers and high standards in their training' (2000, para 54.2). Although the social work degree is awarded by individual universities, it is the GSCC that accredits those universities wishing to run social work qualifying programmes (General Social Care Council, 2002a). It also approves universities able to offer the various post-qualifying awards in social work (General Social Care Council, 2005a).

Because the *Care Standards Act 2000* gives the 'appropriate minister the function of ascertaining what training is required by persons who are, or wish to become, social care workers' (2000, para 67.1), currently providers of social work qualifying programmes must ensure that the way they select, teach, and assess social work students conforms with the Department of Health (2002) *Requirements for Social Work Training*. These *Requirements* state that qualifying programmes must equip students to meet the National Occupational Standards for Social Work (Topss UK Partnership, 2002) and the Quality Assurance Agency benchmark statement for social work (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2000; revised 2008). The National Occupational Standards outline what employers require social workers to be able to do on entering employment while the Subject Benchmark Statement for Social Work lays down the academic standards applied to practice for the award of a social work degree.

Following its election in May 2010, the Coalition government published a White Paper in July 2010 outlining its reform programme for the National Health Service (Secretary of State for Health, 2010). Included in the White Paper were proposals to carry out a review of arm's length bodies (ALBs – the term for national bodies such as the GSCC responsible for regulation and improving standards across the health and social care sector). Following this review (Department of Health, 2010a), a decision was taken to abolish the GSCC and transfer its responsibilities to the Health Professions Council (HPC) which already has responsibility for regulating registrants from fifteen professions, such as occupational therapists, chiropodists, physiotherapists, and speech and language therapists. The functions of the GSCC will be transferred to the HPC in 2012 and the HPC will be renamed in order to reflect its new functions.

Changes to services for children

Following publication of the report into the death of Victoria Climbié (Laming, 2003), the then Labour government responded with a Green Paper *Every Child Matters* (Chief Secretary to the Treasury, 2003). This, alongside the results from various consultations, formed the basis for *Every Child Matters, the Next Steps* (Department for Education and Skills, 2004) and the *Children Act (2004).* The Act set out a number of changes to services for children, including the establishment of Local Safeguarding Children's Boards (LSCBs) and the appointment of Directors of Children's Services. This resulted in one of the most dramatic changes to local authority social services departments since their establishment in 1970 – their separation into Adult and Children's departments, although a minority of authorities chose to maintain a unified structure (and some have reunified since). Central government responsibility for the Children's services workforce moved from the Department of Health to the (former) Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), now Department for Education.

This was followed by further central government initiatives, including the establishment of the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) in 2005 with responsibility for workforce reform in the non-schools sector (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2007) and the publication of the Children's Plan (Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, 2007). For this present study, the key developments stemming from the Children's Plan were plans to 'address turnover, quality of supervision and burnout of new children's social workers' (2007, para 1.44) by establishing a guaranteed induction programme for newly-qualified social workers and the introduction of fast-track work-based programmes so as to attract graduates willing to undertake social work qualifying education who would then go on to work in Children's services.

The last government's proposals for a guaranteed induction programmes for newly-qualified social care professionals (Department of Health/Department for Education and Skills, 2006) resulted in the establishment of the Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) scheme (Children's Workforce Development Council, 2011). This is a year-long development programme aimed at enabling newly-qualified social workers to broaden and develop the knowledge gained in their initial qualifying training. They then follow an Early Professional Development programme in their second and third years of employment. The fast-track social work qualifying schemes are the *Step Up to Social Work* (Children's Workforce Development Council, 2010b) and the graduate recruitment scheme (Children's Workforce Development Council, 2010a) (Moriarty & Manthorpe, 2010). Both fast-track schemes were marketed as a way of attracting what were termed 'high calibre entrants' into social work. As part of the review of arms length bodies mentioned earlier, the Coalition government has decided that the functions of the CWDC will be transferred back to the Department for Education to ensure that central government Departments are more directly accountable for their actions and to channel resources into 'front-line' services. It is envisaged this process will be completed by 2012 (Hansard, 2010d).

While the Labour government's changes to services for children could be interpreted as a way of improving collaboration between the various agencies responsible for children's welfare (Horwath & Morrison, 2007), criticisms began to emerge about what was seen as an over-emphasis on process and procedures over outcomes for children (for example, Ayre & Preston-Shoot, 2010), and in particular about what were thought to be overly bureaucratic information systems (for example, Broadhurst *et al.*, 2010).

In 2008, Lord Laming was asked by the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families to chair another inquiry in the aftermath of the negative media coverage of child protection services in Haringey following the death of Peter Connelly ('Baby P') (DCSF, 2008). Lord Laming's report expressed concern that in some authorities he visited 'over half of social workers are newly qualified with less than a year's experience' (para 5.2), that there was a 'shortage of experienced social workers with the skills needed to work in child protection' (para 5.5), and that 'social workers themselves do not think that their training is equipping them to take on the responsibilities for which they are being trained'. As evidence of this, he cited CWDC (2009) research suggesting that 'two-thirds of newly qualified social workers felt that the degree prepared them just enough or not at all for their current role' (Laming, 2009, para 5.9).

Alongside commissioning a report from Lord Laming, the former Labour government decided that it would set up a Social Work Task Force (SWTF):

…to undertake a nuts and bolts review of frontline social work practice and make recommendations for immediate improvements to practice and training as well as long-term change in social work.

<div align="right">(Hansard, 2009)</div>

The Task Force was asked to report to both the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families and to the Secretary of State for Health so, before describing the work of the Task Force, it is also important to describe some of the changes taking place in Adult services.

Changes to services for adults

Existing research has shown consistently that over half of newly-qualified social workers work in children's services, with around one in seven and one in ten respectively working in services for older people and services for people with mental health problems (Wallis-Jones & Lyons, 2002). Since the community care reforms of the early 1990s, the majority of social workers working with adults have undertaken care management roles in which their main tasks are to carry out assessments and arrange services (Postle, 2001; Weinberg *et al.*, 2003).

An enduring theme of successive governments has been to reduce social care service providers' control over the composition, timing and flexibility of these services and to make them more responsive to the circumstances of individual people using services (Glendinning *et al.*, 2008). In 2005, the White Paper *Independence, Wellbeing and Choice* (Secretary of State for Health, 2005) emphasised the Labour government's intention to extend the system whereby people could choose to receive cash in lieu of social care services, and to pilot individual budgets which would also include funds from benefits, and budgets for housing and equipment, as well as funds to cover the costs of social care services. Recognising the *de facto* situation that the majority of the work undertaken by councils in assessing and providing services was not done by social workers, the White Paper stated that:

We therefore emphasise the role that skilled social work will continue to play in assessing the needs of people with complex problems and in developing constructive relationships with people who need long-term support.

<div align="right">(Secretary of State for Health, 2005, 10)</div>

In 2007, a ministerial concordat confirmed the government's commitment towards creating a more personalised system with an increased emphasis on self-assessment and the extension of personal budgets. It envisaged:

Social workers spending less time on assessment and more on support, brokerage and advocacy.

<div align="right">(HM Government, 2007, 3)</div>

Despite this, reports emerged that some authorities considered that social workers were 'too expensive' to employ and that personalisation policies would be a way of reducing the need for social workers in Adult services (Williams, 2009) except in a small number of complex safeguarding cases. Responding to this, a joint document issued by the Department of Health, the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS), the British Association of Social Workers (BASW), and the Social Care Association (SCA) (2010) reinforced social workers' continued role in assessing and planning care but also saw the potential for new roles in advocacy, brokerage and more therapeutic work.

Like the CWDC, Skills for Care (Skills for Care, Undated), the employer-led authority on the training standards and development needs of adult social care staff in England, developed its own NQSW programme for social workers working in Adult services which recognised the need for newly-qualified social workers to receive good quality induction and supervision which would enable them to build on the knowledge and skills gained in qualifying education. Both the Skills for Care and CWDC NQSW programmes were beginning to be established at the time that the Task Force began its work and it is to the work of the Task Force that we shall now return.

The Social Work Task Force

As explained earlier, the Task Force was set up to undertake a 'nuts and bolts review of frontline social work' and throughout 2009, it issued a series of reports (Social Work Task Force, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c) outlining the problems they identified with difficulties faced by the profession and its suggestions for making improvements. Based on the evidence the Task Force received from individuals and organisations, meetings with stakeholders, visits to local authorities, and various surveys and literature reviews, in its final report it concluded that:

> *Task Force has also heard from many sources that initial education and training is not yet reliable enough in meeting its primary objective, which must be to prepare students for the demands of frontline practice. Some employers are telling us that they are unable to appoint newly qualified social workers (NQSW) because of a lack of suitable applicants. Some NQSW cannot find jobs. Others who do enter the workforce are often expected to take on unrealistically complex tasks because of the acute recruitment and retention problem in many authorities. Equally, employers need to be realistic about the time people need to progress from achieving a professional qualification to operating as a full professional, and what therefore a newly qualified social worker should be asked to do.*
>
> (Social Work Task Force, 2009a, para 1.6)

The final report listed 15 recommendations, many of which – as has been observed (Mann, 2010; Moriarty *et al.*, 2010) – were concerned with the quality of initial qualifying training, such as proposals to 'strengthen the criteria governing calibre of

entrants to social work programmes, overhaul the content and delivery of social work degree programmes, and to create an assessed and supported [first] year in employment as the final stage in becoming a social worker' (2009a, 12).

The then government accepted all of the Task Force recommendations and established a Social Work Reform Board to take forward the work of the Task Force (Secretary of State for Health and Secretary of State for Children, School and Families, 2009). Following its election in May 2010, the Coalition government confirmed its commitment to implementing the Task Force's recommendations and continuing the work of the Reform Board (Hansard, 2010c).

Policy developments since the election of the Coalition government

This parliamentary statement contained further details of the independent review announced a few days earlier (Hansard, 2010b) in which the government requested Professor Eileen Munro to look at 'reform of child protection: early intervention; trusting professionals and removing bureaucracy so [social workers] can spend more of their time on the front-line; and greater transparency and accountability' (Hansard, 2010c). The Munro Review consists of three reports (Munro, 2010a, 2010b, 2011). A key theme of these reports has been the organisational contexts that make for effective outcomes for children and families:

> *It is important to see the quality of any one social worker's performance as not just being due to their expertise but arising from the interaction between what they bring to the job and the aspects of the work environment that make it easier or harder for them to exercise that expertise.*

> (Munro, 2010a, para 3.5)

In particular, the Review discusses whether longstanding tensions between the managerial oversight of caseloads and the professional supervision of practice might be improved by separating the roles of managerial oversight and professional supervision 'so that both are done properly' (Munro, 2010a, para 4.12). The government (Department for Education, 2011) has accepted all of the Review's recommendations and emphasised its commitment to the development of expertise among professionals and ensuring that there are opportunities for continuous learning and improvement. In this context, an important issue for **Into the Workforce** is not simply the quality of initial social work qualifying education but the work environments in which new graduates are working.

Earlier, in November 2010, the Coalition government turned its attention to Adult services with the publication of *A Vision for Adult Social Care: capable communities and active citizens* (Department of Health, 2010b). This outlined its seven principles for social care: prevention, personalisation, partnership, plurality, protection, productivity, and people. This envisages a continuing role for social workers,

including new roles in community development. It also announced plans to extend Social Work Practices whereby social workers work in organisations providing services on behalf, but independent of, local councils to Adult services, following experiences with Social Work Practices in six Children's services authorities.

In December 2010, the Social Work Reform Board (2010) issued a report outlining its progress and requesting comments on its key proposals at that stage. These included:

- The introduction of a new standards framework – the *Professional Capabilities Framework for Social Workers in England* (professionalism; values and ethics; diversity; rights, justice and economic wellbeing; knowledge; critical reflection and analysis; intervention and skills, contexts and organisations; and professional leadership). This is intended to convey that professional learning is not just about becoming competent in different areas, but about continuing learning and development throughout the whole career. The capabilities are developed throughout all the stages of a social worker's career, from initial qualifying education through to becoming a manager, advanced practitioner, or practice educator and beyond.
- The implementation of a Standards for Employers and Supervision Framework based on shared principles about how good quality social work practice should be established and maintained and recognising the responsibility of all employers to provide social workers with a suitable working environment, manageable workloads, regular high quality supervision, access to continuous learning and supportive management systems.
- The development of a new continuing professional development (CPD) framework which encourages social workers to take responsibility for improving their practice and helps to create workplaces in which they will be supported and encouraged to do so.
- Measures to improve the quality and consistency of social work qualifying programmes, such as improving the calibre of entrants, increasing the quality and quality of practice placements, and an overhaul of the curriculum based on the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) and involving employers and people using services and carers as well as educators.
- The creation of better partnerships between employers and educators.

The next phase of the Reform Board's work will address further detail and other recommendations.

In March 2011 the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) (2011) announced a consultation asking for views about its proposed major review of the statutory duties carried out by local councils. Although it is not known what

changes will result from this review, it is possible that it could lead to an outsourcing of child protection services or allowing other professionals to take on the roles social workers currently undertake in child protection (Pemberton, 2011).

The final policy development important for the context of this study which is discussed here is the new cap on immigration from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) (Hansard, 2010a). Over the past 20 years there has been a considerable increase in the number of social workers qualifying overseas who are practising in England. Research (Lyons & Littlechild, 2006; Hussein *et al.*, 2010; Hussein *et al.*, 2011b; Moriarty *et al.*, in press) has shown that the majority of these social workers do not come from inside the EEA but instead come from countries such as Australia, the United States, and India. While some of these workers may have the right to live and work in the UK (for instance by acquiring British citizenship or being granted leave to remain), others will be affected by the cap. The Task Force and the Reform Board have both called for better systems for forecasting social work supply and demand and in the context of changes to immigration law, information on recruitment and retention patterns becomes even more important.

Discussion

The overview above has sought to show the changing policy context in which *Into the Workforce* was designed, and executed. This presents a number of methodological challenges – the key policy concerns when a study is commissioned may no longer be priorities when it is due to be completed. In the time since the first social work degree level qualifying programmes began, a number of developments have impacted upon the question about programmes producing graduates able to meet the needs of employers and people using services. As well as changes likely to have an impact on the way social workers practise (Department of Health/ADASS/Skills for Care/BASW/Social Care Association, 2010; Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011), the financial context is very different (Acton Shapiro Consultancy & Research, 2010; Butler, 2011), although high vacancy rates among social work posts are still being reported (McGregor, 2010a). These changes highlight how any answers to questions about the extent to which the social work degree meets the needs of employers and people using services are not static, but need to take account of changes to the social work role in the future.

Having highlighted the rapidly changing policy context in which *Into the Workforce* has taken place, it is important to remember – as Dickens (2010 advance access) reminds us – that social work has always found itself either at a 'crossroads' or 'watershed' because it is:

…always uncertain, always on the point of change. It is a mistake to think that the dilemmas will ever be settled, but that is not a reason to stop looking for improvements.

(2010 advance access, 36)

While not of all the recent policy developments could have been anticipated when the study began, the findings from *Into the Workforce* can help contribute to informing debates about how motivations can change or stay the same, job satisfaction, intentions to stay in social work, experiences of supervision, the extent to which graduates feel prepared for the workplace, and the role of continuing professional development. Before describing these findings, the next section will summarise some of the findings from other studies of newly-qualified social workers.

III BACKGROUND LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter sets the context for the study findings by drawing on the results from a scoping review examining what is known about the transition from student to newly-qualified professional (Moriarty *et al.*, 2011 advance access). The review synthesised results from the UK and internationally from 1995 onwards, and included information on nurses, teachers and allied health professionals, as well as social workers. In total, more than 1,200 items were retrieved, including duplicates abstracted in more than one database. As well as empirical studies or research reviews, a number of commentaries were included as they provided valuable contextual information on relevant theoretical constructs or policy developments. After reading the abstracts of retrieved items, the full texts of 180 journal articles, reports, and books were obtained, of which 134 met the criteria for inclusion. A high proportion of the material related to UK research, with a little from Australia – but as this was a scoping review it is impossible to say whether this was a limitation of the search strategies, or reflects differing expectations about newly-qualified professionals in other countries. Overall, the review concluded that debates about the extent to which social work qualifying education prepares students to become effective practitioners are neither new nor are they restricted to social work. It identified a lack of consensus about how to measure whether newly qualified professionals are 'ready to practise' and concluded that, on the whole, the majority of published research has focused on *perceptions* of preparedness, rather than on measuring actual performance or analysing the impact of interventions designed to improve the process of transition. Furthermore, much of the published research is cross-sectional, meaning that it is unable to measure professional development over time.

Methods

The review aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What do we know about the transition from student to practitioner among social workers, nurses, other allied health professionals and teachers from their perspective, that of their managers and others with whom they work directly, such as colleagues, service users, patients and pupils?

2. What do we know about interventions designed to support the process of transition, such as induction (the training given to individuals who are newly appointed in post), supervision or continuing professional development?

The following electronic bibliographic databases were searched: Social Care Online, Web of Science, Sociological Abstracts, Social Services Abstracts, Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC), Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), Health Management Information Consortium (HMIC), Social Policy and Practice, and International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS). These databases were selected as offering a broad coverage of the literature on social work, nursing, allied health professionals and teaching. A combination of fixed term and free text searches were made during October 2009-January 2010 and then repeated in March 2011 to identify any literature published since the first set of searches was completed.

Published research on social work degree graduates

In comparison with nursing and teaching, fewer studies have looked at the experiences of newly-qualified social workers. It is also important to recognise that it was not until 2007 that graduates from the social work degree registered with the GSCC in any substantial numbers, so there are only a limited number of studies looking at the experiences of graduates from the social work degree.

The largest and most detailed study published to date (Carpenter *et al.*, 2010) looks at the experiences of over 1,100 graduates employed in 87 local authorities and two voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations who were enrolled on Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) programmes run by the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC). At the end of the year, 58% of NQSWs responding to an online survey said that they were generally satisfied with the overall package of work, support, and training which they had received from their employer, with the remainder being dissatisfied. While over three-quarters of NQSWs were satisfied with their jobs, around a third scored above the threshold for stress as measured by the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ), a standardised self-report questionnaire (Goldberg & Williams, 1988) using a cut point of four or above to indicate stress. By Time 2 which occurred a year later, the proportion scoring four or above had risen to 43%.

While other surveys of social workers using the GHQ have similarly found that around 40% of respondents score above the threshold for stress (Coffey *et al.*, 2004; Evans *et al.*, 2005), these proportions are higher than those we would expect to see among the general population as a whole and are notably higher than those found in surveys of social workers carried out in the early 1990s (McLean & Andrew, 2000) which used a lower cut point (and thus should have resulted in a greater number of respondents scoring above the threshold).

In Carpenter and colleagues' (2010) study, high GHQ scores were associated with low job satisfaction, low role clarity, high role conflict, and a higher intention to leave their job. By Time 2, around one in six NQSWs participating in the study

thought it 'very likely' that they would leave their current post within the next year while a further 30% thought it 'fairly likely'. However, three-quarters of those intending to leave expected their next job to be in children's social work.

The study also collected information on participants' confidence in their ability to accomplish the tasks set out in 11 NQSW 'outcome statements' (Children's Workforce Development Council, Undated). This involved developing a specially designed self-efficacy scale which NQSWs were asked to complete at baseline, after three months, and at the end of the year-long programme (T2):

> *Self-efficacy is more than a self-perception of competency. It is an individual's assessment of his or her confidence in their ability (to) execute specific skills in a particular set of circumstances and thereby achieve a successful outcome.*

(Holden *et al.*, 2002, 116)

The T2 survey was also sent to NQSWs in a sample of authorities which had not taken part in the NQSW programme. The results showed a statistically significant increase in mean total ratings at three months. At the same time, when NQSWs were asked to give a retrospective rating of their self-efficacy at baseline, their retrospective ratings of their performance at baseline were significantly lower, suggesting they realised that they had not known as much and were not as skilled as they had thought at the beginning or that the outcomes envisaged in the outcome statements were more complicated or demanding than they had appreciated. At T2, when respondents repeated the self-efficacy scales again, there was further evidence of a substantial increase in self-efficacy and three-quarters of NQSWs were now 'very confident' of their ability to meet the outcome statements. As with job satisfaction and stress, high role clarity was associated with higher self-efficacy scores. Women and older social workers were also more likely to score more highly on self-efficacy.

In terms of areas in which they wanted more training, NQSWs identified that they would like to know more about topics such as family assessment, the law, courtroom skills, the management of conflict and dealing with violent behaviour, domestic violence, and intervention skills. They also wanted help with aspects of personal development, such as time management and assertiveness. While the authors acknowledged that these topics are included in social work qualifying programmes, they concluded that skills such as these take on an added dimension when graduates enter full-time professional practice. The largest source of dissatisfaction was the requirement to complete a portfolio which many saw as repetitive and covering aspects they had already studied on their social work qualifying programmes. Some respondents also reported difficulties in obtaining the 10% reduction on their caseloads that they were meant to have during their time as an NQSW.

The interim report from the evaluation of the NQSW scheme for social workers in Adult services (Sharpe Research, 2010) found that 90% of respondents to an online survey were enjoying their job, and felt they were 'making a real difference to the wellbeing of service users'. They felt that the supervision they received as NQSWs had improved their practice and were generally pleased with the amount of training they had received. However, they were unsure about the way that the work they had undertaken to meet the outcome statements for social workers in Adult services (Skills for Care, Undated) would fit in with the existing post-qualifying framework (General Social Care Council, 2005a). While most respondents acknowledged the help and support they received to improve many aspects of their practice, their ability to write 'official' reports, including for courts and tribunals, was an area where they felt help was often insufficient for their needs.

The previous year CWDC (CWDC Research Team, 2009) published the results from an online survey completed by 502 NQSWs and 47 employers in Children's services. When asked how they considered their qualifying programme had prepared them for their current role, just 2% thought they it had 'fully prepared' them, 30% thought it had prepared them 'quite a lot', 54% thought it had prepared them 'just enough', and 14% thought it had 'not at all' prepared them. Practice placements and 'support to translate theory into practice' were the ways in which respondents felt the degree had helped them most. Where they felt least prepared were in 'managing difficult service users', 'conducting assessments', time management and court work.

Two separate small scale local studies have followed up the experiences of newly-qualified social workers in the south west of England. The first (Bates *et al.*, 2010) followed up 22 newly-qualified social workers working in Adult and Children's services, surveying them at three points in time in the nine months or so after qualifying. It also obtained the views of line managers, and people using services and carers. Overall, about three-quarters (n=16) of newly-qualified social workers in the study and their line managers agreed or strongly agreed that the degree had provided them with the right knowledge, understanding and skills for their current post. Over three-quarters of the newly-qualified social workers agreed or strongly agreed that they had been well prepared in areas such as communication skills, social work methods, responding to cultural differences, social work law, critical perspectives, evidence- and research-based practice, social work values, working in an organisation, inter-professional working, and the role and responsibilities of a social worker. However, about a quarter did not feel prepared in such instrumental areas of social work practice as assessment, report writing, record-keeping, time management, case management, dealing with conflict, and care management and contracting; over half did not feel prepared in the use of court skills – a finding that remained constant over the three questionnaires and was reinforced by nearly a third of line managers. Respondents' experiences of induction were varied, and

service users and carers emphasised the need for structured induction and regular supervision for social workers in their first year of practice. Access to training was also variable. Looking back on their experiences, newly-qualified social workers in the study emphasised the importance of good quality statutory placements while students, and of help in dealing with the instrumental aspects of their work such as report-writing, time management, and dealing with conflict.

The second (Jack & Donnellan, 2010) gathered questionnaire and interview data from 13 NQSWs and 10 line managers working in Children's Services. Although all of the participating NQSWs started their jobs with optimism and confidence, a combination of the day-to-day reality of their work and the organisational conditions under which it was undertaken led to increasing levels of frustration and unhappiness. While the authors identified pockets of good practice in the management and supervision of these NQSWs, they concluded that too great a focus on what NQSWs needed to know and do led to a failure to recognise properly the *person* within the developing professional and were concerned that this might lead to disillusionment and lack of motivation and self-belief.

Another survey of NQSWs (Galvani & Forrester, 2008) concentrated specifically on whether their qualifying programmes had prepared them for practice with people using alcohol or drugs. While most of the 248 respondents to a questionnaire circulated to all those qualifying in England during 2006 and 2007, a response rate of 8.5%, estimated that on average half of the clients they were currently working with had issues relating to drugs and/or alcohol use, the majority did not consider themselves prepared for working with people with alcohol and/or drug issues. In some areas, such as mental health and children and families, the proportions of clients with alcohol or drug issues were estimated to be even higher. While emphasising the variability in the extent to which social work qualifying programmes covered drug and alcohol misuse, the authors also drew attention to the lack of training in this topic that respondents had been able to access in their post-qualifying training. The authors concluded that employers and social work educators needed to give greater consideration to improving social workers' ability to support clients with alcohol and/or drug issues both at qualifying and post-qualifying levels.

The final two pieces of published research with social work degree graduates identified were undertaken in Wales (Evans *et al.*, 2009) and Northern Ireland (Kavanagh & Smyth, 2008). Evans and colleagues (2009) undertook two national surveys of social work graduates in Wales in 2008 and 2009, achieving response rates of almost half and around a third respectively. Among those who had responded at both time points, it was striking that so many reported similarities in the size and complexity of their caseloads and the amount of supervision they received. Another finding of note was that perceptions about preparedness to practise using a seven-point delighted-terrible scale had declined significantly

within the group of repeat responders. The authors suggested that as graduates became more experienced in their work and more distant from their qualifying programmes, they were able to reflect and realised that their studies had not prepared them for practice as well as they might. Almost three-quarters had remained in the same job in the year since completing the 2008 survey and most intended to stay in post. While most respondents commented on the complexity and demanding nature of their work, they also continued to feel it was very rewarding.

While the Social Work Reform Board (2010) has proposed an Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) as one of the career stages in the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) stages, in Northern Ireland social work graduates have already had to complete an Assessed Year in Employment (AYE) satisfactorily since 2006 as part of their conditions of registration. A survey of the Health and Social Care Trusts employing new graduates in Northern Ireland (Kavanagh & Smyth, 2008), found that they welcomed the introduction of the AYE policy and acknowledged its potential to strengthen and improve support and supervision for newly-qualified social workers. However, improvements were needed to some of the audit and quality assurance systems and the authors recommended that Personal Development Plans (PDPs) should be in place for all AYE staff.

NQSWs with predecessor social work qualifications

From 1991 until 2005, the year of the last student intake, the professional qualification in social work was the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW) (Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work, 1991), awarded in England by the General Social Care Council (GSCC) and by its predecessor, the Central Council for Training and Education in Social Work (CCETSW) which had a UK-wide remit.

From 1993-2001 researchers at the University of East London undertook a series of national surveys of newly-qualified social workers in England around six months after qualification. A synthesis of results from these surveys (Lyons & Manion, 2004) showed that around two-thirds of respondents were generally satisfied with their social work education, with the greatest appreciation being shown for teaching on social work theory and law. Information communications technology (ICT), record-keeping, residential work, and budgeting and finance all scored badly. Data on supervision and post-qualifying opportunities generally showed an improving trend, albeit from a low base. For example, around a third of respondents qualifying in 1996 (Wallis-Jones & Lyons, 1997) reported that they did not receive regular supervision. This fell to less than one in seven in 2000 (Wallis-Jones & Lyons, 2001) and 2001 (Wallis-Jones & Lyons, 2002). More than half of

those qualifying in 1996 had not received an induction training programme. In 2000 and 2002, this had fallen to a third (Lyons & Manion, 2004).

The other key source of data on the DipSW was the study carried out in the early 1990s looking at readiness to practise among newly-qualified social workers and probation officers during their first year of employment (Marsh & Triseliotis, 1996). At that time there was no separate qualification in probation. Their sample consisted of some 700 students who were surveyed at the end of their programme and subsequently around nine months later. Seventy per cent of those responding to the first survey also responded to the second. While 72% of respondents had found their course 'interesting', only 54% thought it had been well taught. The teaching of social work skills was thought to be especially poor and the relationship between theory and practice was not made as effectively as it could have been. Overall, while 85% of respondents felt they were 'quite' or 'very well' prepared for practice, only around a half considered their programme had been a good preparation for social work practice.

The study also involved surveying a sample of supervisors working in agencies in which NQSWs responding to the survey were employed. By comparing their responses with those from the newly-qualified social workers, a clear tension emerged between the newly-qualified social workers' emphasis on their need to develop interpersonal skills, such as communication and listening skills, and their supervisors' emphasis on the lack of familiarity with procedural skills such as report-writing, and knowledge about agency procedures and guidelines, which they had observed among the newly-qualified social workers. Of the supervisors who participated in the study two-thirds thought that the newly-qualified social workers were 'mainly' or 'highly' prepared while a fifth felt them to be 'poorly' prepared.

Pithouse and Scourfield (2002) undertook a similar survey of newly-qualified social workers in Wales. Just under half of respondents considered that their general preparedness for practice after undertaking a DipSW was 'adequate' while a further two-fifths saw it as 'more than adequate'. However, between a quarter and a third of respondents felt 'less than adequately' or 'poorly prepared' for practice in terms of three core DipSW competences, namely to 'intervene and provide', 'work in organisations', and to 'assess and plan'. Telephone interviews with a sub-sample of newly-qualified social workers, managers, and supervisors were also undertaken. These suggested that there was general agreement that risk management was an area in which newly-qualified social workers were poorly prepared. Managers and supervisors also considered that prioritising and time management were areas in which newly-qualified social workers could have been taught better. Managers and supervisors in the statutory sector, and in particular in Children's services, were generally more critical, leading the authors to wonder whether this reflected actual deficits in qualifying programmes or if employers in this sector had different expectations.

A small scale study (Bradley, 2008) of 10 newly appointed social workers working with children and families, of whom eight had qualified the previous year and all of whom were taking part in an induction programme in a council situated in a mainly rural area in the north of England, found that they all had something positive to say about the teaching content of their DipSW programmes, including the input received on childcare and the law, but they were equally divided in their views about whether their programmes were sufficiently 'reality based' and prepared them to deal with 'real pressures' in the workplace. Half of the respondents also had mixed views about the quality of their practice learning. All the respondents felt that induction had influenced their practice in a positive way and given them increased confidence and insight into their work and that of the organisation. Bradley (2008) concluded that there was a role for social work educators to use the tutor/tutee relationship as a way of modelling good practice in work-based supervision and helping students to develop the reflective skills that would stand them in good stead as practitioners.

International research

Australian research (Healy & Meagher, 2007) has also revealed dissatisfaction among some employers in services for children with the preparedness of social work graduates. While social work educators emphasised the importance of generic professional skills, such as being analytical, employers preferred graduates who had honed their practice skills in placements in children and family settings. Fook and colleagues (2000) followed up a sample of students into their professional lives and concluded that it was the generic professional skills, such as transferability, flexibility, and problem-solving that enabled workers to operate most effectively as professionals. They emphasised the need for workers never to assume they were competent in a particular area of practice because these skills may be context specific. Instead, a process of lifelong learning was important if workers were to achieve the expert level of skill acquisition.

Research with other professionals

While a more detailed account of research undertaken with other professional groups is reported elsewhere (Moriarty *et al.*, 2011 advance access), it will only be summarised here for brevity. Studies of nurses (Wolff *et al.*, 2010) and radiographers (Nisbet, 2008) have similarly emphasised the differing approaches to concepts such as 'readiness to practise' or 'preparedness' between employers and educators. The feeling of 'reality shock' (Kramer, 1974) around the transition from student to professional has been similarly reported by nurses (for example, Gerrish, 2000), occupational therapists (for example, Robertson & Griffiths, 2009), and teachers (for example, Hobson *et al.*, 2007). While systems of support – be they induction programmes for teachers (for example, Totterdell *et al.*, 2002) or

preceptorship in nursing (a preceptor is an experienced nurse who provides support with the transition from student to registered nurse and assists with the development and consolidation of knowledge and skills) (for example, Robinson & Griffiths, 2009)– are positively rated by newly-qualified professionals, there is a risk of frustration and burnout (for example, Maben *et al.*, 2007) if professional and organisational constraints prevent them from sustaining the ideals and motivations that led them to choose to work in a particular profession in the first place.

Conclusion

While the published literature on the transition from student to professional varies in terms of their scale, scope, and methodology, it has produced remarkable consistency in terms of its findings. Comparisons between the results from research undertaken with social work degree graduates and those undertaking predecessor qualifications suggest there was no 'golden age' in terms of 'readiness to practise'. Strikingly, there is a consistency in graduates' wish for support in dealing with people using services or clients who show aggression or hostility, assessing risk, and for managing their time and prioritising their work. Undertaking assessments well is a complex skill and it is clear that some newly-qualified social workers find this process difficult. What needs greater clarification is whether they are dealing with cases of such complexity that difficulties in completing assessments are to be expected or whether they lack an understanding of the basic nature and purpose of assessment in terms of what qualifying programmes might be expected to cover (for example, Crisp *et al.*, 2003; Whittington, 2007).

Examination of the literature also shows that the concept of 'readiness to practise' is evolving and context specific – hence the lack of reported concerns about a lack of ICT skills or knowledge of residential care among studies of social work degree graduates compared with their DipSW counterparts (Lyons & Manion, 2004), but the emergence of new challenges in the form of a need to know more about alcohol and/or drug misuse (Galvani & Forrester, 2008). Counter-intuitive as it may seem, the finding that with time graduates may retrospectively decide that they were *less* ready to practise (Evans *et al.*, 2009; Carpenter *et al.*, 2010) at the start of their careers than they thought highlights the need to contextualise self-reports about readiness to practise in terms of the stage in their careers when these ratings were made.

The literature also suggests that *access* to supervision and induction is now more consistent (Carpenter *et al.*, 2010; Sharpe Research, 2010) than in the past (Lyons & Manion, 2004). What we do not know is if, and how, the *quality* of supervision has changed. This is because so many reports of newly-qualified social workers have relied on self-completion questionnaires with limited opportunities for respondents to provide more detail about their answers.

The few social work studies that have reported changes over time (Fook *et al.*, 2000; Maben *et al.*, 2007; Evans *et al.*, 2009; Carpenter *et al.*, 2010) have reported varying results in terms of respondents' job satisfaction, intentions to leave, and motivations. It has highlighted the complex interaction between graduates' current work environment and their qualifying education, suggesting that the two need to be considered in tandem.

IV METHODS

This section describes the design and methods used for the various strands of this multi-methods research:

- three online surveys of graduates from the new social work degree, most of whom had participated in surveys while students;
- 23 face-to-face interviews with line managers of new social work graduates;
- two preliminary group discussions with service users and carers;
- five group discussions with senior social work education staff from a spread of universities (HEIs) in England;
- an online survey of Directors of Children's Services and of Adult Services in local authorities in England, identical to a similar survey conducted in 2006 and reported in the final report of the Evaluation of the Social Work Degree in England (SWDE, 2008).

The overall chronology was as follows:

	2007	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**
Service users and carers: group discussions	September			
Exploratory face-to-face interviews with new graduates and line managers		January – May		
2008/I online survey of graduates		November		
Line manager face-to-face interviews – first tranche			February – July	
2009 online survey of graduates			November	
2008/II online survey of graduates				April
Line manager face-to-face interviews – second tranche				September - November
Online survey of LA Directors of Adult and Children's services			November	
HEI senior staff: group discussions				May – July

Each of these elements of the research is described in more detail below.

Ethical approval for the graduate surveys and HEI elements of the project was obtained from the Social Care Research Ethics Committee, established in 2009. The line manager interviews part of the study was approved by the King's College Geography, Gerontology and Social Care Workforce Research Unit Ethics Panel.

Research Governance approval for these interviews was received from local authorities where required.

Graduate surveys

The 'Into the Workforce' graduate surveys were designed to be completed online, and were emailed on the dates shown below to all those on the databases of previous respondents from the relevant SWDE student surveys. Email reminders were subsequently issued in an effort to improve the response.

Student cohort:	November 2008	November 2009	April 2010
2005-6 entry			
U/G (2008 graduates)	✓ I		✓ II
P/G (2007 graduates)	✓ I		✓ II
2006-7 entry			
U/G (2009 graduates)		✓ I	
P/G (2008 graduates)	✓ I		✓ II

✓ **I** in the chart above denotes first-year graduates, and ✓ **II** second-year graduates. This report draws this distinction in the text.

Many of the questions in the online questionnaires were dictated by the specific objectives of the research. In addition, a series of exploratory in-depth interviews with 14 new graduates was held during the early part of 2008, plus 7 interviews with line managers (involving 12 individuals), and the findings used to identify issues important to them for inclusion in the questionnaire. The language and vocabulary used in the workplace were also adopted for the wording of some questions. A few questions were repeated from the SWDE student questionnaire, to enable direct comparisons. Other documents consulted included the Induction Standards published by Skills for Care and the Children's Workforce Development Council. Most of the questions were pre-coded, to facilitate systematic analysis.

Exactly the same questionnaire was used for both first-year graduate cohorts (2008/I and 2009), but slightly different questions were asked of second-year graduates (2008/II) though some were repeated. Both questionnaires are appended.

Graduate sample – 2008

This sample of new graduates was a follow-on from an online survey of social work students, the findings of which were published in the final report of the Evaluation of the Social Work Degree in England (SWDE, 2008)

The 2008 graduate eligible sample consisted of 1,520 people who had taken part in a SWDE online survey while students. This initial total was considerably reduced by:

- 480 bouncebacks – i.e. the email address held on the SWDE database for the respondent was later not recognised, in many cases because it was an HEI email address;
- 146 people who were still students at the time of the survey, mostly identified as such by checking individual names of non-responders against the GSCC student register in August 2009;
- 53 who gave no email address, having originally completed their student questionnaire on paper;
- 13 very incomplete responses;
- 7 who as students had asked not to be contacted again.

These exclusions left a total of 821 potential eligible respondents. Out of these, 302 replied in sufficient detail to be included in the analysis – a response rate of 37%.

This calculation is not able to take into account anyone who discontinued their social work degree programme because it is not known who they are, and the response rate stated will therefore be an underestimate.

Most of the graduates taking part in the 2008 survey started their social work studies in 2005-6. Those on undergraduate programmes (n=1,068) would have completed their studies in 2008, but postgraduates (n=281) a year earlier. This sample also contained a small number (n=171) of postgraduate students completing their studies in 2008 – having begun in 2006-7.

The 302 respondents who replied to the first survey in 2008 (2008/I) were re-contacted in 2009 and asked to complete a second questionnaire about their work experiences meanwhile. The 133 who replied have been referred to in this report as second-year graduates (2008/II). The simple response rate for this sample was 44%.

Graduate sample – 2009

This sample was drawn largely from a database of undergraduate respondents to pencil-and-paper questionnaires completed by first-year students (Phase 7 of SWDE, beginning their social work programmes in 2006/7).

The eligible sample of 663 respondents was reduced by:
- no email address for 148 respondents
- 148 bouncebacks

- 12 very incomplete replies
- 6 who as students had asked not to be contacted again
- 3 notifying the research team that they had not yet graduated.

These exclusions left a total of 346 potentially eligible respondents.

Only 84 usable replies were received to the 2009 survey, after one reminder. In view of this, it was decided to ask programme staff at the twelve HEIs where these potential respondents had been students to contact all their 2009 graduates to ask them to fill in the ITW online questionnaire. This resulted in another 78 new replies (as well as 13 duplicates, removed from the analysis). Of these 78 respondents, 15 were able to be matched to the original 2009 graduate database. So the response rate is calculated as 29% (84 plus 15 = 99, divided by 346).

All the 78 'new' HEI-generated respondents were checked against various lists. Apart from the 15 mentioned above located on the original 2009 graduate database, another 5 names were identified as not having given an email address at all when they had filled in SWDE questionnaires as students, and 2 as non-responders to the 2008 graduate survey, implying that they had completed their studies a year later than expected. (These 22 graduates had all participated in surveys as students, and therefore their responses were added to the 84 original 2009 graduate survey responses, making 106 altogether, for inclusion in the longitudinal analysis.) The remaining responses to the HEI-generated sample were checked against the GSCC Register, where 36 out of the 47 names were found. So there can be reasonable confidence that replies were genuine. (New graduates can delay GSCC registration until they find jobs, and the process is not always very quick.) Some of these 'new' HEI-generated respondents were postgraduates.

Graduate survey response rates overall were disappointing. Follow-up calls to a small number of 2008 non-responders who had provided telephone numbers as students mainly indicated that they had simply ignored the initial request to participate further; these calls prompted replies to the survey from around half these contacts. However, consistency between the 2008 and 2009 first-year samples was sufficiently high for confidence to be placed in the validity of the findings, and care has been taken in reporting not to over-claim.

The graduate survey results reported on in this report are mainly based on those currently employed as social workers. Responses were also received from graduates not currently employed as social workers, though they might have been looking for a social work position. Sample profiles for these two groups of graduates are presented in Table 8, section 1.5 in Main Findings.

It has not been possible to compare the profile of respondents to the survey against any published demographic information on newly-qualified social workers. However, we were able to compare the profile of graduates to their corresponding cohort of students, using anonymous student data records. This comparison suggests that men may be under-represented, and the age distribution in the graduate survey is very different from the student population, with fewer under 25s and more 45+ year-olds than might have been expected.

Analyses

Statistical analyses of the graduate surveys aimed to explore relationships between their characteristics, experiences and opinions – focusing on graduates for whom student survey data from the Social Work Degree Evaluation (SWDE, 2008) was also available (n=280). Detailed results of all these tests and analyses are available from the research team on request; techniques included bivariate, ANOVA, multivariate, factor analysis and repeated measures' analysis. Bivariate analysis methods, including correlation analysis, chi-square and means testing, using non-parametric paired Wilcoxon rank sum test, were not only employed to explore the relationships between different variables, but also in preparation for the multivariate approaches adopted: factor analysis, leading to the production of scales, and logistic regression models. Online survey data of graduates and students were combined for some of these analyses and a longitudinal sample was constructed. Both longitudinal and cross-sectional techniques were employed. Path analysis and repeated measures' analysis were employed to examine changes over time for the longitudinal sample. All analyses were conducted using R Statistical Environment on UNIX (ver 2.1); graphics and visualisations were produced using R Lattice packages.

Bivariate analyses

Correlation analysis was used to explore associations between the aspects of induction about which graduates were asked (section 3.3), and knowledge gaps (section 4.8). This involved undertaking separate correlations between all the relevant variables, which produced a correlation matrix showing the significance and magnitude of the correlations between these aspects.

Factor analysis and scale production

Perceptions and satisfaction
Respondents working in social work jobs were asked two 'portmanteau' questions in relation to organisational and work relationships and structure – see Tables 44 and 45, appended. The first question asked respondents to indicate whether each of 9 different job-related elements was true or not true, and the second asked about satisfaction with 14 different aspects of their jobs. We recreated a new set of

binary 23 variables to harmonise differences in possible response values and polarity, with a value of 'one' as indicating a positive view of each organisational and work related variable.

Factor analysis was conducted on these 23 variables to construct more concise scales, covering different elements of work environment. This indicated seven latent factors covering all the 23 variables included in the model. Seven scales were constructed corresponding to the factors, incrementing by one point for each positive answer for the different questions. The correlation matrix, mean and standard variable for each scale were calculated, and then the inter-correlation and inter-consistency of each scale was tested using level of correlation and Cronbach Alpha tests. Levels of correlations were acceptable for six of the seven scales (a value above 0.30 is usually acceptable), with internal correlations ranging from 0.68 to 1. For these six scales all Cronbach Alpha were more than 0.6 (ranging from 0.62 to 0.85), indicating acceptable levels of inter-consistency. The seventh scale had an internal correlation of only 0.2 and very low internal consistency (Cronbach Alpha of 0.30) and was therefore abandoned and not used further in the analysis. (See section 2.3 – with outcomes reported principally in sections 2.5 and 4.1.)

Motivations

To summarise responses in relation to motivations for choosing social work, and to establish if there were some underlying unobserved factors affecting the selection of a combination of options, we ran an exploratory factor analysis. This was followed by a set of confirmatory factor analyses examining the effect of limiting the number of underlying factors to 2, 3, 4 and 5 factors. We concluded that at least four latent factors were needed to explain a considerable part of the variations in all responses. Factor loading, after rotation, for the last stage of the analysis and detailed correlation matrices were presented as tables. All factor analyses were conducted at T0. The analysis examined changes in individual motivations over the three time points using path analysis. (See section 2.1.)

Logistic regression

As a first step, we undertook exploratory bivariate analysis, which aimed to identify separate associations between different 'dependent' outcomes and a set of 'independent' variables. Following this initial analysis, we employed a set of step-wise logistic regression models, to investigate how job satisfaction and propensity to look for another job were influenced by 'independent' variables (such as gender), controlling for differences made by other 'independent' variables (such as age). The aim was to identify the 'best' set of available measured factors in predicting graduates' job satisfaction and then propensity to leave. These two analyses focused only on graduates currently in social work jobs. The process involved entering a large set of independent' variables into an iterative step-wise logistic regression, and systematically removing non-significant associations until

the maximum amount of variation was explained by the minimum number of variables. The final model included those variables which produced 'best fit' using Akaike's Information Criterion (AIC) and Area Under the Curve (AUC).

Two binary 'dependent' variables were created and used as outcomes in the two logistic regressions (see section 2.5):

Job satisfaction
"'Taking everything into consideration, how are you enjoying this job so far?"
0   'Not enjoying it very much/ not enjoying it at all' – referred to as 'not satisfied'
1   'Quite enjoying it/enjoying it very much' – referred to as 'satisfied'

Propensity to leave
"How long do you expect to remain with your current employer?"
0   'Does not intend to leave': Those who expect to remain with current employer for the next two to four, or five years AND those who expect to start looking for another social work job within the next two years.
1   'Intend to leave': Those already looking for another social work job in Britain or abroad and those who expect to leave social work within the next two years.

The following set of variables was entered into the initial logistic regression model to explore influences on job satisfaction. For the 'intention to leave' model the same set of independent variables were used, in addition to job satisfaction. Both models examined different interactions between independent terms.

Demographic characteristics:
o   Age (continuous)
o   Gender (male/female)
o   Ethnicity (white/BME)

Characteristics as students:
o   Level of satisfaction when students (0 'not enjoying very much/not at all'; 1 'quite enjoying/enjoying it very much')
o   Receiving 'any' financial support from employer (yes/no)
o   Receiving student loan (yes/no)
o   Receiving a bursary (yes/no)
o   Been to access course in preparation to the degree (yes/no)
o   Type of degree (UG/PG)

Characteristics as graduates
o   Current motivations for a career in social work (worthwhile job; suitable job conditions; good career; interacting with people)
o   How well feel the degree prepared them (0 'not very/not at all well'; 1 'fairly/very well')

Current social work job characteristics
o   Type of employer (LA adult; LA child; voluntary or private; other)

- o Type of setting (fieldwork; community; hospital; other)
- o Received any induction in current job (yes/no)
- o Manageable workload scale (0-4)
- o Supportive line manager scale (0-2)
- o Supportive colleagues scale (0-3)
- o Values scale (0-2)
- o Pay and prospects scale (0-2)
- o Job engagement scale (0-5)

Both final logistic regression models were indicated as having 'very high discriminatory power' using AIC and AUC indicators (Hosmer and Lemeshow 2000).

Line manager interviews

The content of the line manager interviews was guided by the second research question (see Introduction), namely:

- How newly-qualified social workers' own beliefs about their abilities and preparedness compare with the needs and expectations of employers.

Interviews covered general expectations of newly-qualified social workers and how far these have been met, or not; supervision and induction arrangements for the newly qualified; recruitment and retention issues; views on the amount of direct contact time with service users or carers.

Interviews were recorded and then transcribed in full (with permission) and entered into N-Vivo[1] (Version 8) qualitative data analysis software. Members of the research team read transcripts of interviews they had undertaken and identified some key themes, which were shared with the SCWRU Service User Advisory Group. This informed the initial coding frame (or set of nodes) that was used by one member of the team to code the data. Text coded at each node was read and re-coded into over-arching themes, which were then related to the main themes of the report.

Line manager sample

The first tranche of 17 line manager interviews was carried out in 2009, with more planned to follow in 2010. Eight of these managers worked in local authority (LA) Children's services, eight were in LA Adult services, and one was a recruitment consultant who worked across both Children and Adults. They included: five senior managers (four from Children's services, one from Adults); eight team managers (four each from Children's and Adult services); three senior practitioners

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[1] N-Vivo, Version 8 manufactured by QSR, Doncaster, Victoria, Australia

who held responsibility for supervising newly-qualified social workers – all from Adult services; and one senior recruitment specialist (see Chart below). Managers were assured of confidentiality and so no further details are reported here that might lead to their being identified. In round two (in 2010), six more line managers were interviewed, four from Adult services and two from Children's services. Four were team managers (three in Adults and one in Children's); the other two were senior practitioners – one each in Adults and Children's. Despite the higher proportion of new graduates working in Children's services, approximately equal numbers of managers in Children's and Adult services were interviewed. This ensured that sufficient numbers were included to elicit views from across the range of social work services; the sample was not intended to be statistically representative.

A range of LA types were approached in terms of geography, including inner-city, suburban and metropolitan areas. While both Children's and Adult services were sampled, this should not be taken to imply uniformity – a variety of service locations and teams was covered, with managers working in smaller and larger teams covering several different types of social worker activity, around assessment, interventions, monitoring and commissioning.

Line manager sample:

	Round 1 (2009)			Round 2 (2010)		
	Children's	**Adults**	**Both**	**Children's**	**Adults**	**Both**
Senior managers	4	1				
Team managers	4	4		1	3	
Senior Practitioners		3		1	1	
Senior recruitment consultant in social care			1			
Totals: n=23	**8**	**8**	**1**	**2**	**4**	**-**

Service users and carers

Two group discussions were carried out in September 2007 in the north (Sheffield) and south (London) of England, to explore service user and carer perspectives and requirements from social workers. A total of 14 respondents took part, spanning a range of experiences including foster carers, parents of disabled children and mental health service users. Their views were taken into consideration in designing and interpreting the graduate surveys.

Proceedings were tape-recorded for subsequent analysis; this involved listening back and identifying key themes.

HEI staff

Five group discussions were held over the period May to July 2010, with senior social work education staff from both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, in different geographical areas:

- North West
- East Midlands
- West Midlands
- South coast
- London

Thirty-three respondents from a total of 31 higher education institutions (HEIs) participated altogether.

Topics discussed included the aims and objectives of programmes, and their quality, employer reports on new graduates' readiness to practise, and reactions to proposals and recommendations from the Social Work Task Force and Reform Board.

The analysis involved listening back to the recordings of proceedings, to identify key themes emerging as well as issues important to a minority. HEI perspectives were related to the major research questions, and verbatim quotes used to illustrate similarities and differences with the views of other respondent groups (graduates, line managers and Directors).

Directors

The aim of this study was to examine employer opinions and attitudes towards newly-qualified social workers; in 2006 these would mostly have qualified with the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW), whereas by 2009 graduates of the new social work degree would have started entering the workforce. The research design therefore enabled comparisons across a three-year period during which the skills and knowledge of newly-qualified social workers could potentially have been enhanced by the new degree.

The samples in 2006 and then 2009 were drawn from the Members lists published on the websites of both the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) and the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS). In some cases it is known, however, that Directors passed the survey on to someone else in their local authority to fill in.

The online questionnaire was based on the findings of a small number of face-to-face interviews with Directors of Social Services or their senior nominees, during the summer of 2006. The local authorities represented in this preliminary stage of research were in different geographical regions, and were of different types: county councils, metropolitan districts and unitary authorities. Respondents identified a range of 'qualities' felt to be important for newly-qualified Social Workers, and discussed other matters relating to recruitment and the workforce.

The online questionnaire content was designed in 2006 to provide 'benchmark' data, so that when the survey was repeated in two or three years' time after graduates of the new degree had started entering the workforce in significant numbers, any changes in opinion could be measured. There was no explicit mention of the DipSW in the questionnaire, as it was felt to be unwise for the survey to be seen by employers as stemming from criticism of previous social work qualifications.

All respondents affirmed they had indeed recruited 'any newly-qualified social workers … on to your staff within the last three years'. Newly-qualified social workers were defined as 'those who finished their training up to two years before coming to work for you'.

Although the response was lower than might have been hoped (no higher than 20% for any of the four sub-samples), the balance between Children and Adults was fairly even at both stages of the survey:

	2006	2009
Children's Directors	24	26
Adult Directors	23	30
TOTAL	**47**	**56**

The analysis consisted of frequency counts of the responses to each question, cross-tabulated by each of the four sub-samples (Directors in Adult services 2006, 2009 and Directors in Children's services 2006, 2009). The four sub-samples were each weighted to 100, to correct for the small difference in the ratio of Adult to Children's between the two surveys. This has the effect that the figures appearing in all the Directors Tables which follow in this report may be read as percentages.

V   MAIN FINDINGS

1   CURRENT SOCIAL WORK JOBS

1.1   Sector

As shown in Table 1, over three-quarters of first-year graduates working in social work (2008/I, 2009) were employed in local authorities (LAs): many more in Children's departments than in Adults', especially in 2009.

Table 1: Sector of Employment

	2008/I		2009	
	N	%	N	%
LA Children	101	49	63	57
LA Adults	61	29	34	31
NHS	16	8	5	5
Voluntary sector	12	6	5	5
Private Sector	8	4	2	2
Other	9	4	1	1
Base	**207**		**110**	

The distribution of sectors in which new graduates were employed is consistent with earlier research showing that newly qualified social workers are more likely to work in Children's services (Wallis-Jones & Lyons, 2002). Although some reports indicate that Adult and Children's services share similar vacancy rates (Local Authority Workforce Intelligence Group, 2007a, 2007b; Mickel, 2009), data collected by UNISON (Pile, 2009; UNISON, 2009) suggest that there are higher vacancy rates in Children's services. It has also been asserted that more newly qualified social workers work in child protection than in the past (Ahmed, 2009). Higher vacancy rates in child protection teams seem a more plausible explanation for the finding that by far the highest proportion of respondents were working in child protection compared with other service user groups (see Table 3). Mental health is another area in which local authorities report difficulties in social work recruitment (Commission for Social Care Inspection, 2009). One effect of these differences in vacancy rates is that newly-qualified social workers may be over-represented in sectors experiencing recruitment difficulties, meaning that the demands on them in these settings may be greater.

Table 2 illustrates the potential value of generic social work education, in that the division between working 'mainly with children' and 'mainly with adults' was by no means clearcut. While all but three of the graduates working in LA Adult departments said they worked 'mainly with adults', only two-thirds of those working in LA Children's departments said they worked 'mainly with children', with a third working with 'both children and adults', and a few working 'mainly

with adults', predominantly in fostering and adoption with prospective parents/carers of looked-after children. In this sample, those in the NHS were nearly all working 'mainly with adults' – in mental health or with older people. In 'Other' types of organisation, including in the voluntary and private sectors, there was a mix.

Table 2: Mainly working with children, or with adults, or both-by sector

Base: 377
2008/I,
+ 2008/II 'new jobs'
+ 2009

Working in:	LA Children		LA Adults		NHS		Other	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Mainly with Children N=137	121	61	2	2	1	3	13	30
Mainly with Adults N=159	9	5	104	97	29	97	17	40
Both N=81	67	34	1	1	-	-	13	30
Bases:	**197**		**107**		**30**		**43**	

Almost all those working in local authorities said they were in statutory positions, as were a large majority of NHS social workers. Statutory positions in the private and voluntary sectors were rare exceptions.

Graduates were asked about the main service user group/s they worked with. Table 3 gives the main results for first-year entrants:

Table 3: Main service user groups

	2008/I		2009	
	N	%	N	%
Children & families – including Child Protection	85	41	58	53
Children & families – NOT including Child Protection	15	7	9	8
Looked after children	49	24	28	25
Older people	36	17	24	22
People with a physical disability	17	8	19	17
People with learning difficulties	24	12	13	12
Users of mental health services	32	15	8	7
Palliative care	6	3	4	4
Refugees, asylum seekers	5	2	1	1
Young people	15	7	15	16
Drugs/alcohol/substance misusers	10	5	9	8
People experiencing domestic violence	11	5	2	2
Offenders	10	5	1	1
Base	**207**		**110**	

Graduates were able to give more than one response regarding the main service user group/s they worked with, as Table 3 above makes evident, and there were some interesting overlaps:

- more than half of those working with looked-after children also worked in child protection;
- the overlap between older people and physical disabilities appears to be growing over time;
- learning disabilities similarly, having been a largely discrete area of work in 2008, seems by 2009 to be overlapping increasingly with physically disabled and older people;
- all those mentioning palliative care worked with older people in LA Adult departments;
- all those working with refugees and asylum seekers worked with looked-after children in LA Children's departments;
- work with domestic violence was almost entirely associated with child protection in LA Children's departments;
- in many cases working with offenders also involved mental health and or drugs/alcohol misuse.

The great majority of graduates in child protection worked for LA Children's departments, with a few in the voluntary/private sector. A similar pattern applied with looked-after children. In LA Adult departments there was a wide range of user groups: more than half worked with older people – some of whom were also classified as having physical disabilities – but graduates were also working with people with learning disabilities and mental health service users. Most cases of working with young people were 'looked after-children' in LA Children's departments.

1.2   Employment status

The great majority of first-year graduates working in social work were full-time (Table 4).

Four out of five had permanent jobs. Non-permanent posts were more common in LA Adult departments than in Children's departments, and even more so in the voluntary sector where staff are more likely to have been taken on to work on a specific time-limited project. These differences may reflect the reconfiguration going on in Adult departments to take account of personalisation, and the uncertainty of continuing funding in the voluntary sector.

Table 4: Employment status – first-year graduates in social work jobs

	2008/I		2009	
	N	%	N	%
Full-time	189	*91*	93	*85*
Part-time	18	*9*	17	*15*
Permanent	168	*81*	92	*84*
Non-permanent				
Temporary (open-ended)	16	*8*	6	*5*
Fixed-term contract	21	*10*	12	*11*
Employed direct	191	*92*	106	*96*
Through Agency	16	*8*	4	*4*
Base	**207**		**110**	

Almost nine out of ten of these first-year graduates were still in their first job since graduating.

The line managers of the great majority of graduates were qualified social workers (Table 44, appended), and almost always the case in LA Children's departments.

1.3   Agency workers

Agency workers made up eight per cent (n=16) of the 2008/I sample (the later samples indicating a drop). Of these, slightly more had made a deliberate decision to work for an agency than had had no choice. Better pay, and the ability to 'move around to try different areas of social work', were the main reasons given for opting for agency work. Graduates from ethnic minority backgrounds (n=39) were slightly more likely to be employed through an agency (21%; n=8) – this is consistent with other research suggesting that people from minority ethnic groups are over represented among agency workers (Jayaweera & Anderson, 2008).

The rise of temporary, or agency working, in social work has been the subject of recent research interest (Carey, 2007; Hoque & Kirkpatrick, 2008) and was the subject of a separate project funded under the Social Care Workforce Research Initiative (Cornes *et al.*, 2010).   Government guidance (Department of Health/Department for Education and Skills, 2006; Department of Health, 2009) advised councils to review the proportion of their expenditure on agency workers as way of controlling expenditure. Earlier research (Wallis-Jones & Lyons, 2002) has suggested that newly-qualified social workers have always looked to agency working as a way of acquiring the experience that will enable them to acquire a permanent post in the sector of their choice. However, at 8% among 2008 graduates, the proportion of respondents in this study working for temporary

agencies is higher than the 4% among those qualifying in 2001 (Wallis-Jones & Lyons, 2002). Furthermore, Wallis-Jones and Lyons noted that this figure of 4% represented an increase on the 1-2% they reported in the 1990s.

1.4 Probationary periods

Table 5 shows that six months probation was the most common period for first-year graduates in permanent social work jobs but, surprisingly, almost a quarter reported that they had no formal probation period at all.

Table 5: Probationary periods

Graduates in permanent social work jobs	2008/I		2009	
	N	%	N	%
No formal probationary period	40	24	20	22
Three months	16	10	14	15
Six months	98	58	47	51
Twelve months	3	2	7	8
Other period	10	6	4	4
Don't know	1	1	-	-
Base:	**168**		**92**	

The incidence of 'no formal probation period' was higher among those having received financial support from their employer while a student, as might be expected; however, these graduates by no means account for everyone in this category.

1.5 Recruitment

Over two-thirds of the total number of first-year graduates responding to the survey were currently working in social work – consistent with GSCC data for 2008/9 graduating students, which reported 67% finding employment within six months and 4% later (General Social Care Council, 2010a). Some first-year ITW graduates were employed outside social work, but the great majority of these were in jobs elsewhere in social care: as a family support worker, for example, or in the fields of domestic violence, HIV, education, asylum seekers and older people; several of these graduates had found their present non-social work job through practice placement. However, slightly more first-year graduates were not in paid work at all as yet and still looking for a social work job at the time they replied to the survey. Table 6 gives the full picture.

Table 6: Working status of working total sample of first-year graduates

	2008/I		2009	
	N	**%**	**N**	**%**
Currently in paid employment as a qualified social worker	207	*69*	110	*68*
Employed, not in social work	35	*12*	12	*7*
Looking for a social work job	37	*12*	26	*16*
Looking for a job, not social work	2	*1*	1	*1*
Taking a break	6	*2*	4	*2*
In full-time education	12	*4*	8	*5*
Unable to work - sick	3	*1*	1	*1*
Base	**302**		**162**	

These results do not suggest that the social work degree is being undertaken 'just to get a degree'. In considering the evidence of any 'leakage' of social work graduates into other occupations, the difficulty of finding a job in social work appears to be just as much of a problem.

This conclusion on 'leakage' is supported by the answers to a question about intentions to take up employment as a social worker in future, which show that only a small minority of those not currently working in a social work job had turned their backs on this possibility – as Table 7 makes clear:

Table 7: Expectations of taking up employment in social work in the future

Graduates not currently employed in social work	2008/I		2009	
	N	%	N	%
Yes, definitely	51	*54*	35	*67*
Yes, probably	27	*28*	12	*23*
Probably not	10	*11*	5	*10*
Definitely not	5	*5*	-	-
Not stated	2	*2*	-	-
Base	**95**		**52**	

More than four out of five graduates not currently working in social work thus expressed an intention to take up employment in social work in the future.

Table 8 presents the demographic profiles of first-year graduates working, and not working, in social work – presenting the two cohorts separately. (Unfortunately several 2009 graduates responding to the HEI-distributed survey did not answer the demographic questions, and the sample is small, so these 2009 results should be treated with caution.)

There are noticeable differences between the profiles of those working, and not working, in social work, in terms of:

- age: fewer young (<25years), and to a lesser extent, older graduates (45+ years) having obtained posts in social work;
- ethnicity: fewer graduates from black and minority ethnic backgrounds having obtained posts in social work;
- disability: fewer disabled graduates having obtained posts in social work;
- degree level: more postgraduates having obtained posts in social work.

Some of these differences – ethnicity and disability – accord with findings reported in the analysis of GSCC data comparing 'Grow your Own' (sponsored or seconded by their employer) with other social work students (Hussein *et al.*, 2011a)

Table 8: Demographic profile of graduates responding to survey

| | 2008/I | | | | 2009 | | | |
Profile	Currently working in social work		NOT currently working in social work		Currently working in social work		NOT currently working in social work	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Gender								
Male	23	*11*	10	*11*	16	*15*	6	*12*
Female	184	*89*	85	*89*	86	*78*	43	*83*
Age								
Up to 25 years	19	*9*	21	*22*	16	*15*	15	*29*
25-34 years	88	*43*	24	*25*	27	*25*	8	*15*
35-44 years	55	*27*	25	*26*	26	*24*	12	*23*
45+ years	43	*21*	25	*26*	18	*16*	9	*17*
N/A	2	*1*	-	-	23	*21*	8	*15*
Ethnicity								
White	177	*86*	71	*75*	85	*77*	40	*77*
BME	30	*14*	24	*25*	17	*15*	9	*17*
Disabled								
Yes	21	*10*	18	*19*	11	*10*	10	*19*
Degree level								
Undergraduate	137	*66*	83	*87*	88	*80*	47	*90*
Postgraduate	70	*34*	12	*13*	14	*13*	2	*4*
Base	**207**		**95**		**110**		**52**	

The reasons underlying these profile differences might include an unplanned oversupply of social work graduates in some regions, or perceived unsuitability among some employers.

For historical comparison, Wallis-Jones and Lyons found in 2002 that 93% of newly-qualified social workers were employed in social work within a year of qualifying, and just 1% remained unemployed.

In this current study, the 'employed in social work' first-year graduate samples contained 35 graduates who at the time they completed the questionnaire were still waiting for their GSCC registration (11% of those working as social workers). Such delays in formal registration could create problems; one line manager described the effect on the contribution that such graduates could make to teams:

> *But they don't hear about whether they've been successful and they have got their qualification in their hands and the GSCC registration, some of them now, haven't been until August or even September. We end up employing people because they want the money and they want the job, employ them in June time as Social Work Assistants on that salary band. We can only give them social service assistant work.*
>
> R1 115 Denise, Team manager, Children's services

Turning now to how new graduates currently employed in social work found their current job (Table 9), around one-fifth had been recruited through being on placement with that employer. The voluntary/private sector accounted for a higher than average proportion in this ex-placement group. Given that the ability to appoint good candidates from students on placement is often proffered as a reason for agencies to provide placements, the figure of only one in five graduates finding a social work job in this way seems surprisingly low, especially as a majority of Directors felt that recruiting new social workers from placement was something their organisation did 'well' (Table 51, appended). As managers explained, experience of students on placement was a good means of identifying good candidates for posts.

> *We tend to take students into care management, and if we can we try and keep the decent ones on, because not everybody – even though they want a care management placement – has really got the ability to do that. When you take students on there are some that shine more than others and grasp it, and other people… it is not really for them, so they will do the placement and then move on.*
>
> R1 104 Jenny, Team manager, Adult services

Line managers in LAs operating 'Grow Your Own' (GYO) schemes to recruit new or existing staff members as entrants to social work, or those who had recruited newly-qualified social workers who had completed a final practice placement in their organisation, generally seemed more satisfied with the calibre of their new graduates – but it is not clear whether this is because of a highly selective initial recruitment process attracting excellent and experienced candidates, or that GYO students were very likely to have had one or more statutory placements, or just that their managers knew them better as individuals.

The largest group of first-year graduates had found out about their present job from an external advertisement (press or Internet). Around one in six had returned to work for the organisation which had sponsored them through their degree programme, and another one in nine had been appointed as a result of an internal job ad. None had obtained their job through a Jobcentre, only three through a job fair and one through their university's careers office. Fewer than one in twenty had found out about their current job through personal or informal contacts.

Table 9: How found out about current job

	2008/I		2009	
	N	%	N	%
Through practice placement	44	*21*	19	*17*
Through employment agency	16	*8*	5	*5*
Internal job advertisement	23	*11*	12	*11*
External job advertisement – newspaper or internet	68	*33*	41	*37*
Careers office at university/college	-	-	1	*1*
Job fair	2	*1*	1	*1*
Informally through friends/personal contacts	9	*4*	3	*3*
Job centre	-	-	-	-
Returned to sponsoring employer	29	*14*	21	*19*
Other	16	*8*	7	*6*
Base:	207		110	

Almost all the agency workers in this sample had found their current job through an employment agency.

1.6   Retention

Graduates were asked about their intentions to stay with their current employer (Table 10). Over half the first-year graduates expected to remain with their current employer for at least the next two years; slightly more for the shorter period of between two and four years than for the longer period of the next five years. One in eight of these graduates was already looking for another social work job – more in Britain than abroad. A quarter expected to start looking for a new social work job within the next two years. Only a handful expected to leave social work altogether within the next two years.

These results are better than CWDC found with a 2008/9 sample of first-year newly-qualifieds participating in the NQSW programme in Children's services (Carpenter *et al.*, 2010).

Table 10: How long expect to remain with current employer

	2008/I		2009	
	N	%	N	%
I expect to remain with my current employer for the next five years	51	*25*	28	*25*
I expect to remain with my current employer for the next two to four years	66	*32*	38	*35*
I expect to start looking for another social work job within the next two years	54	*26*	28	*25*
I am already looking for another social work job – in Britain	23	*11*	9	*8*
I am already looking for another social work job - abroad	3	*1*	1	*1*
I expect to leave social work within the next two years	3	*1*	3	*3*
Don't know	7	*3*	3	*3*
Base	**207**		**110**	

Line managers worried about retention, not least from the point of view of continuity for individual service users.

> *If I have a social worker that sticks with a child for a year – that's remarkable. My turnover in parts of my service is huge. So I need staff who are going to be around and stick around and are going to be there for vulnerable children for reasonable chunks of time. I need – resilience is important.*
>
> R1 115 Denise, Team manager, Children's services

Managers identified several factors affecting retention. First, they acknowledged that social work is often a difficult job, especially in Children's services, and they were not always sure that newly-qualifieds were fully aware of the challenges before starting work, and the reserves of personal resilience needed to cope successfully. A few linked this with a lack of vocation, or commitment.

> *It's tough being a front line social worker in [this area]… We have high deprivation, unemployment, teenage pregnancy and it sounds doom and gloom. But it's tough. If there is a different opportunity out there then they will take it.*
>
> R1 122 Louise, Team manager, Children's services

Capacity problems in social work teams had two damaging effects on retention, according to line managers: high workloads, and lack of support because more senior and experienced workers simply did not have enough time to offer help. Poor quality managers were also blamed for driving newly-qualifieds away to seek another job – in fact this was often the reason mentioned by graduates themselves who had changed jobs. Finally, line managers thought that uncompetitive rates of

pay compared to neighbouring LAs could persuade newly-qualifieds to go elsewhere – they sometimes attributed recruitment difficulties to poor pay too.

One respondent, in a team working with children with disabilities, was able to articulate a clear link between support in the workplace and retention:

> *Many stay with us a long time. The social workers like the work and how they are supported and managed, for example they get leave, the workload is fair, it's not arbitrary, we do prioritise and people get training. The NQSWs have protected caseloads – some other teams I know don't have the chance to do that.*
>
> *R2 205 Kate, Senior Practitioner, Children's services*

1.7 Career paths

Of the social workers graduating in 2008 who took part in the Phase I survey (n=207), their career paths roughly eighteen months later (Phase II) are known for about half of them:

Table 11: 2008 graduates: career paths

	N	%
Stayed in the same social work job	56	27
Stayed in social work but switched jobs	38	18
Moved from social work to a non-social work job	2	1
Not working	2	1
Unknown	109	53
Base	**207**	

Both the two social workers who left for a non-social work job had stayed in social care: one moving from a post working with learning disabled people in LA Adult services, to an older people's charity; the other from a fixed-term voluntary sector post working with young people in prisons to a different voluntary sector post – both posts involving child protection work.

Of the two now not working (at Phase II): one was 'taking a break' to have a baby, fully intending to return to social work; the other had a debilitating health condition and was not working at all.

What 2008 graduates in social work posts at both Phase I and Phase II said at Phase I about their intentions to stay in their current job reveals a quite different pattern between those who in fact stayed ('Stayers' in Table 12 below), and those who switched to another social work job ('Switchers' in Table 12):

Table 12: Comparison of intention to stay or leave vs. what happened

Q: How long do you expect to remain with your current employer? (Phase I)	STAYERS		SWITCHERS	
	N	%	N	%
I expect to remain with my current employer for the next five years	19	*34*	6	*16*
I expect to remain with my current employer for the next two to four years	24	*43*	8	*21*
I expect to start looking for another social work job within the next two years	10	*18*	12	*32*
I am already looking for another social work job – in Britain	2	*4*	11	*29*
I am already looking for another social work job – abroad	-	-	1	*3*
I expect to leave social work within the next two years	-	-	-	-
Don't know	1	*2*	-	-
Base	**56**		**38**	

Thus three-quarters (77%) of those who in fact stayed had said they would; by contrast only a third (37%) of those of those who changed jobs expected at Phase I to stay put. Conversely, only one in five of those who did not change jobs had previously expected to do so (22%), whereas nearly two-thirds of those who switched had anticipated that they might (61%). So while intentions are not a perfect predictor, they do seem to provide a guide to future behaviour.

Among the Switchers, there were only eight who at Phase I were working in non-permanent jobs, implying that for the great majority they wanted to change job, rather than simply seeking a permanent position.

The sector of social work jobs at Phase I was very similar between those who stayed in the same job, and those who switched:

Table 13: Phase I sector comparison between Stayers and Switchers

Phase I jobs:	STAYERS		SWITCHERS	
	N	%	N	%
LA Children	24	*34*	17	*45*
LA Adults	18	*32*	11	*29*
NHS	3	*5*	4	*11*
Voluntary sector	4	*7*	4	*11*
Private sector	4	*7*	-	-
Other	3	*5*	2	*3*
Base	**56**		**38**	

In addition, most social workers who switched jobs between Phase I and Phase II stayed in the same sector:

Table 14: Employment sector of job Switchers – longitudinal comparison

JOB SWITCHERS FROM:		To: LA Children	To: LA Adult	To: NHS	To: Vol.	To: Private	To: Other
LA Children	17	15	-	-	1	-	1
LA Adults	11	1	7	3	-	-	-
NHS	4	1	-	3	-	-	-
Voluntary	4	3	-	1	-	-	-
Private	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other	2	1	-	-	-	-	1
TOTAL	N=38	21	7	7	1	-	2

Thus there is no indication from this data that any of these sectors was in itself more or less attractive to social work graduates after they started work.

As noted in section 1.5, the 2008/I survey of new graduates included 95 respondents not working in social work jobs at the time they replied. Again there are gaps in the record for many, but it is also clear that by Phase II a good number had found social work jobs:

Table 15: Career paths of graduates not working in social work

Phase I: Not working in social work	N	Phase II: SW job	Phase II: Non-SW job	Phase II: Not working	UNKNOWN
Employed, not in social work	35	7	6	1	21
Not working including 'looking for a job'	60	16	1	5	38
TOTAL	95	23	7	6	59

Of those 23 taking up a new social work job:
- 6 were in LA Adult services;
- 12 were in LA Children's services;
- 1 was in a Children's Centre;
- 1 was in a school;
- 2 were in a joint Social Services/NHS organisation (one working with older people and their carers; the other in mental health);
- 1 was seconded from the LA to an 'Other' organisation working with users of mental health services.

2   WORKING LIFE

2.1   Motivations

Graduate social workers were asked about their motivations for choosing social work, and Table 16 sets out the findings. This shows how these social workers were principally motivated by the sense of being able to improve the quality of service users' lives and tackle injustice, though aspects of the work which led to a sense of fulfilment (stimulating, variety) were also important. Respondents could select as many options as they wanted, and it is noticeable from the pattern of responses that motivations could be quite multi-faceted.

Table 16: Graduates' motivations towards social work

Q: What attracts or motivates you towards social work as a career?	2008/I		2008/II		2009	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Good career prospects	55	27	27	23	41	37
Well paid jobs	32	15	20	17	14	13
Opportunities for flexible working patterns (part-time, career breaks, etc.)	39	15	21	18	29	26
Personal ability to get on with people	119	57	76	66	67	61
Working in a team	92	44	57	49	59	54
Wish to tackle injustice and inequalities in society	128	64	71	61	76	69
Helping individuals to improve the quality of their own lives	165	80	106	91	93	85
Especially suitable career for someone with life experiences like mine	49	28	32	28	33	30
High job satisfaction	75	30	47	41	45	41
Variety of work day-to-day	142	69	83	72	84	76
Interesting, stimulating work	150	74	87	75	85	77
Able to exercise individual responsibility for making my own decisions	82	40	57	49	43	39
Encouragement from family or friends	13	6	11	9	16	15
Base	**207**		**116**		**110**	

This same question was asked of students, the results reported in SWDE 2008. Comparing the overall findings between graduates and students, there are no motivational items which rise in importance for graduates, whereas a number of falls can be observed:

- Encouragement from family or friends - more than halved for graduates
- Well paid jobs   - more than halved for graduates
- Good career prospects   - fell for graduates
- Personal ability to get on with people   - fell for graduates
- High job satisfaction   - fell for graduates

This *Into the Workforce* study provided the opportunity to trace longitudinally the pattern of motivation responses among the 133 social work graduates participating in both the 2008/I and 2008/II surveys, and relate these to what they answered as first-year students. Factor analysis was carried out on these 133 first-year students' responses, which yielded a four-factor solution which best explained the variation. These factors were as follows:

- **Career**
  Good career prospects
  Well paid jobs

- **Working conditions**
  Flexible working patterns
  Suitable career for my life experiences
  Variety of work
  Responsibility for decision-making
  Encouragement from family/friends

- **Interaction with people**
  Personal ability to get on with people
  Working in a team

- **Worthwhile job**
  Tackle injustice, inequalities in society
  Improve the quality of lives
  High job satisfaction
  Interesting, stimulating work

It is worthy of note that the final factor 'Worthwhile job' shows how closely inter-related are the sense of job satisfaction and interesting work with the altruistic aims of improving service users' quality of life, and to a lesser extent tackling injustice and inequalities in society: these two latter motivations being dominant in graduates' and indeed students' thinking about social work as a career.

This 4-factor solution has produced different results from the factor analysis (Principal Components Analysis) carried out on all student responses to this question (see Evaluation of Social Work Degree Qualification in England Team, 2008b, 29). There, the correlation was barely present between the top two items under 'Worthwhile job' listed above, and the bottom two; instead, the relationship between 'Tackle injustice' and 'Improve quality of lives' was much stronger with the items separately listed above under 'Interaction with people'. Sampling differences may account for these different solutions; the SWDE analysis used data from all students at all stages of their studies, whereas this present ITW analysis

has used first-year student motivations data only, and just from that smaller number of respondents who went on to participate in ITW surveys as graduates.

Table 17 illustrates the pattern of change in 'most important' motivation over time, for the same group of respondents (133 social work graduates participating in both the 2008/I and 2008/II surveys, and as students). The desire to help people improve the quality of their own lives assumed even more importance, and 'interesting, stimulating work' increased a little, albeit from a low level. Most other motivations diminished in importance once students graduated and went into social work employment. The importance of 'good career prospects' as a main motivating factor almost disappeared on starting work.

Table 17: 'Most important' motivations towards social work as a career longitudinal data

	As first-year students		First year in practice: 2008/I		Second year in practice: 2008/II	
	N	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
Good career prospects	13	*10*	1	*1*	2	*2*
Well paid jobs	-	-	1	*1*	1	*1*
Flexible working	2	*2*	1	*1*	1	*1*
Ability to get on with people	4	*3*	3	*2*	7	*6*
Working in a team	-	-	-	-	-	-
Wish to tackle injustice	24	*18*	18	*15*	19	*15*
Improve users' lives	59	*45*	69	*56*	67	*53*
Suitable for my life experience	10	*8*	2	*2*	3	*2*
High job satisfaction	6	*5*	12	*10*	5	*4*
Variety of work	4	*3*	4	*3*	5	*4*
Interesting, stimulating work	8	*6*	13	*11*	16	*13*
Make own decisions	1	*1*	-	-	-	
Encouraged by family and friends	-	-	-	-	-	-
Base:	**131**		**124**		**126**	

The strength and persistence of altruistic motivations towards social work as a career is a key finding from this study.

First-year graduates were asked about how their motivations had been fulfilled (Table 18); the most likely motivations to be fulfilled were:

- Helping individuals to improve the quality of their own lives
- Variety of work day-to-day
- Interesting, stimulating work
- Working in a team

Table 18: Motivations fulfilled

Q: Which of these have you actually found to be fulfilled in your social work career so far?	2008/I		2009	
	N	**%**	**N**	**%**
Good career prospects	14	*7*	8	*7*
Well paid jobs	14	*8*	6	*5*
Opportunities for flexible working patterns (part-time, career breaks, etc.)	27	*13*	13	*12*
Personal ability to get on with people	45	*22*	19	*17*
Working in a team	66	*32*	39	*33*
Wish to tackle injustice and inequalities in society	36	*17*	24	*22*
Helping individuals to improve the quality of their own lives	92	*44*	67	*66*
Especially suitable career for someone with life experiences like mine	10	*5*	9	*8*
High job satisfaction	27	*23*	12	*11*
Variety of work day-to-day	89	*43*	31	*28*
Interesting, stimulating work	74	*36*	39	*35*
Being able to exercise individual responsibility for making my own decisions	22	*11*	15	*14*
Encouragement from family or friends	3	*1*	3	*3*
Base	**207**		**110**	

In addition, a higher than average proportion of graduates found that 'Opportunities for flexible working patterns' and 'Well paid jobs' were fulfilled, relative to the number that were motivated by these factors – small in both cases (Table 16).

2.2   Job satisfaction

At a general level, newly-qualified social workers in this sample displayed very positive attitudes towards their current jobs, generally believing that they were 'Making a real difference to the wellbeing of service users' (see Table 46 appended). As shown in Table 19, almost everyone was enjoying their job.

Table 19: Enjoyment of job so far

	2008/I		2008/II		2009	
	N	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
Enjoying it very much	95	*46*	40	*34*	53	*48*
Quite enjoying it	86	*42*	66	*57*	45	*41*
Not enjoying it much	23	*11*	7	*6*	10	*9*
Not enjoying it at all	2	*1*	3	*3*	2	*2*
NOT STATED	1	*	-	-	-	-
Base	**207**		**116**		**110**	

These findings are very comparable to the answers to a similar question to students about enjoyment of practice placements. However, only half of new graduates were satisfied with 'The amount of contact time with service users or carers' in their current job in social work, and a third were dissatisfied (see Table 45 appended). Dissatisfaction with contact time was higher among those working mainly with children. This same question was asked of students (Evaluation of Social Work Degree Qualification in England Team, 2008a, 137) about their practice placements – with very much more positive results then. Students were either 'very satisfied' or 'fairly satisfied' with the amount of contact time with service users in over 80% of their practice placements. This reduction in satisfaction between being on placement and being in work seems likely to represent considerable disappointment about working life.

Managers who directly commented on contact time with service users similarly felt it was too limited, but they also tended to note the competition between time spent on case recording, as opposed to direct work with people using services:

> *There needs to be a balance between accountability and having clear records about what you are doing, and being able to do your active work on the ground, and I am not sure what you do about that for the future.*
>
> *R1 119 Elaine, Team Manager, Children's services*

Only half of new graduates agreed that they were 'Able to achieve a good work/life balance' in their current job – more than a quarter disagreed. And opinion was also quite finely balanced on the question of whether or not it was difficult coping with the stress of their current job (see Table 46 appended and section 2.3 below).

About half of the managers commented directly about overload, all acknowledging that the work was pressured. This was an area of concern for practice as well as a cause of high turnover:

> *I suppose it's a vicious circle. Less staff, higher caseloads, a lot more reactive worker duty, it makes it busier. So at the moment we're trying to get a sense of stability.*
>
> *R1 117 Hugh, Team manager, Children's services*

2.3 Job-related variables

The online survey questionnaires for new graduates contained a number of 'portmanteau' questions that covered a range of issues relating to how they perceived their jobs. The results of these questions are tabulated in full in Tables 44-46 appended. Factor analysis (Principal Components Analysis) was carried out on the results from two of these questions, based on 280 first-year graduate respondents (2008/I and 2009) for whom data was available from their participation in the SWDE online survey research. The aim of this analysis was to identify latent factors that might summarise the main areas of graduate opinion about their jobs, and if so, to use this smaller number of 'independent' variables to test their influence on two key job-related outcomes ('dependent' variables') – namely enjoyment (section 2.2), and retention (section 1.6).

This analysis produced an intelligible seven-factor solution which incorporated all 23 variables included in the model. The seven factors were as follows:

1. Manageable workload:
1. There are NOT a lot of unfilled staff vacancies
2. The working environment is NOT very pressured
3. *(satisfaction with)* The amount of contact time with service users or carers
4. Coping with your workload

2. Supportive line manager
1. Accessibility of your line manager when necessary
2. Professional support and guidance from line manager

3. Supportive colleagues
1. Professional support and guidance from colleagues
2. Teamwork
3. Friendliness of other staff in the workplace

4. Values
1. Opportunity to put your own social work values into practice
2. Ability to transmit your social work values to workers from other professions

5. Pay and prospects
1. Your conditions of employment (pay, pension, annual leave, etc)
2. Your prospects for advancement and promotion

6. Job engagement
1. Staff are encouraged to take part in learning and development activities
2. Service users' views and perspectives are taken seriously
3. Widening your knowledge of areas of social work practice
4. Being able to fulfil your PRTL commitments for the GSCC
5. Working in partnership with service users to take their wishes into account

7. Stable job structure
   1. The values of the service are clear to everyone
   2. There has NOT recently been a lot of organisational re-structuring
   3. The IT system generally works well
   4. Good day to day working relationships exist with professionals from other agencies
   5. Line manager is a qualified social worker

Scales were then constructed for each factor, incrementing by one point for each positive answer from every respondent – so, the more points, the better. Distributions range from 0 to 2, or 3, or 4, or 5 – depending on how many individual variables were included in each factor (see definitions above). The results of statistical tests showed that internal consistency and levels of correlations were acceptable for all the job-related scales except the last (F7), which has therefore been abandoned.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of graduates' scores for each of the remaining six factors, and illustrates the finding that graduates rated some aspects of their job experiences better than others: scores were much higher for 'Supportive colleagues' and 'Supportive manager' than for 'Manageable workload'.

Figure 1: Graduates' scores for each of the 6 job-related factors

	Manageable workload	Supportive line manager	Supportive colleagues	Values	Pay and prospects	Job engagement
High*	34%	79%	76%	59%	51%	67%
Medium*	42%	8%	20%	21%	27%	25%
Low*	24%	14%	4%	20%	23%	8%
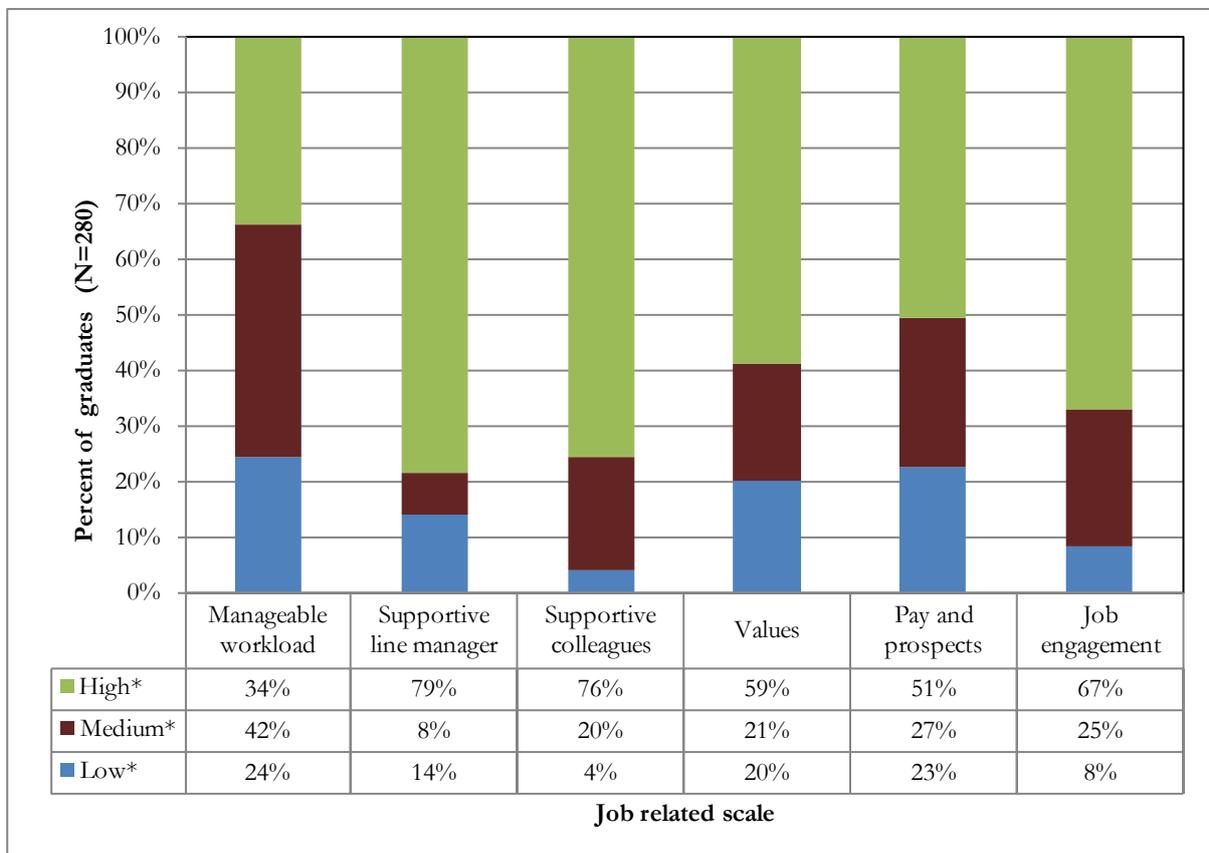
Job related scale

Only three of the six job-related scales consisted of just three points (0, 1, 2), and these have been translated directly as Low, Medium or High in Figure 1. But the other three job-related scales were longer, and to present these scales in the same terms of Low, Medium, High, and make comparison easier, those with more than three points were grouped, as follows:

	Low	Medium	High
• **Job engagement**	0 or 1 points n=11 + 12	2 or 3 points n=30 + 39	4 or 5 points n=57 + 131
• **Manageable workload**	0 points n=68	1 or 2 points n=59 + 58	3 or 4 points n=63 + 32
• **Supportive colleagues**	0 points n=11	1 or 2 points n=19 + 38	3 points n=212
• **Values**	0 points n=56	1 point n=59	2 points n=165
• **Pay and prospects**	0 points n=63	1 point n=75	2 points n=142
• **Supportive line manager**	0 points n=39	1 point n=21	2 points n=220

The results of examining the effect of these job-related factors on other survey variables, including most importantly job enjoyment and retention (see section 2.5), and preparedness for practice (section 4.1) are described later in this report.

2.4   Job-related variables by sector

Mean scores and standard errors for the distributions of the job-related scales were calculated for each sector of social work employment. The results showed that graduates in LA Children's departments gave the lowest score for Manageable Workload (out of a maximum of 4 points; $\overline{X}$=1.39; n=87) compared with other sectors, and lowest also for Values ($\overline{X}$=1.26 out of a maximum of 2 points; n=87).

Fieldwork settings were also found to score poorly for Manageable Workload ($\overline{X}$=1.45; n=121; p=0.009) – consistent with the finding about LA Children's departments, which accounted for a large majority of graduates working in fieldwork.

2.5   Factors affecting job enjoyment

Graduates scoring low on the Job Engagement variable were least likely to be enjoying their job. Low scores on:

- Ability to put values into practice
- Supportive colleagues
- Supportive line manager

… were also associated with not enjoying the job. The 'Pay and Prospects' and 'Manageable Workload' variables had a smaller effect on job enjoyment.

Graduates who had received financial support from their employer while students were more likely to be enjoying their job, probably reflecting their return to a workplace they already knew and were familiar with. BME graduates were also a little more likely to be enjoying their job than white graduates. Postgraduates on the other hand were much less likely to be enjoying their job, and though the sample is small so were those who while first-year students reported that they were 'not much' or 'not at all' enjoying their degree programme.

Taking demographics, characteristics as students, motivations and job factors all into account to build a final set of regression models, shows that only three main issues are significant in predicting whether graduates are enjoying their job:

- Ability to put values into practice
- Job Engagement
- Well-prepared by degree programme (see section 4.1)

This is an extremely important finding.

Whether or not graduates felt prepared by the degree was found to be strongly influenced by job-related factors, as discussed in detail later (section 4.1). Being frustrated in being able to put their social work values into practice or transmit them to others was found through cross-analysis to be correlated with not feeling well-prepared, and also with dissatisfaction with contact time with service users and carers. Postgraduates and those working in LA Children's services were also more likely to feel unable to express their values. The Job Engagement factor (see section 2.2) is a mix of wanting access to learning and development opportunities, and emphasis on working in partnership with service users and carers. Improvements to these aspects of social work jobs are therefore most likely to contribute most to job satisfaction.

A final set of regression models looked at the group of graduates already looking for a new job or intending to leave social work altogether within the next two years, compared with others in social work jobs – the aim being to identify those factors which discriminated between these two sub-samples. After controlling for all other characteristics, only two factors were found to be significantly associated with 'already looking for another job':

- working in the private/voluntary sector
- low score for Supportive Colleagues

Graduates working in the private/voluntary sector were enjoying their jobs just as much as those in other sectors, and on many of the job-related variables (section 2.3) their scores were as good if not better; they scored slightly lower on 'Pay and prospects' but not significantly so. The explanation for their greater likelihood of looking for another job therefore probably lies in their ambition to work in the local authority sector, in statutory front-line social work – possibly for better pay, or for career reasons, or because of worries about job security in the private/ voluntary sector.

The implications of the finding about the effect of the Supportive Colleagues variable on propensity to be looking for another job are that employers concerned about retention should invest in ensuring that all team members work well together, friendly towards each other and mutually supportive.

3   SUPPORT IN THE WORKPLACE

3.1   Team support

A strong sense of peer support emerges from the graduate survey findings, with the overwhelming majority expressing satisfaction with the level of 'Professional support and guidance from colleagues'; very many satisfied with 'Teamworking'; and slightly more satisfied with 'Friendliness of other staff in the workplace' (see Table 45 appended and section 2.3 above). The first two of these were also asked of students in connection with practice placements (Evaluation of Social Work Degree Qualification in England Team, 2008a, 137), with similarly positive results.

Many line managers interviewed for this study also noted the value of team support for newly-qualifieds, seeing it as a vital part of the 'socialisation' process and learning to become a social worker. Mostly this was expressed in terms of informal support around difficult cases, or going along on visits, although more formal systems of team supervision were occasionally mentioned:

> *I think the good thing about here is the team ethos. We've got a core of workers – even though we've had a reasonable turnover on agency, there is a core who have been here for say about five years roughly – and the supportive nature of it, in that if a new worker is struggling with something or needs a second worker, people will drop things to help each other out. There's a real coming-togetherness in difficult times…. Yes, and that* [group supervision] *would be seen as in addition to obviously what we have, but almost choosing a subject area per week, or once a month say, I don't know, pre-birth assessments, and newly qualifieds out there, newer people are actually quite enthusiastic about that which is a real good thing: it's enthusiasm. And for me, it's about feeding off their enthusiasm. There's nothing better than having a worker who wants to learn.*
>
> *R1 117 Hugh, Team manager, Children's services*

Good team support characterised managers' recollections of their own early careers. Most described how they had worked with colleagues who were able to support them, and had time to discuss cases.   In some cases managers acknowledged how their own early experiences had they led them to develop good transition approaches with their own teams.

Managerial support also appeared from the graduate surveys to be reasonably high. More than three-quarters of new graduates were satisfied with the level of 'Professional support and guidance from line manager' (if anything slightly above the level of satisfaction expressed by students with practice placements); satisfaction with 'Accessibility of your line manager when necessary' was even a little greater still (see Table 45 appended, and section 2.3).   Many managers themselves reported being available to newly-qualifieds on an ad hoc basis to answer particular queries or to offer more 'hands on' support.

Line managers described a range of strategies they had developed in order to tailor the workload of NQSWs to their levels of experience. These are discussed in more detail later in sections 3.4, 3.8 and 3.9, and included:

- extra, more frequent supervision
- reduced caseloads
- shadowing
- allocating them less complex cases
- giving them opportunities for co-working.

However, direct observation by their line manager of new graduates' practice was reported to be uncommon (especially in Adult services): over a third of graduates said this 'never' happened, and even when direct observation did take place this was usually less often than once a month.

3.2 Electronic recording systems

Only half of these new graduates felt it was 'True' that the IT system in their place of work 'Generally works well', and two in five that this was 'Not true' (see Table 44 appended).

Managers' comments on the IT systems they had to work with tended to echo the negative findings from the Task Force, among others.

I'd really like the process to feel more slim-lined. It just isn't, and for instance child protection reports, we've got a core process on the system and then there's a separate child protection core process for want of a different word, so in order to keep both processes happy, you would have to have both of them at a case conference, and yet it's just a repetition of exactly the same information.

R1 116 Kirsty, Team Manager, Children's services

They [newly-qualifieds] won't have used this system if they haven't [been here on placement] – it depends where they have done the placements because the systems are different...XXXX system is the council's, but you will find that some areas of the council are not actually operating it the same as we do, or not operating at all because none of the day centres use it... next door you would be on YYYY [system] – so they don't talk to each other.

R1 106 Donna, Team Manager, Adult services

Line managers did sometimes link the time-consuming demands of electronic case-recording with the lack of service user contact time. However, they varied in terms of how much they felt this was an inevitable feature of contemporary social work, or a matter of regret.

Apart from identifying the problems created by the shift towards electronic recording and by the inflexibility of some IT systems, managers also pointed to the advantages of being able to refer to all the records relating to a person, although access to NHS records was sometimes more problematic. New graduates were generally described as being IT literate. At the top of organisations employing social workers, Directors were also quite positive about newly-qualified social workers' IT skills (Table 47 appended).

3.3   Induction

Both Skills for Care (SfC) and the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) recommend a structured induction process for new workers – in Adult and Children's services respectively – right across the board in social care services, not just social workers, newly qualified or otherwise.   Both envisage a thoroughgoing employer introduction to the organisation: briefing new workers about the organisation and their specific role within it, and setting out policies and procedures as well as expectations of behaviour in terms of values, relationships, communication, health and safety, and so on.   While an induction programme should mention workers' responsibility for their own skills and knowledge development, induction should not be regarded as social work professional training in itself, though it might indicate available opportunities for different types of worker.   Employer-provided general training and development activity experienced by social work graduates is therefore considered separately, in Section 3.5 below.

Line managers all described the approach to induction in their organisation, and recognised its importance in establishing newly-qualified social workers firmly in their role and setting expectations.   Typically, there was a mixture of corporate, departmental and team-based programmes.   Induction would also often involve meeting senior managers and members of other teams, as well as some introduction to systems and policies:

> *That's about welcoming [them] to this department. It's about the philosophy of the department. It's about introducing newly-qualified practitioners to the law as it is administered, rather than an academic understanding of the role.*
>
> *R1 121 Stanley, Team manager, Children's services*

Around half of Directors felt that induction could be done 'more, or better' in their organisations (Table 51, appended).

Two-thirds of first-year graduates employed in social work (2008/I: 72%; n=149; 2009: 67%; n=74) reported being given some kind of induction – either already finished or still in progress.

What their Induction covered is presented in Table 20. The response options for this question were derived from the detailed content of the Common Induction Standards produced by both SfC and CWDC. The Table shows that 'Arrangements for your support and supervision' and 'Confidentiality' tended to be covered best, followed by 'Record-keeping', 'Your own job role' and 'General health and safety'. 'Whistle-blowing' was least well covered in Induction. Coverage of 'person-centred approaches' was much better in Adult services ('very well covered' 2008/I: 38%, n=24; 2009: 45%, n=15), reflecting its relevance in this sector.

Table 20: Induction coverage

Q: Which of the following were, or will definitely be covered during your induction?			Very well covered	Partially Covered	Not really Covered	Not covered at all
The values of your organisation	2008/I	%	34	36	13	13
	2009	%	42	35	15	7
The goals and future plans of your organisation	2008/I	%	32	34	12	17
	2009	%	39	38	12	11
Confidentiality	2008/I	%	51	26	11	9
	2009	%	53	36	5	4
Implementing person-centred approaches	2008/I	%	28	30	12	23
	2009	%	32	35	8	22
Risk assessment procedures	2008/I	%	36	36	11	13
	2009	%	38	38	8	16
Record keeping	2008/I	%	48	28	14	17
	2009	%	49	39	7	5
Other policies, procedures of your organisation	2008/I	%	43	35	12	6
	2009	%	45	46	9	-
Your own job role	2008/I	%	45	39	7	7
	2009	%	47	42	5	5
Relationships with other workers	2008/I	%	32	36	9	19
	2009	%	31	39	14	16
General health and safety	2008/I	%	46	35	8	8
	2009	%	42	47	5	5
General security	2008/I	%	42	35	11	9
	2009	%	39	47	5	7
Communication with service users	2008/I	%	30	36	12	19
	2009	%	28	43	14	14
Identifying abuse and neglect	2008/I	%	33	32	13	19
	2009	%	36	35	14	14
Whistle-blowing	2008/1	%	23	34	14	26
	2009	%	27	45	16	11
Arrangements for your support and supervision	2008/1	%	54	33	5	5
	2009	%	43	46	4	5
Arrangements for your C… P… D…	2008/1	%	36	40	6	13
	2009	%	36	42	7	14
	Base	2008/I: 149				
		2009: 74				

Correlation analysis (see Methods section) was carried out between each of these aspects of induction coverage – focusing on gaps, ie. graduates saying that the aspects was covered 'not really', or 'not at all'. This analysis illustrates the ramifications of poor induction. For example, the absence of good induction on 'person-centred approaches' was strongly associated with poor coverage of:

- Communication with service users (r=0.73)
- Risk assessment procedures (r=0.71)
- The values of your organisation (r=0.66)
- Identifying abuse and neglect (r=0.64)
- Confidentiality (r=0.62)
- The goals and future plans of your organisation (r=0.60)
- Record keeping (r=0.56)
- Whistleblowing (r=0.52)

… and relationships between these gaps individually were also observable.

This pattern of responses suggests that in some employer organisations, induction lacked specific social work orientation, focusing more strongly on corporate issues and priorities.

Lack of 'general health and safety' and of 'general security' information were strongly associated (r=0.83). Poor coverage in induction of 'your own job role' was highly correlated with poor coverage of 'relationships with other workers' (r=0.63), and the same was true of 'record-keeping' and 'other policies and procedures of your organisation' (r=0.70).

Graduates reporting no induction were less likely to be enjoying their job: twice as many of those who had no induction were not enjoying their job (18%) compared to only 9% not enjoying their job among those who had received induction. Most of the job-related scales described earlier (section 2.3) were also found to vary according to whether or not graduates had received induction; differences were particularly marked for Supportive line manager and Supportive colleagues. This suggests that induction may be regarded as a sign of general care and concern for new employees, not just a formality.

Compared with ratings of other aspects, for example training, graduates' ratings of the quality of their Induction were somewhat modest (Table 21). As with many of the measures in this study, postgraduates tended to give lower ratings.

Table 21: Quality of Induction

	2008/1		2009	
	N	**%**	**N**	**%**
Excellent, very good	18	*12*	8	*11*
Good	69	*46*	33	*45*
Neither good nor poor	40	*27*	25	*34*
Poor	16	*11*	7	*9*
Very poor	4	*3*	-	-
NOT STATED	2	*1*	1	*1*
Base	**149**		**74**	

3.4   Supervision

Professional supervision is a core mechanism for helping social workers critically reflect on the understanding they are forming of their work with individual service users and families, and for making decisions about how best to support them. As shown in Table 22, the most common current supervision frequency reported by graduates in all three surveys was monthly, but for a considerable minority (upwards of one in six even of first-year graduates), supervision was less often.

The frequency of supervision declined markedly for the 2008 cohort between their first and second year of practice (Table 22) – perhaps not surprisingly as graduates' experience lengthened. More than a third of first-year graduates reported that supervision was already taking place less often now than when they started in post. But for 2009 first-year graduates, supervision frequency in their first year was lower than for the previous cohort (2008/I), with fewer having supervision more often than once a month, and slightly more of them less often.

Table 22: Supervision frequency

Q: How regularly do you have a formal supervision meeting with your line manager?	2008/I		2008/II		2009	
	N	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
Once a week	6	*3*	-	-	-	-
Once every two weeks	53	*26*	16	*14*	23	*21*
Once a month	117	*57*	75	*65*	68	*62*
Less often	27	*13*	25	*22*	19	*17*
NOT STATED	4	*2*	-	-	-	-
Base	**207**		**116**		**110**	

Across all the samples, supervision frequency seemed a little higher in Children's services than in Adults.

Supervision was a strong theme emerging from the line manager interviews. Case management was obviously for them the main purpose of supervision; for some the sole purpose with reflection, personal development, training and encouragement optional extras – though others took these more seriously:

> *Obviously, we have to do it because it's mandatory as well, but it's about how we actually use supervision as well and I always look at the cases, you know, kind of what people want to do, what they're interested in, what training's out there, how they are, where they're at in their careers, and we also do PDPs* [Personal Development Plans] *as well.*
>
> *R1 114 Teresa, Team manager, Children's services*

> *… with the NQSWs they will have formal supervision for an hour and a half, which is likely to be more case-related. Then, they'll have an additional hour and a half of more reflective professional development supervision, where things can be analysed and looked at in more detail.*
>
> *R1 115 Denise, Team manager, Children's services*

> *I can almost still say what are my major influences theory-wise, which I think is especially important in front-line social work because it is so reactionary, and we lose reflection, we lose the theoretical underpinning, we lose sight of a lot of what happens, and we're just reacting daily due to the resources issue and everything else. But I think it's our job as front-line managers to try and bring some of that back in with supervision. And it's surprising actually, the lack of that...*
>
> *R1 117 Hugh, Team manager, Children's services*

It is also important to note that many line managers spoke of an 'open-door' policy, whereby social workers in their teams, especially the newly-qualified, could ask questions or seek guidance at any time, outside formal supervision sessions. Sometimes this kind of dialogue was initiated by line managers themselves – occasionally described as 'informal supervision'. A few line managers noted that newly-qualified social workers were more open than their more experienced colleagues in discussing incidents, developments and problems with their cases, which they broadly welcomed.

Directors generally appeared confident that their organisations were providing 'closer supervision' for newly-qualifieds than for more experienced social workers, with more than half saying they did this 'well' (Table 51, appended).

Consistent with what most graduates were saying, all the line managers in this sample reported undertaking supervision at least monthly with their newly-qualified workers, and often more frequently at the start.

Even when supervision was no more frequent for newly-qualified than for more experienced social workers there was sometimes recognition that monthly was not often enough:

> ...[supervision] *every three to four weeks, but that can be a long time for a newly-qualified member of staff who might be making mistakes in that time, and on the surface some people who are very good at looking good at what they are doing but there is other stuff underneath – sometimes that you find later in the day that things haven't been done right or they have not been done at all.*
>
> *R1 106 Donna, Team Manager, Adult services*

The longitudinal nature of the survey among 2008 graduates permitted a comparison in the frequency of supervision between Stayers (those still in the same job at Phase II as at Phase I) and Switchers (those having changed jobs between Phase I and Phase II – see section 1.7). As shown in Table 23 below, a quarter of Switchers said 'less than once a month' at Phase I compared to fewer than one in ten of Stayers – ie. supervision frequency at Phase I was much better for Stayers. By Phase II, these differences were less apparent – with around a fifth of both groups saying that they received formal supervision 'less than once a month'.

Table 23: Comparison of supervision frequency between Stayers and Switchers – longitudinal data

Q: How regularly do you have a formal supervision meeting with your line manager?	STAYERS: N=56		SWITCHERS: N=38	
	Phase I	Phase II	Phase I	Phase II
Once a week	1	-	2	-
Once every two weeks	13	7	7	3
Once a month	37	39	19	27
Less often	4	10	10	8
N/A	1	-	-	-

As noted above, supervision frequency may be expected to decline after the first few months in a job, as newly-qualified social workers become more familiar with the work. However, among Switchers, the frequency of supervision actually improved at Phase II for 7 of these graduates – in 6 cases from 'less than once a month' at Phase I to monthly – compared to only 2 Stayers reporting an improvement. This suggests that supervision frequency may be a factor in deciding to switch jobs.

Second-year graduates (2008/II) were asked about certain perceived effects of supervision (Table 24). Almost three-quarters felt that supervision helped them improve their professional practice, and nearly as many that it helped them prioritise their workload. Supervision was rated as somewhat less helpful in coping with stress, or in maintaining professional boundaries with service users.

Table 24: Perceived effects of supervision

Q: To what extent do you feel your supervision helps you…. BASE: 116 second year graduates, 2008/II		A great deal	A little	Not much	Not at all
Prioritise your workload	%	24	45	22	7
Cope with stress	%	28	26	29	15
Maintain professional boundaries with service users	%	18	40	26	15
Improve your professional practice	%	27	45	22	5

According to new graduates, discussion of individual cases dominated their supervision meetings (even more so in Children's services), across all the surveys (Table 25). But a good majority said that sessions usually covered 'Personal support, encouragement and appreciation' – though this fell over time – as well as training needs. Among first-year graduates, non-permanent staff tended to report personal appreciation more often, but training less often, than permanent staff. Theory-into-practice appeared to be very much a feature of the first year of employment.

Table 25: Formal supervision meeting content

Q: What do formal supervision meetings with your line manager usually cover?	2008/I		2008/II		2009	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Review of each of your cases	175	85	98	84	91	83
Advice and guidance on more difficult cases	175	85	98	84	98	89
Closing cases	110	53	71	61	67	61
Discussion of your training needs	159	77	89	77	89	81
Personal support, encouragement and appreciation	145	70	69	59	66	60
Suggestions for developing reflection and self-awareness	71	34	37	32	41	37
Help in applying theoretical approaches or explanations to your practice	42	20	11	9	29	26
Agency policies	89	43	43	37	39	35
Your performance against targets	76	37	42	36	48	44
NOT STATED	6	3				
Base	**207**		**116**		**110**	

Second-year graduates (2008/II) were asked which elements of supervision they wanted more of, or less (Table 26). Those elements they were most likely to want 'more of' resonated very well with the aims of HEI staff teaching on social work qualifying courses – namely the application of theory, and reflective practice. The wish for more 'personal support, encouragement and appreciation' was also quite widespread, likewise 'advice and guidance on more difficult cases'. A majority of these second-year graduates were content to see other case-progress topics remaining at the same level in supervision, but many wanted less attention paid to 'performance against targets'.

Table 26: Supervision preferences

Q: Which of these aspects of supervision would you like more of, or less? BASE: 116 second-year graduates (2008/II)		Much more	A little more	Just the same	Less
Help in applying theoretical approaches or explanations to your practice	%	37	35	25	-
Suggestions for developing reflection and self-awareness	%	29	40	29	-
Personal support, encouragement and appreciation	%	23	30	44	1
Advice and guidance on more difficult cases	%	22	29	48	-
Discussion of your training needs	%	11	32	53	-
Agency policies	%	7	34	50	5
Review of each of your cases	%	11	22	65	1
Your performance against targets	%	6	21	50	17
Closing cases	%	2	9	78	5

The proportion of first-year graduates thinking that their line manager rated their performance 'Very highly' fell from a third to only a quarter between the two first-year graduate cohorts (2008/I, 2009) – see Table 27. Among second-year graduates (2008/II), however, the 'very highly' proportion went up, suggesting that the line manager's rating – or at least graduates' perceptions of this – took little account of new graduates' relative lack of experience during their first months of practice.

Table 27: Perceptions of line manager rating of performance

Q: How well do you think your line manager rates your performance so far in this present job?	2008/I		2008/II		2009	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very highly	67	32	47	41	25	23
Quite highly	131	63	66	57	79	72
Not very highly	5	2	3	3	6	5
N/S	4	2	-	-	-	-
Base	**207**		**116**		**110**	

The great majority (c.90%) of graduates considered that their line manager's rating of their performance was 'Fair', with very small numbers thinking that they were either over-rated or under-rated by their line manager.

However, it may be that second-year graduates were in a better position to report confidently about their line manager's positive view of their performance: by their second year more than half of graduates had so far received a formal appraisal at the time they responded (2008/II: 59%, n=68), whereas for first-year graduates this had only reached a third (2008/I: 33%, n=68: 2009: 29%, n=32).

Comparing the difference between Stayers and Switchers (see section 1.7 for definitions) regarding how well their line manager was thought to rate their performance (Table 28): Switchers were in fact slightly more likely than Stayers to say that their performance was rated 'very highly' at Phase I, suggesting possibly that a high performance rating gave them confidence to search successfully for another job. By Phase II the proportion saying that their performance was rated 'very highly' by their line manager had risen to a similar level for both Stayers and Switchers groups.

Table 28: Line manager ratings – longitudinal comparison

Q: How well do you think your line manager rates your performance so far in this present job?	STAYERS: N=56		SWITCHERS: N=38	
	Phase I	Phase II	Phase I	Phase II
Very highly	15	24	13	16
Quite highly	39	30	25	22
Not very highly	1	2	-	-
Not stated	1	-	-	-

Among Stayers, proportionately more reported an improvement in their line managers' rating between Phase I and Phase II (27%; n=15) than among Switchers (16%; n=6). This suggests that it is not just length of time in employment that counts, but time spent in a specific post – most probably with the same manager.

3.5   Training and development

At a general level, new graduates appeared quite happy with their employers' stance in terms of their development. Almost all (c.90%) said it was 'True' that 'Staff are encouraged to take part in learning and development activities' in their current job; roughly three-quarters (c.75%) were satisfied with 'Being able to fulfil your PRTL[2] commitments for the GSCC[3]', and nearly two-thirds (60+%) agreed that 'My employer takes my professional development seriously' (see Tables 44, 45 and 46 appended, and section 2.3).

Fewer than one in ten first-year graduates said they had so far received no training in their current job, apart from Induction, though training was slightly less prevalent among second-year graduates (2008/II: 85%; n=99).

In-house training was much more common than externally provided training, but many graduates had received both. As shown in Table 29, the quality and relevance of the training received were overwhelmingly rated as 'good' or better.

Table 29: Training quality and relevance

	2008/I		2008/II		2009	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Excellent, very good	53	29	19	24	28	28
Good	109	61	44	56	55	54
Neither good nor poor	15	8	13	17	13	13
Poor	2	1	2	3	3	3
Very poor	-	-	-	-	-	-
NOT STATED	1	1	-	-	2	2
Base (all receiving training)	**180**		**78**		**101**	

Second-year graduates (2008/II) were asked separately about the training they had received under either the Children's or Adult NQSW programme, or other training. Ratings tended to be rather better for non-NQSW (presented in Table 29 above) than NQSW training.

Almost half of second-year graduates (2008/II: 47%, n=54) said they had been allowed 'protected development time', defined as time off for study or learning – in response to a specific question:

- Yes, plenty of time off   19%   n=22
- Yes, but not enough time off   15%   n=17
- Yes, but not always able to take time off   13%   n=15

---

[2] **Post registration training and learning**
[3] **General Social Care Council**

As shown in Table 25, over three-quarters of new graduates stated that formal supervision meetings with their line manager usually involved a discussion of their training needs, and managers themselves typically identified training and development as a key topic for supervision. Specific areas of further training mentioned in the interviews with managers for their newly-qualified staff included:

- Assessment and care planning
- Risk assessment
- Risks to workers
- Mental health issues (including Approved Mental Health Professional award)
- Drug and alcohol awareness
- Prioritising cases
- Specialist Child Care Awards
- Safeguarding
- Mental Capacity Act and Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards

3.6 Personal Development Plans

The prevalence of Personal Development Plans (PDPs) increased markedly over the survey period, according to the graduate survey data – possibly because both the CWDC and Skills for Care NQSW Frameworks emphasised PDPs to employers as a good tool for planning training and development activity. Between the two first-year graduate cohorts the incidence nearly doubled (Table 30).

PDPs were much more often developed since graduating, rather than while still a student (just over a quarter of PDPs). While in most cases line managers had discussed PDPs with their newly-qualified social workers and helped implementation, as the prevalence of PDPs has grown, line managers' involvement shows a steady decline proportionately. PDPs were barely mentioned spontaneously by the managers interviewed.

Table 30: Personal Development Plans

	2008/I		2008/II		2009	
	N	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
Have a Personal Development Plan	67	*32*	62	*53*	67	*61*
PDP drawn up as a student	19	*9*	n/a	*n/a*	21	*19*
Line manager discussed PDP with you	57	*28*	49	*42*	45	*41*
Line manager helped you implement PDP	50	*24*	36	*31*	38	*35*
Base	**207**		**116**		**110**	

3.7 Post-qualifying education (PQ)

About half of first-year graduates (2008/I: 46%, n=95; 2009: 53%, n=58) said they had already discussed PQ (post-qualifying) education with their line manager.

Second-year graduates (2008/II) were asked a slightly different question: about satisfaction with their access to PQ. Just over half were satisfied ('Very' 28%, n=32; 'Fairly' 28%, n=33), and a quarter dissatisfied ('Very' 12%, n=14; 'Fairly' 12%, n=14), with the rest neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Working with new social workers to enable them to move towards PQ awards was specifically identified as a natural progression by a small number of managers, though PQ was not universally popular. There was a sense among managers that newly-qualified workers needed a period just to settle down into the workplace and establish themselves in professional practice before embarking on further study.

> *When do you take the stabilisers off? It used to be when you left college – it was expected you would gain a lot when in work – there's a lot to be said for this.*
> *R2 205 Rhona, Team manager, Children's services*

3.8 Learning and development methods and activities

Second-year graduates (2008/II) were asked which of a series of learning and development methods and activities they had had experience of (Table 31).

Table 31: Learning and development opportunities

Q: Have you had experience of any of the following, in your current job?	N	%
A mentor assigned to you for informal support (someone more experienced or senior to you, NOT your line manager)	36	31
Shadowing of a more experienced social work colleague – from your own team	60	52
Shadowing of a more experienced social work colleague – from a different team	16	14
Shadowing a colleague – from a different profession	21	18
Co-working a case with more experienced social work colleague/s	48	41
Peer supervision – when several social workers from your team share experiences with your professional supervisor	26	22
Group session/s for newly-qualified social workers (including action learning sets or support groups) – within your <u>own team</u>	13	11
Group session/s for newly-qualified social workers (including action learning sets or support groups) – involving NQSWs from <u>other teams/agencies</u>	23	20
Base	**116**	

Shadowing within the graduate's own team was most frequently reported, followed by co-working of a case. All these activities were reported to be much more common in graduates' first year of practice than later on. (A different question to first-year graduates specifically about Mentoring showed 40%, for example, for both cohorts – compared to only 31% for second-years: Table 31.) Except for 'shadowing of a social work colleague from a different team', which was twice as likely to have happened only once than more than once, these activities – if they were available at all – seemed to be recurrent. For each activity they had experience of, graduates were asked to rate 'the quality of the learning opportunity'; although there was some minor variation between them, all were rated quite highly.

Joint working with senior social workers on more difficult cases, and being accompanied on visits to meetings or to court were frequently mentioned by line managers as helpful and supportive to new workers – even if this did not continue for very long.

> *I think we would expect them in their first couple of weeks of induction to accompany someone else on a visit. Then they would do a visit with someone else going with them, and then the manager would go out and shadow that visit, just so that we're assured that they're safe, that they're a good representative of the council, and that the service user is getting a full assessment. So we would always do that.*
>
> *R1 110 Imogen, Team manager, Adult services*

> *I may well link them into co-working with someone else so that they can actually build up on their experiences, whether it's coming along to a case conference, meetings with the police, or whatever we do. So I'm always on the lookout for an opportunity.*
>
> *R1 114 Theresa, Team manager, Children's services*

> *I like to think I'm approachable, and what I would usually do, and I still do for some social workers who've been qualified a lot of years, is if they feel the need, then I will go to court with them. Having said that, if it was a newly qualified worker, I wouldn't wait for them to come to me and request that – I would offer to go with them, and I'm quite happy to sit down with anybody and go through how to write a statement and provide them with ones that people have already done.*
>
> *R1 116 Kirsty, Team manager, Children's services*

Peer supervision was very occasionally mentioned by line managers as a good development opportunity, for gaining *"insight"* about how to improve practice from talking through difficult cases with others in the team. Other informal support arrangements included shadowing, or direct assistance in carrying out aspects of work for the first few times, particularly case conferences or court reports.

We would want to be having quite an intensive support and supervision, so encouraging them to have a small caseload of the more straightforward work for starters, and perhaps going out on the first couple of visits with the person, either the supervisor directly or another member of staff, and then coming back and talking about it, and so leading them into it gently, rather than just dropping them in it.

R1 109 Daisy, Team manager, Adult services

As a precursor to a question about help and support with improving various aspects of their practice (see Table 33), second-year graduates (2008/II) were first asked how much they felt these aspects had actually improved for them since starting work in their present job. Reported levels of improvement were quite positive – as set out in Table 32. Interestingly, these results show that these second-year graduates considered their practice to have improved rather more than their personal confidence.

Table 32: Improvements over time

Q: Since starting work in this present job, how much would you each of the following has improved for you personally? **Base: 116 second-year graduates**		Improved a great deal	Improved a little	Not improved very much	Not improved at all
The overall quality of your practice	%	66	30	3	1
Your choice of suitable interventions more likely to lead to better outcomes for the service users and carers on your caseload	%	54	38	5	2
Your own professional abilities	%	69	28	2	-
Your personal confidence	%	58	34	5	3
The accuracy and analytical insights of your case assessments	%	63	34	3	-
Feedback from service users and carers on your practice	%	41	45	8	1

For the same set of aspects of practice, second-year graduates were then asked how much help and support they had received in their current workplace for each one, with the results shown in Table 33 below. Perhaps not surprisingly, the extent to which graduates felt their practice had improved was strongly affected by the level of support they considered they had received, for each of these aspects.

Table 33: Help and support with improving practice

Q: How much appropriate help and support have you received in your current workplace for improving… Base: 116 second-year graduates		A great deal of help and support	A little help and support	Not much help and support	No help and support at all
The overall quality of your practice	%	28	57	13	3
Your choice of suitable interventions more likely to lead to better outcomes for the service users/carers on your caseload	%	23	56	17	3
Your own professional abilities	%	19	54	23	3
Your personal confidence	%	21	42	30	7
The accuracy and analytical insights of your case assessments	%	16	55	22	6
Feedback from service users and carers on your practice	%	9	47	30	13

The relatively low level of support received with 'service user and carer feedback' may help explain why this was considered by graduates to have improved least (Table 32), among all the aspects asked about. There were signs that support for this aspect was lower still in Children's services, which may indicate a lack of attention to this measure in this workplace sector.

Second-year graduates (2008/II, n=116) were also asked to rate their capability now, in terms of marks-out-of-ten, and then 'when you first started in this current job'. Figure 2 plots graduates' self-rating of their capability now, in comparison with their self-rated capability when they started in their current job. The upward shift in perceived capability over time is very clear.

Figure 2: Second-year graduates' self- rating now and when started job

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
On starting job	1	9	10	31	34	18	10	1	0	2
Now	0	0	1	2	4	11	41	31	17	9
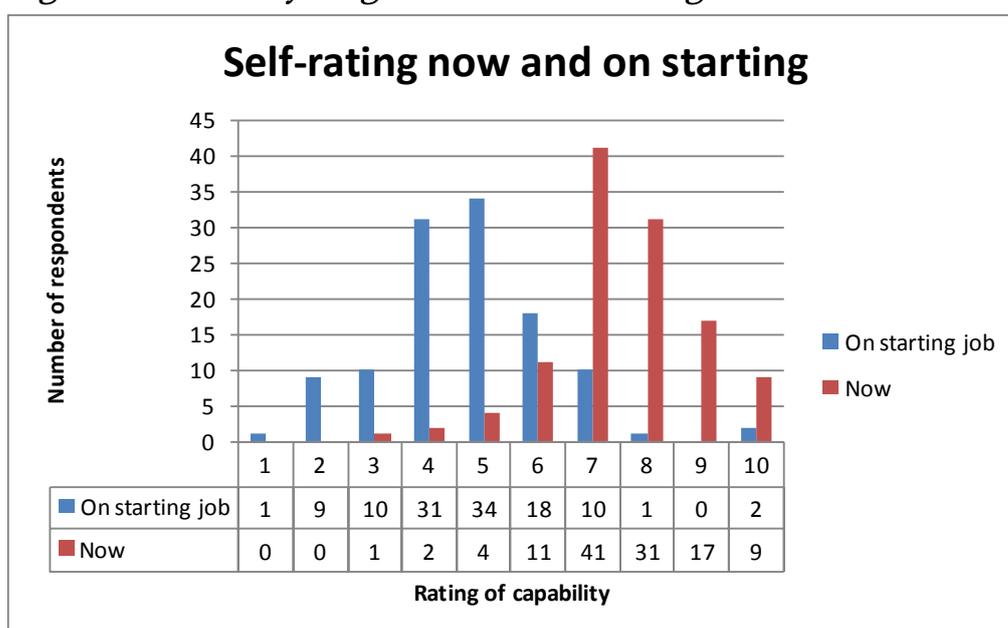
Almost all of these second-year graduates scored an improvement in their capability; four respondents scored the same and one went backwards (from 5 to 4), but the rest (96 %, n=111) reckoned their capability had improved. As illustrated in Figure 3, the average increase in marks-out-of-ten was 3 – though a quarter of these of these second-year graduates reckoned their capability had improved by more than 3 points.

Figure 3: Changes for individual graduates between 'now' and when started current job

Change in self-rating

	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Difference in rating	1	4	11	28	43	18	9	1	1

Change in capability rating
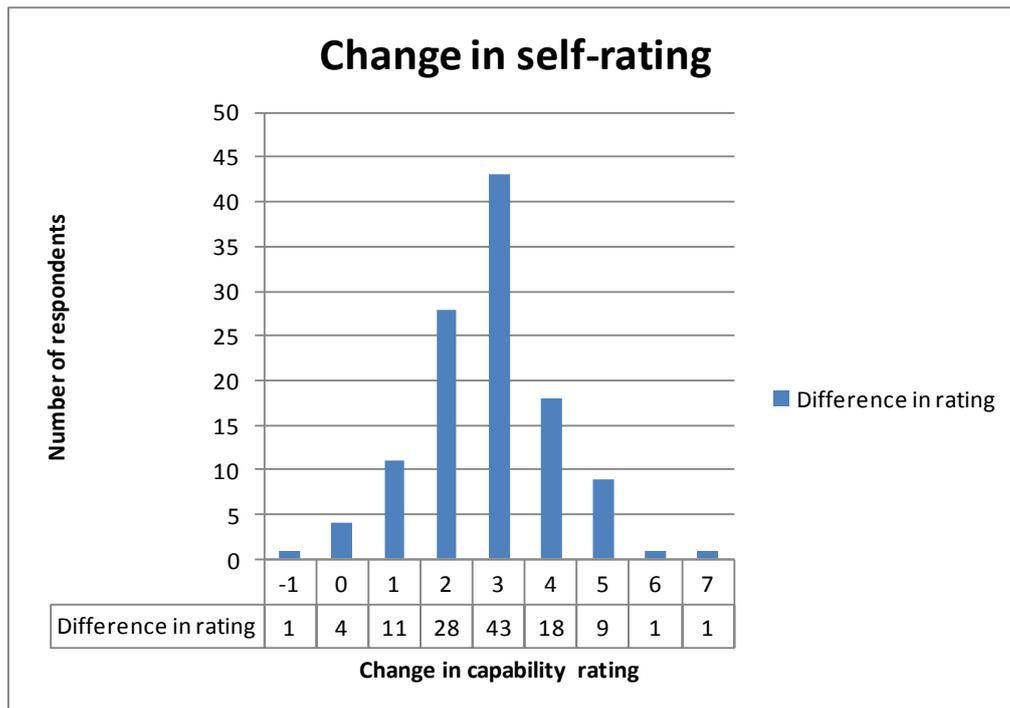
3.9 Protected caseloads

The great majority of second-year graduates (2008/II) said that 'your level of experience in social work practice was taken into account' in allocating their caseload, either 'to a limited extent' (45%; n=52) or 'to a great extent' (37%; n=43); they were 'pleased' where this happened (and 'not pleased' where it did not).

Protecting the caseloads of newly-qualified workers was, for line managers, one of the key elements of supporting them during their early period in post. In almost all cases, managers described how newly-qualifieds were not allocated cases of the highest risk or complexity, wherever possible – essential to ensure that they were not put off social work, and also as a safety measure. Typically, however, this was not corporate policy, as this comment demonstrates:

> *I would have a protected caseload for them and start off with easy things that they would feel comfortable with, or confident with, and build up, very much the same way as you would with a student…I felt it was my responsibility not to be setting* [people] *up to fail. Giving her a caseload which was relatively straightforward, people who were able to speak for themselves, for instance. People who we might know very well already and there is no conflict in the family. Service users that I felt she could manage well with and start to achieve with and learn the paperwork with, without any damage … That's sort of a starting point... Well, I suppose it's a little bit off* [my own bat] *because she was a locum rather than an employee when she was newly qualified. But yes, I don't think it's a written policy within the authority.*
>
> R1 103 Lisa, Team manager, Adult services

Managers' ability to deploy these strategies was largely dependent upon having a stable core of experienced team members who could take on more complex cases and higher caseloads. Even so, they explained that newly-qualified workers might sometimes find themselves in situations in which the levels of complexity and risk escalated. For example, managers in Adult services pointed out that safeguarding concerns could emerge in what had previously seemed like a routine referral of a person with learning disabilities, or an older person with dementia. Another manager in Children's services pointed out that her most experienced workers were often involved in court proceedings, and so newly-qualified workers were having to undertake other day-to-day child protection work. When a case being handled by someone newly-qualified suddenly became more complex or risky, managers tended to respond by giving them more support, possibly another team member to work with them, rather than removing them from the case.

However, where teams were under pressure due to workload or staff shortages, newly-qualified workers might well be allocated more difficult cases. One manager described how a recruitment crisis had led to graduates qualified through a Grow Your Own (GYO) scheme working with complex child protection cases quite

quickly after starting, whereas a group of newly-qualifieds recruited directly from universities was working with such cases only after six months:

> *The* [GYO] *graduates haven't* [had reduced caseloads]. *They were able to do it. My graduates have got caseloads of 30 children. They are functioning at a much higher level, whereas my newly-qualified or new ones, they've got caseloads of 12, 15 children … that's where they are now six months down the line; they certainly wouldn't have started with that.*
>
> *R1 115 Denise, Team manager, Children's services*

In one instance, a manager mentioned allocating cases deliberately to widen the newly qualified worker's exposure to different areas of practice:

> *You also try and get them to work to their strengths but give them something for their weaknesses as well – so if somebody has worked with learning disability all the time you need to give them other things to do to develop them in other ways and vice versa; if they are frightened of working with people with learning disabilities you need to almost encourage that to happen.*
>
> *R1 104 Jenny, Team manager, Adult services*

Directors in LA Children's services were more likely in 2009 than in 2006 to acknowledge that they could do better in ensuring limited initial caseloads for newly-qualified social workers – half the Children's Directors in 2009 (Table 51, appended). To a lesser extent recognition also grew among Children's Directors over the three-year period that closer supervision should be provided for newly-qualifieds than for more experienced social workers. In Adult services, by contrast, there was no increase in thinking that either of these forms of support needed more attention; instead there was a growing focus on induction programmes for newly-qualified social workers. These changes may be attributable to the emphasis in the NQSW Pilot programmes from both CWDC and Skills for Care on better support for newly-qualified social workers early in their careers.

4 READINESS TO PRACTISE

4.1 Preparedness

Three-quarters of first-year graduates felt 'very' or 'fairly' well prepared by their degree programme for their current job – see Table 34.

Table 34: How well graduates feel their degree prepared them for their present job

	2008/1		2009	
	N	**%**	**N**	**%**
Very well prepared	27	*13*	10	*9*
Fairly well prepared	124	*60*	76	*69*
Not very well prepared	37	*18*	21	*19*
Not at all well prepared	4	*2*	-	-
NOT STATED	15	*7*	3	*3*
Base	207		110	

While these results on perceived preparedness appear on the face of it to be slightly lower than reported in earlier research (Marsh & Triseliotis, 1996, 127), they are more positive than those found in another study of NQSWs (CWDC Research Team, 2009). However, neither the question wordings nor the sample compositions were quite the same as for this present survey.

How well prepared graduates in this present study felt was found to be quite strongly related to perceptions of their current job. Dividing them into two groups 'Well prepared' and 'Not well' and analysing by the six job-related factors (see section 2.2) revealed the significant effect of all these factors – listed here in descending order of magnitude:

- Ability to apply values   ($p<0.001$)
- Job engagement   ($p<0.001$)
- Manageable workload   ($p<0.003$)
- Supportive line manager   ($p<0.001$)
- Pay and prospects   ($p<0.002$)
- Supportive colleagues   ($p<0.02$)

This finding – that social work graduates' beliefs about how well their degree has prepared them for working life are to some extent a function of their actual job experiences – is a key conclusion of this research.

Whether or not graduates were enjoying their current job was also highly correlated with their sense of preparedness: six times as many of those who felt unprepared were <u>not</u> enjoying their job (33%) in comparison with the small minority among those feeling they had been well prepared who were not enjoying their job (only 5%).

Overall satisfaction among Directors with 'the quality of the newly-qualified social workers you have recruited into your organisation over the past three years' improved between 2006 and 2009 (Table 35). Directors in Adult services were generally more satisfied than those in Children's services. The improvement over time was similar, though in Children's services there was a slight rise in the proportion dissatisfied, as well as satisfied – in other words, more polarised views in 2009 than in 2006.

Table 35: Directors' satisfaction with newly-qualified social workers

Q6 Overall, how satisfied have you been with the quality of the newly-qualified social workers you have recruited into your organisation over the past three years?	2006		2009	
	ADULTS	CHILDREN	ADULTS	CHILDREN
	Weighted base=100	Weighted base=100	Weighted base=100	Weighted base=100
Very satisfied	9	4	7	4
Fairly satisfied	48	38	63	54
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	17	29	13	12
Fairly dissatisfied	9	17	3	23
Very dissatisfied	4	-	-	4
N/S	13	13	13	4

In 2006, most newly-qualified social workers would have achieved the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW), whereas by 2009 the preponderance of new social workers entering the workforce would have qualified via the degree. These findings therefore provide evidence that the degree has improved the quality of new entrants to the profession – in the eyes of Directors.

4.2   Attitudes towards the degree

Table 36 shows that four out five of first-year graduates reported having enjoyed their degree programme.

Table 36: Enjoyment of degree programme – looking back

	2008/I		2009	
	N	**%**	**N**	**%**
Enjoyed it very much	89	*43*	44	*40*
Quite enjoyed it	77	*37*	55	*50*
Did not enjoy it much	19	*9*	7	*6*
Did not enjoy it at all	6	*3*	-	-
NOT STATED	16	*8*	4	*4*
Base	207		110	

These ratings are very slightly lower than the 'enjoyment' rating given by students actually during their degree studies (Evaluation of Social Work Degree Qualification in England Team, 2008b, 22).

Graduates' attitudes towards the degree, looking back, were reasonably positive. Almost two-thirds agreed that 'Doing the degree programme strengthened my motivation to go into social work as a career', and over half felt that 'higher standards of social work practice' would result from the degree (Table 46 appended). While students' views of the degree strengthening their motivation were very similar, since starting work opinions about the effect of the new degree on standards of practice appear to have deteriorated somewhat.

Graduate opinion diverged about the usefulness in their present job of the theory they had learned during their degree programme (see Table 46 appended). This may be related to the finding of general lack of attention given to 'Help in applying theoretical approaches or explanations to your practice' during supervision (section 3.4). A slightly different question was asked of second-year graduates (2008/II) about this; only a quarter (26%, n=30) disagreed that 'My present job prevents me from applying the theory I learned during my degree programme', with over a third (39%, n=45) agreeing and the rest undecided. Answers to this question correlated to some extent with perceptions about how well they were able to express their values in their practice – which had a significant influence both on job enjoyment and on propensity to look for another job (section 2.3). In addition, three-quarters of second-year graduates (2008/II: 72%; n= 84 – see section 3.4) picked 'Help in applying theoretical approaches' as an element of supervision they wanted more of – and this was at the top of their list. Taken together, these results provide evidence of insufficient attention given to theory-into-practice in normal working life, if social work graduates are struggling to understand the perceived practical

usefulness of theoretical approaches to service users' situations, and to deciding on and implementing helpful interventions.

Line managers generally spoke positively about the newly-qualified social workers in their teams, praising their energy, enthusiasm and commitment. They also appreciated initiative – getting on with a case and then checking afterwards that they were on the right lines – rather than waiting to be told what to do.

A strong theme from managers was that the degree was not training social workers to apply their learning in the contexts they would be faced with in practice, displaying a lack of understanding or recognition that employers share responsibility with universities in delivering high quality educational experiences, through provision of practice placement opportunities. Creating clear expectations about what social workers would be expected to do was seen by managers as an important part of universities' roles – in contrast to what HEI respondents themselves believed. However, managers did acknowledge that it was not possible to prepare students fully for the realities of professional practice, and that much development could only come through experience.

> *Now we've got all the personalisation and transformation stuff coming in, and depending on what's happening that drives us, it's just constant, constant change. The processes are always being looked at to see whether they can be smartened up… If you can't cope with that constant, constant change, it's not the environment for you… One student said to me that a hundred days just dipped their toes in the water. There is just so much to know.*
> *R1 107 Rosemary, Team manager, Adult services*

Line managers, along with graduates and HEI staff, placed considerable emphasis on student placement experiences as a key source of learning, especially about social work roles and service user groups – most notably child protection.

The great majority of Directors participating in this study, interestingly, felt that taking social work students on placement was something their organisation did 'well' (Table 51, appended).

Managers (and indeed HEI respondents) were conscious of the variability in quality between placement opportunities: in terms of the type of work available, especially statutory work, and the amount of support offered to develop and learn. Picking up *"good habits"* was also a mark of a good quality placement. And the more thoughtful managers certainly recognised that being on placement was not at all the same thing as independent professional practice:

> *[Students] have light, interesting caseloads, which are challenging in terms of their interest, but not kind of … You are only in three or four days a week. No-one is going to give you something that is going to fall apart.*
> *R1 103 Lisa, Team manager, Adult social care*

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… although the placements are excellent and they are even better now they are hundred days, I don't think that that is indicative of how it's going to be when you are doing the job, and I know as a practice learning assessor that students shouldn't be used as a worker anyway, so I wouldn't expect them to have that depth. I would expect them still to have that probationary induction period when they get used to it, used to the team, especially if they have not worked on a team.

R1 105 Gloria, Team manager, Adult social care

The ideal for many managers was for their newly-qualified member of staff to have undertaken a placement in exactly the same setting, with the same service user group. This would mean, most importantly, that they would already be familiar with processes, if not precise procedures.

Some service user respondents, but not all, seemed to know about the social work degree, through friends. Opinion about a degree qualification, as opposed to any other kind, was not particularly strong, though some kind of training was certainly seen as necessary. On the positive side, graduate social workers might have: better skills, especially in communicating with service users; more understanding; and better knowledge of the needs of service user groups, eg. mental health. On the other hand service users were wary about social workers becoming academic rather than practical – academic learning was not felt to be sufficient. *"Life experience"* was mentioned several times, very often in the context of understanding parenting first hand. The myth about graduate nurses being 'too posh to wash' was quoted as an analogy, which they did not wish to see replicated in social work.

New graduates were considered by service users and carers to need a period of shadowing or mentoring in the workplace before handling a caseload of their own, because only then would they acquire the necessary *"practical experience"* – considered key to good social work.

"But the hands-on experience is your training, isn't it. You can do as many years [education] as you want, and I think experience is your hands-on work, and your reality of meeting people."… "Part of the training should be out in the field as well."

[Northern group – Service users and carers]

4.3   Social worker roles – service user perspectives

Service users and carers appeared to have no difficulty in distinguishing their social worker from other professionals they had dealings with, or from care workers. However, they did associate their social worker with the quality of care services they received, and if this was not as good as they expected, they tended to hold the social worker responsible.

The social worker would be assigned their case at the beginning, and was their first port of call when the service user had a problem. In this sample it was rare for service users to change their social worker, but they quite often had to deal with another social worker when their own was unavailable. They appreciated the continuity of dealing with the same social worker, which ideally enabled them to *"build up a relationship"*, and *"get to know you"* and *"what your lifestyle is"*.

The social worker was perceived to have many roles. In the first instance they collected information from the service user or carer about the case, asking a great many questions. Respondents accepted the necessity for this to establish a user's circumstances, and hence needs. In the case of foster carers some actively welcomed the questioning process regarding their personal suitability, as it allowed them to examine their own attitudes and beliefs more closely than they otherwise might – regarding education or discipline, for example – and they appreciated getting to know themselves a bit better. Better *"probing"* was occasionally called for, for social workers to understand family circumstances more fully. However, respondents did get tired of having to repeat information, especially in crisis situations when other priorities seemed more important.

Service users expected social workers to offer help and advice, in crisis and non-crisis situations. This included knowing what benefits or services were available that service users in different circumstances were entitled to, and in turn this meant understanding what these were, and possibly 'battling' to obtain them.

> *"Actually, I like my supporting social worker, I do; I feel confident with her that if I have got a problem, I can phone her up and she will do her utmost to sort it."*
> *[Northern group – Service users and carers]*

At times of crisis service users wanted a quick response from their social worker – if a vulnerable child went missing, for example, or a mental health condition suddenly worsened. Accessibility was an important role.

> *"I think they should always answer you. If you ring or leave a message they should always, no matter what, get back to you… even if it's only to say 'I've got your message; I'm looking at it; I can't give you an answer now' "… "Even if it's another social worker…"*
> *[Northern group – Service users and carers]*

> *"We all at some time will need their help out of hours, and I think that has got to be paramount that they can't offer* [just] *a 9-5 service."*
> *[Southern group – Service users and carers]*

Liaising with other authorities and professionals was also an important social worker role in many cases, ie. inter-professional or inter-agency working. Transfer of Child Benefit to foster carers, providing a wheelchair, 'statementing' of an autistic child – these were examples of where effective inter-agency liaison was required.

These perceived roles implied a fairly clear set of desirable social worker characteristics.

- Empathy was perhaps top of the list, because without it other important qualities such as supportiveness and responsiveness seemed so much less likely.

"They're not very sympathetic… I think they feel that you have to be on the verge of murdering somebody for them to do anything… that your mental health problems aren't so severe that they should waste their time."

[Southern group – Service users and carers]

"Caring" was how one service user expressed it.

- Good communication skills were also important, particularly listening.

"You share such a lot of your personal information that you actually want to feel that they are listening and understanding and are going to make a difference… to help you."

[Southern group – Service users and carers]

Service users gave many examples of when they thought they had not been listened to – their wishes and feelings being ignored, misunderstandings arising – which clearly annoyed and upset them.

- Commitment, shading sometimes into persistence, was appreciated by service users when actions needed taking on their behalf.

- Common sense was also a positive quality, and alongside more positive recollections, service users were able to give examples also of occasions when they thought this was absent, leading to poor decisions.

Service users tended to hold all social workers to the same standards, whether newly-qualified or not, though they did make allowances for less experience.

4.4   Specialisation

First-year graduates (2008/I and 2009) were asked about specialisation in their degree programme (Table 37): slightly fewer had had this opportunity than had not. One in five were 'happy' not to have specialised – however this applied much more often in the Adult sector than the Children's sector. The Table shows that most graduates ended up working in the sector they had specialised in. However, it also indicates that among those who did not specialise, the desire to have done so was much greater in the Children's than the Adult sector.

Table 37: Opportunity to specialise during degree programme

	2008/I ALL		Work mainly with Children/ both		Work mainly with Adults		2009 ALL		Work Mainly with Children/ both		Work mainly with Adults	
	N	*%*	**N**	*%*	**N**	*%*	**N**	*%*	**N**	*%*	**N**	*%*
Yes and chose Children and families social work	**56**	*27*	52	*45*	4	*4*	**36**	*33*	32	*48*	4	*9*
Yes and chose Adult social work	**34**	*16*	1	*1*	33	*36*	**13**	*12*	2	*3*	11	*26*
No, but would have liked the opportunity to specialise in Children and families social work	**39**	*19*	31	*27*	8	*9*	**24**	*22*	18	*27*	6	*14*
No, but would have liked the opportunity to specialise in Adult social work	**17**	*8*	2	*2*	15	*16*	**13**	*12*	4	*6*	9	*21*
No, and happy not to have specialised	**42**	*20*	18	*16*	24	*26*	**20**	*18*	10	*15*	10	*23*
NOT STATED	**19**	*9*	12	*10*	7	*8*	**4**	*4*	1	*1*	3	*7*
Base:	**207**		**116**		**91**		**110**		**67**		**43**	

Among managers there was no strong feeling about the need for a generic or a separate qualification route for children and families. Only a small number made any comment, all but one of whom felt that the generic qualification should remain, but that clearer pathways should perhaps be available for those who were sure about where they would want to work:

> *I suppose this calls into question, should we have a separate degree for those working in Children's than those working in Adults? I don't think so. I think we might need streams.*

> *R1 121 Stanley, Team manager, Children's services*

One line manager put forward a very good account, perhaps unwittingly, of the value of a generic degree across both children's and adult social work:

We deal with those people who have a disability and have to look at their needs, but what about the impact of them as parents on the children? And we have had to go right back to basics, and I have to say this is not just the newly-qualified, but it is striking that you might think they might be more aware of it having been on a course and the different legislation, or actually there is a children-in-need assessment that you can do.

R1 108 Deborah, Team manager, Adult social care

The positive disposition of Directors of Adult services towards generic programmes hardened over time, with three-quarters in favour in 2009 rising from only two-thirds in 2006. By contrast, in Children's services, Directors' preference for separate Adult and Children programmes was clear in both years, and opinion swung even more in 2009 when half the Directors responding to the survey expressed a strong preference for separate programmes.

Table 38: Directors' views on specialisation in qualifying education

	2006		2009	
	Adults	**Children**	**Adults**	**Children**
	Weighted base=100	**Weighted base=100**	**Weighted base=100**	**Weighted base=100**
Strongly in favour of generic Social Work education	39	13	63	15
Moderately in favour of generic Social Work education	22	17	13	15
Moderately prefer separate programmes for Adults and Children	13	29	10	15
Strongly prefer separate programmes …	13	33	3	50
Not stated	13	8	10	4

Most HEI respondents participating in this research strongly agreed with generic qualifying programmes, covering both children's and adult social work. As an aside, there seemed general agreement in universities that the split between LA Adult and Children's services had been an adverse one, creating, as one respondent put it, *"a fault line"* between the services, an artificial separation of services and problems. By contrast, it was thought that really good work was going on in the voluntary and independent sector and that social work should be seen as a wider activity than statutory social work. Several respondents commented that social work should not be defined by local authority function.

4.5   Learning benefits from the degree

First-year graduates were asked to rate the importance of certain skills in their present job, according to a scale which presented the following options:

- Very important
- Fairly important
- Not important

They were then asked whether their degree programmes had helped them develop these skills as students. The most help, graduates felt, was obtained in developing as:

- A reflective practitioner (almost all said their programme had helped them 'a lot' or 'a little')
- Analytical, able to analyse a case critically
- Empowering, a creator of opportunities to for service users to give them more control over their lives

Table 39 below presents the findings from both questions, in descending order of perceived importance – according to the graduates. The two years' data are shown separately, as for some of these skills the results are more positive about student teaching and learning for the 2009 cohort than a year earlier. The Table shows that degree programmes were seen to have fallen short most often over adaptability/ responsiveness to changing work demands: a quarter of graduates felt that in this area, their degree programme 'Did not help much, though I needed help'. Inter-professional working was also an area of shortcoming for a minority of graduates – students also found this to be a less satisfactory component of the curriculum than others (SWDE p99). It is interesting that the proportion of graduates thinking that their written English was 'already very good' before they started their programmes fell sharply between the two cohorts of first-year graduates.

Table 39: Learning benefits and their importance to graduates

Extent to which the degree programme helped you to develop each of these personal skills or characteristics Bases: 2008/I: 207 2009: 110	Helped a lot	Helped a little	Did not help much though I needed help	…I was already very good at this	Very important
Able to engage effectively with users and carers 2008/I %	16	47	5	24	89
2009 %	22	51	10	15	95
A good listener 2008/I %	15	42	1	33	85
2009 %	21	44	4	29	91
Analytical, able to analyse a case critically 2008/I %	39	39	12	3	78
2009 %	45	40	11	2	87
Good at working with other professionals from different disciplines and/or different agencies 2008/I %	21	41	16	14	76
2009 %	22	45	13	18	79
A reflective practitioner 2008/I %	59	8	2	3	71
2009 %	57	38	-	2	79
Adaptable, responsive to changing work demands 2008 /I %	14	29	28	20	70
2009 %	12	44	24	18	73
Empowering, a creator of opportunities for service users to give them more control over their lives 2008/I %	29	47	9	7	66
2009 %	32	51	12	3	76
A literate writer of fluent English 2008/I %	23	24	2	42	54
2009 %	35	31	7	25	58

As Table 39 shows, all these skills were rated as 'very important' in their present jobs by a majority of graduates. As discussed in more detail in section 4.6, managers concurred with the importance of effective communication with service users, and on the whole seemed to feel that graduates were strong in this area. They also emphasised the importance of analytical abilities, particularly for assessment.

The biggest apparent divergence between graduates and employers lies in the perceived importance of good written communication skills (see section 4.6).

Interestingly, postgraduates were more likely than undergraduates both to stress the importance of good literacy skills, and to say that they were 'already very good at this'.

4.6 Employer expectations

Considering together the findings from line managers and Directors, the following picture emerges of the qualities, skills and knowledge expected of new social work graduates. (For Directors, see Tables 47- 50 appended.)

a) Interpersonal relationships

Basic human empathy was clearly the foundation, leading to 'Effective engagement with service users and carers' which was top of the Importance list for Directors of Adult services, and second for Children's Directors. Directors generally rated this well among their newly-qualified social workers. Many line managers made the point that social work was all about people. Self-assurance, assertiveness and emotional resilience also came under this heading, as desirable qualities, even essential – to be able to deal confidently with difficult cases, and with professionals from different backgrounds, eg. police.

You can't be a wallflower to be a social worker; you have to be able to assert yourself and put your point forward and challenge when needed.
R1 114 Theresa, Team manager, Children's services

In terms of personal skills, I expect people to have good interpersonal skills, good communication skills and ability to make themselves understood in a variety of different media. And most importantly, to be resilient, because this is a tough, hard job… Once you've got your value base right, we need people who are going to stick at their job and not be put off – who are not going to be scared and frightened because somebody is telling them to 'bog off' and go away.
R1 115 Denise, Team manager, Children's services

Inter-professional working with colleagues from other disciplines was important to Directors of Adult services, and generally rated as Adequate or better.

b) Communication skills

Good verbal communication skills were essential: to some extent seen as dependent on empathy, but also acknowledged by some line managers as

capable of development with experience, for example to find the right *"form of words"* to use with service users in particular circumstances. Managers on the whole thought that graduates were strong in the area of effective communication with service users, and were able to identify many instances of good verbal communication skills among their newly-qualified staff.

> *I have to say that on the whole most social workers, once they've qualified, they do seem to be able to communicate well.... Obviously I think it's something that they have to develop over time, like challenging people in a positive way, but no, I think the emphasis on values and empathy and, you know, non-judgmental attitude at university does quite often rub off on people.*
>
> R1 116 Kirsty, Team manager, Children's services

In terms of written communication, 'High standards of literacy in report-writing' were very important to Directors in Children's services, and clearly to many line managers too – who were often disappointed that the change from diploma to degree had not always brought improvement in this area. Managers considered that in their report-writing, newly-qualified social workers ought to be able to present a succinct written analysis, using correct grammar and spelling. Where these skills were not always as good as they expected, especially in the preparation of court reports or other documents for circulation to external agencies, managers suggested that it was the responsibility of the university, firstly, to support students to learn to write more analytically and less descriptively and, secondly, to assess students' literacy and offer support where necessary. Examples given of actions which managers had taken to help newly-qualifieds improve their writing skills were posting or circulating particularly good examples of assessments or court reports from members of their teams for other staff to learn from – not just newly-qualified workers – and developing a specific training programme using anonymised examples of reports on which workers were able to give and receive feedback.

c) Social work values

Directors were generally pleased with the commitment of newly-qualified social workers 'to the best interests of service users and carers', as were line managers. While not at the top of the Importance list for Directors, commitment was quite often picked as a quality appreciated in new graduates.

'Cultural sensitivity' and skills in 'Working with diverse communities' were, however, more likely to be considered 'Adequate' than 'Excellent' by Directors, but did not appear in the Importance list. Anti-discriminatory practice (ADP) was not asked about as such with Directors. Line managers were divided about new graduates' ADP knowledge and abilities, but generally praised their values.

d) Analytical abilities

The 'analytical abilities' of graduates – perceived as so crucial to effective assessment – were a source of some disappointment to Directors both in Adult and especially Children's services, as well as sometimes to line managers, again possibly reflecting raised expectations as a result of the change from diploma to degree. One line manager described this as the ability to *"draw out what the person's issues are".*

Managers considered that newly qualified social workers often had good thinking skills and had learned useful theoretical underpinnings to their work. However, they were anxious that these skills should be reflected in the quality of assessments. Although they recognised that assessment skills improved with experience, they felt strongly that graduates should arrive with a good understanding of the purpose of an assessment, and of the statutory frameworks in which assessments were undertaken. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF), which has been in use now for a number of years and able to be initiated by any professional (eg. health, education, as well as social work) in contact with a child presenting cause for concern, was mentioned as an example of procedure which students ought to be aware of by the time they graduated. Managers recognised that teaching new graduates about how to complete the relevant forms was the responsibility of employers, since these would almost certainly vary.

> *What you have to remember is that employment-based students will have used our framework, so it will be familiar, but if you are coming in from placements in other local authorities they don't all use the same system, so they have to start learning that again.*
> *R1 108 Deborah, Team manager, Children's services*

'Planning for specific outcomes for service users as a result of social work interventions' was important to Directors in both Adult and Children's services, and tended to be rated more often than other aspects as Disappointing. This was sometimes mentioned by line managers as well, as providing the appropriate focus for assessments.

> *I would expect them to have fundamental understanding of the basics of what we do now, which is around identification, information gathering. It's around analysing information and being able to identify needs of children and the needs of families. And on the basis of all that information, identifying a plan, mobilising resources to be able to implement that plan. Be clear about what outcomes you want, so that the plan is about achieving an improved outcome for a child and then actually having the skills to be able to manage and monitor and review that.*
> *R1 115 Denise, Team manager, Children's services*

Assessing risk was frequently mentioned by managers as a central social work task – though managers were not always of the same mind as to whether this was a skill that NQSWs should bring with them fully developed, or whether they learned it with experience in practice. They pointed out that newly-qualified staff were not alone in needing training in this area.

I think they talk on social work courses about risk but they don't teach people how to do a risk assessment within the context of a particular family or circumstances. Nobody knows how to weigh risk. We have to do courses in that at all sorts of levels.
R1 121 Stanley, Team manager, Children's services

But line managers wanted their new staff at least to understand the principles of risk assessment, and why it was important in social work practice.

e) Legislation, policy and guidance

Knowledge of their legal powers was not usually among the most important attributes of newly-qualified social workers, according to Directors – and was generally rated as at least Adequate. But line managers often referred to the need for social work qualifying programmes to give students a thorough grounding in relevant legislation and associated policy documents, and were sometimes surprised that graduates lacked awareness of key items of legislation and government policy documents relevant to their work – the Children Act and the National Service Framework for Older People were each cited in this context. Personalisation was also often mentioned by line managers, and for some, the notion of social workers' legal powers was a major influence on defining their role – specifically in terms of 'social policeman'.

There seems to be little recognition that we are working in a number of legal frameworks… Everybody is aware that when you are working within the Mental Health Act, for example, and less aware that you are working within maybe the NHS and Community Care Act or that you are working with the Mental Capacity Act. You are working with the National Assistance Act. They don't have that recognition.
R2 201 Moira, Team manager, Adult social care

New graduates' knowledge of care management and 'care in the community' was sometimes identified as weak by line managers in Adult services. Even when they knew this important topic had been covered in the curriculum there was a sense that the teaching lacked grounding in the realities of up-to-date practice – possibly reflecting how thresholds of intervention have risen.

Some of them that come have had that care management module… the thought was it was very rose-tinted in some ways… What we have got is maybe care management being taught as an ideal, and then maybe we teach them the reality really.
R1 104 Jenny, Team manager, Adult social care

f) Social work theory

Knowledge of 'theories about social problems and disadvantage' hardly featured as Important to Directors, and most considered that newly-qualified social workers were at least Adequate in this respect. Line managers' opinions were divided, with some praising the abilities of their new staff to apply theory to practice, and others more critical of their *"understanding of the theoretical significance of aspects of practice"*.

g) Professionalism

Many line managers spoke about social workers taking responsibility and being accountable for their own work as a mark of professionalism.

> *I think students are perhaps a bit more confident now and feel it is more of a profession. And they certainly see a sense of responsibility and accountability not just to the service user, but to themselves and the profession itself. I think that comes across more so now.*
> *R1 107 Rosemary, Team manager, Adult social care*

Another aspect of professionalism noted by line managers was keenness to learn and develop.

h) Evidence-based practice

Graduates' knowledge of evidence-based practice appeared to be less important to Directors in 2009 than in 2006, and in both years was rated better by Directors in Adult services than in Children's, where more than a third were Disappointed.

i) Adaptability, flexibility

Adaptability – being able to apply social work skills and knowledge in a variety of situations at times of rapid change – was mentioned by managers as a useful quality. Directors tended not to accord this very high Importance, and generally rated newly-qualified workers as at least Adequate.

Looking now at how Directors' ratings changed over time between the 2006 and 2009 surveys, regarding the abilities of the newly-qualified social workers (Excellent, Adequate, Disappointing), the pattern of responses varied between Adult and Children's services.

In Adult services, there were several areas where Directors' ratings improved:

- IT
- Teamworking
- Inter-professional working
- Ability to prioritise workload
- Literacy in report-writing
- Planning for specific outcomes…
- Analytical abilities
- Facilitating service user independence
- Working with diverse communities
- Knowledge of underpinning theories about social problems and disadvantage
- Knowledge of the GSCC Codes of Practice
- Recognising the importance of internal procedures and policies
- Self-confidence

Only with 'Coping with stress and pressure' was there any deterioration in ratings by Adult Directors between 2006 and 2009, and this was small.

By contrast, in Children's services, there were no areas of significant improvement, and deteriorations were more common – in particular:

- Planning for specific outcomes…
- Inter-professional working
- Facilitating service user independence
- Local Authorities – functions, responsibilities and structures
- Literacy in report-writing

Given that four out of this list of five qualities where Directors' ratings declined over time in Children's services (all except 'Local Authorities') appear in the Adult list as having improved, this raises questions about differing expectations in the two sectors.

A recruitment consultant taking part in the manager interviews felt that some employer expectations were too high and that they should be more willing to invest in developing newly-qualified social workers. Her experience was that the

pressure to recruit workers who could 'hit the ground running' meant that they were less willing to recruit newly-qualifieds who could not demonstrate that they had already acquired substantial experience in a particular specialism, even if they had excellent personal and professional qualities in other areas. In this sense, her arguments mirror those to be found in the literature on apprenticeships which discuss the extent to which employers pursue either productivity or investment strategies in terms of developing the human capital in their organisations (Zwick, 2008).

4.7   HEI views on preparedness

HEI respondents were unanimous that social work is a profession, and that their overall aim as educators was to produce professionals with a range of skills, knowledge and values which they could apply in a variety of working situations, and develop with practice experience over time.

> *"Our role is not to deliver people with the technical skills to meet all the employer requirements at that time of appointment… The students are learning underpinning knowledge and skills that are transferable into aspects of social work practice."*
>
> *HEI Group 2*

They were adamant that graduation marked a threshold of professional competence, or the first rung of a ladder.

> *"The degree level only ever has been introduced as a generic qualification to provide a pathway into the profession."*
>
> *HEI Group 5*

HEI respondents contrasted this with what they saw as the widely held perception among employers that gaining the qualification was in some sense a finishing-line. Many respondents compared social work unfavourably in this respect with other professions:

> *"You do not expect a law graduate to instantly do most complex criminal law or most complex conveyancing. So I would go back and re-emphasise what my colleagues have said – I think there have been unrealistic expectations."*
>
> *HEI Group 5*

HEI staff also stressed the importance of continuing training and learning in the workplace, to develop practice. One respondent described the ideal social work student thus:

> *… committed, motivated, able to be intellectually challenged, cope with higher education study, as well as then at the end of it come out with the potential to develop further for being an effective practitioner.*
>
> *HEI Group 3*

But increasing pressures in social work teams and a target-driven culture were considered to have a damaging effect on workers' capacity to learn and develop.

There was widespread awareness of reports of employer criticisms of new social work graduates' readiness for front-line practice. On the whole HEI respondents rejected these criticisms, ascribing them to unreasonably high employer expectations which had risen as the demands of front-line practice intensified over recent years – both the volume of casework and its complexity were perceived to have increased since many of these staff had qualified themselves, coupled with a lack of support.

> *I think it's often disguised as being unprepared, and actually it's an unreasonable environment… a very difficult, pressurised world to be in – whether you're a newly-qualified or two years post-qualified.*
>
> *HEI Group 1*

> *There's a changing climate in practice as well to be noted, because at one time maybe there was support, supervision – now qualified social workers are going straight into… lack of support, with high caseloads. The likelihood is that they may be seen as not effective, because the expectations are too high.*
>
> *HEI Group 3*

There was a sense that employers were often more interested in new graduates being *"functionally ready"* than in their abilities as *"critical and reflective practitioners"*, which HEI staff considered central to the social work role. Some HEI respondents disliked the term 'readiness to practise', which seemed to carry *"mechanical"* connotations.

> *If you say 'professional readiness' – in other words the qualities of this person will allow them to apply themselves at a particular stage of their development to a range of tasks… if you see it as the whole business of being a social work professional… it isn't a single thing which stops; it's a constant state of development. What you want represented in the person is a set of qualities – how they are analysing; how critical they are, their ability to empathise, their value base – that makes it reasonable at this stage, or good enough at this stage… Graduation is a different thing from being ready to do something.*
>
> *HEI Group 5*

In local authority statutory services especially, HEI staff felt that social work posts seemed to have become more and more narrowly focused, not just on either Children's or Adult social work, but also on particular tasks such as referral, assessment or review. Employers looking for specific procedural skills in these areas, ready-made, especially without a proper workplace introduction, were felt to be acting unfairly. While programmes did some teaching on general procedures, HEI staff believed it was for employers to develop these further.

Comparing the expectations of employers regarding the skills, knowledge and personal qualities they wanted from newly-qualified social workers, there was little disagreement from HEI staff.

a) Interpersonal relationships

Interpersonal relationships were considered by HEI respondents to be key to effective social work, in whatever setting, and therefore an essential element of qualifying teaching and learning.

I don't think you can teach social work without teaching people how to work with people.
HEI Group 2

As a social work educator one has a duty to keep pushing the values and the relationship skills despite what happens in practice, because it's that that holds you together as a social worker.
HEI Group 1

While relationship skills could be enhanced during programmes, it was widely felt that it would be difficult to inculcate basic empathy in someone without any, and therefore testing applicants at selection was important. A certain initial level of robustness was also thought necessary:

… emotional intelligence… resilience… if it's non-existent at entry level it's going to be very difficult to develop to a sufficient degree.
HEI Group 2

"Engagement skills" was how one respondent put it, in the context of being able to relate to a diverse range of service user groups.

But there was a sense among HEI respondents that the priority focus in many employer organisations appeared to have shifted away from direct work with service users towards compliance with procedures and targets, so that social work practice was no longer primarily about working with relationships. They suggested that this could lead to a culture of less care, especially for some managers who had to meet targets, and with a supervision process that was primarily *"performance-led"*. However, coverage of the theory underpinning work with relationships – dealing with the more emotional content and context of practice – was thought to be vital, even though more limited in some programmes than it might be, resulting in graduates perhaps being less equipped in this area than desirable.

b) Communication skills

Developing communication skills was also considered an important role of programmes – through formal teaching, or exercises such as role play, or on placement. The involvement of service users in delivering aspects of the curriculum was thought to be a considerable strength in terms of enhancing communication and engagement skills, and so there was concern about the uncertainty of current arrangements for financial support of such involvement.

Some HEI respondents noted that employers complaining about poor standards of written English of some new graduates might have a point, and there were signs that in some HEIs literacy might in future become a more stringent student selection criterion. Applicants who failed on written English could be invited to reapply once they had tackled this and improved their abilities.

c) Social work values

HEI staff considered social work values to be at the heart of good professional practice, and clearly paid great attention to promoting and developing the values of their students. Several mentioned the teaching of anti-discriminatory practice.

One respondent in particular felt strongly that homophobia should be tested at selection, and candidates rejected if they failed to take seriously this aspect of equalities.

d) Analytical abilities

HEI respondents were very clear that a principal and very important goal of qualifying education was to hone their students' analytical abilities; as one put it: *"… not just gathering information; making sense of it"*. Another respondent spoke of *"that element of criticality and thinking that's necessary to underpin practice"*.

They have to come out of that three, four years to actually have that balance, that critical thinking where there's common sense but that systematic thinking as a professional. That's what I would expect to see.

HEI Group 3

Analysis plus… it's about being able to make fine complex judgements as well. So it's more than analysis – there's an 'understanding' element, but you've also got to do something about it, so it's making judgement calls too.

<div align="right">*HEI Group 4*</div>

However, they stressed that at selection they were looking for potential, and that the intellectual capacity upon which analytical abilities depended, and which was required to cope with academic study, was not necessarily best measured by UCAS tariff scores. One respondent observed that 'high flyers' do not always make good social workers, and another noted that "*nearly all the social work courses score very well on the value-added dimension – taking people from quite a low place and actually achieving quite well at the end of the course*". This encapsulated the widely held view across HEIs that a diverse workforce should be recruited to meet the needs of service users, linked to the 'widening participation' agenda in Higher Education.

Some HEI staff worried that graduates' analytical skills and critical thinking could become compromised in the workplace by having to follow a rigid format for assessment.

All these electronic systems screen out analysis and critical thinking… what you do with information by way of weighing it, analysing it, and then using it to make judgements.

<div align="right">*HEI Group 5*</div>

One respondent, having taught former students on their qualifying programmes, commented that when they came back to do post-qualifying courses, their previous critical orientation had gone and they were now more 'process' driven – though not all agreed.

e) Legislation, policy and guidance

While there was little discussion about the specifics of this aspect of what graduates needed to know, there was no doubt that HEI staff acknowledged the importance of this element of the curriculum:

It's being able to apply really very high level intellectual and cognitive skills informed by knowledge of theory and evidence to highly complex human situations, and to be able to apply complex legal framework. That doesn't happen overnight.

<div align="right">*HEI Group 5*</div>

Keeping up to date with changes in the law or policy was also mentioned in the context of ongoing learning and development in the workplace.

f) Social work theory

HEI staff took seriously the necessity for programmes to teach a range of theory relevant to social work.

Our responsibility is to make sure that in terms of the learning they get, that they are getting the knowledge base and the preparation for practice and the skills around assessment and judgement from a theoretical perspective – that they can then go out and practise that.

HEI Group 3

Concern was sometimes expressed that that programmes were not always building a sufficiently rigorous social and behavioural science base to teaching, which indicates the importance placed on theory. This could result in students not being well enough equipped to understand and think critically about some of the complex situations they would encounter. Strong, structured processes for integrating theory and social work skills were considered important.

Theories about power were also emphasised, especially if social workers were aiming to empower service users and to challenge services which fail to meet their needs.

g) Professionalism

HEI respondents stressed *"professional formation"* constantly during the group discussions as an over-riding aim of their qualifying programmes. Compliance with the GSCC's Codes of Practice was taken as given.

The qualities implied included independent professional autonomy – taking responsibility for and being accountable for your own decisions and behaviour. Approved Mental Health Professionals (AMHPs) were cited as the best exemplar of this autonomy, even though it was accepted that their status in this regard was defined in law. Another connotation was professional competence, along with the ability to recognise when a situation was beyond the practitioner's level of competence. Honesty and reliability were also mentioned.

It was also very clear from this sample that HEI staff regarded themselves very much as members of the social work profession, with the same rights to contribute to shaping its future as current practitioners – they sometimes expressed disquiet that their voices had not been listened to sufficiently during debates in recent years.

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Another aspect of professional status referred to repeatedly was undertaking regular development activity to update skills and knowledge.

h) Evidence-based practice

While evidence-based practice was rarely mentioned spontaneously, there was a clear expectation on the part of HEI respondents that graduates would be exposed to relevant research during their programmes – and know how to access and use research once in practice.

j) Adaptability

Conscious of the changing context of social work practice, HEI respondents often mentioned adaptability, as a quality to look for in applicants at selection and to foster during their studies.

Over the course of their working life… they are going to have to be flexible, and their skills are going to have to be transferable, because the whole context and policies that they are working to will change. So there is something about their belief in their core values and ethics that will allow them to adapt to all these different pressures that are going to come round them.

HEI Group 4

All these HEI respondents were confident that their programmes offered good social work education and training. However, they identified a number of issues in delivering the quality of provision necessary to all students:

- **lack of time**

The academic year for many undergraduate courses ends in May, with little over two terms for teaching. This could leave limited time to cover requisite subject areas. For two-year postgraduates programmes it was considered that the requirement to have 200 days in practice placement had brought about a reduction and loss of some important teaching. In general, most respondents felt there was a *"crowded curriculum"*, with tensions about what to include and what to leave out – *"a quart into a pint pot"*. A fourth year was often suggested. Time pressures also meant that opportunities to support students individually were constrained, especially the weaker ones.

- **practice placements**

The key role played by practice placement opportunities in preparing students was repeatedly emphasised, especially to integrate theory into practice.

> *It has to be practice and theory together, doesn't it; you couldn't produce the social worker you wanted just purely from the perfect academic programme. It has to be a partnership with practice.*
>
> *HEI Group 4*

HEI respondents wondered whether employers always fully acknowledged the important contribution they themselves made to the quality of graduates in providing placement opportunities where students could engage in meaningful work – especially in working with service users to develop relationships and understand their situations.

Students on placement needed to practise traditional social work skills, and the type of work available to them on placement had therefore to be appropriate to this purpose. A thorough assessment of their practice learning was also crucial. Many HEI staff regretted the demise of the Practice Teacher Award, both as a qualification in itself, and as a requirement for practice placement assessors. Overloading of some Practice Educators, under pressure to take a lot of students at once, was also noted.

- **failing students**

Respondents mostly agreed that it could be difficult to fail weak students. They identified a number of explanations, including the lengthy processes of appeal in many universities, and a lack of documentary evidence from Practice Educators without which failure to reach the required standard could not be demonstrated. One HEI had introduced a system for grading practice, to clarify the threshold for passing. Sometimes HEI staff found a lack of understanding in university hierarchies about professional decisions concerning standards and suitability, and having to deal with *"this tension between the push to pass and the standards we want to maintain"*, though most tried to uphold standards and where necessary to fail students they believed unsuitable for professional practice.

HEI staff made the point that despite the effort put into careful selection of students – using a variety of techniques to identify the most suitable candidates in terms of a range of qualities – the process was not always foolproof:

> *Each year there are some that you are worried about, and some that you are quite glad if they have fallen by the wayside.*
>
> *HEI Group 4*

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But they emphasised that such students were a small minority; most students performed satisfactorily and some were *"brilliant"*.

> *Social work is one of the courses where there is least a problem…. the performance is very much at a higher level than other professional course like community care or even youth work… For my institution we are very satisfied with the outcome.*
>
> *HEI Group 3*

> *The calibre of some of our students is just fantastic, really good.*
>
> *HEI Group 4*

These HEI respondents warmly welcomed the prospect of better partnerships in future with social work employers, with shared responsibility and mutual understanding, especially of student practice placement expectations, and continuing professional development. Several examples were cited of joint working through programme structures – mainly with learning and development staff; engaging with senior managers was thought to be harder. Further examples of joint initiatives already successfully introduced were given, such as teaching on new policy areas, eg. personalisation, and practitioners giving lectures. The finding that around half of Directors said that the latter was something their organisation could do 'more, or better' (Table 51, appended) bodes well for the future. The chance for more tutors to have greater exposure to current front-line practice was also seen by HEI respondents as a benefit of more regular contact and co-operation.

Other proposals from the Social Work Task Force and the Reform Board (so far publicised by early summer 2010) which HEI respondents approved of were:

- the career structure, offering more opportunities for social workers to be promoted to senior or advanced practitioners or practice educators, not only to management positions;
- supervision standards, to encourage better professional development through reflection and critical thinking;
- employer Health-checks to assess the working environment;
- the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) which would explicitly recognise that it takes time for new graduates to grow into confident, effective social workers.

These HEI respondents often saw a role for universities in collaborating with employers to bring these changes about.

> *That may be a very good thing for the way we work together.*
>
> *HEI Group 1*

4.8 Knowledge gaps

Whether graduates felt prepared in terms of specific skills and knowledge relevant to their current practice was investigated in various ways. Table 40 sets out the answers to the question: *"Which of these areas of specialist knowledge would you say are relevant to your present job?"* – the options all alluding to specific service user groups with whom social workers are typically engaged. Responses have been re-ordered by frequency. This question was used as a platform to ask, for each aspect selected by the graduate, whether they felt their level of skill and knowledge was considered adequate when they started work, or if they had been expected to know more than they did.

The answers to this second question are presented in Table 41, but the pattern of response to the earlier question is worth considering in detail first (Table 40).

The prominence of Child Protection is unsurprising. But this was chosen not only by everyone saying they worked 'Mainly with children', but also by around a third of those working 'Mainly with adults'.

'Mental health conditions…' was picked by virtually all of those working specifically with users of mental health services, and also by over half of those in Children and Families. This area of knowledge therefore seems to be relevant across a wide spectrum of social work practice. Drugs and alcohol also appeared to have a wide range of applicability across Children's and Adult practice, including almost everyone saying this was the field they worked in. 'Transitions…' was another area spanning Adult and Children's practice. (These findings support the value of generic degree programmes.)

By contrast, 'Communicating with children…', Rights of the Child and 'Child development milestones' were all much more concentrated in Children's social work practice.

Table 40: Relevance of specialist 'service user group' knowledge

Areas of specialist knowledge relevant to your job	2008/I		2008/II		2009	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Child Protection/safeguarding children	135	65	80	69	71	65
Mental health conditions and their likely progress	133	64	80	69	65	59
Drugs or alcohol dependency/misuse	129	62	69	59	55	50
Communicating with children and young people	120	58	67	58	69	63
The Rights of the Child	115	56	60	52	67	61
Transitions in the lives of service users	113	55	68	59	64	58
Child development milestones	104	50	61	53	64	58
Preparing reports for legal proceedings in court/tribunal	108	52	60	52	61	55
Adult protection/safeguarding vulnerable adults	95	46	51	44	52	47
Learning disabilities	81	39	48	41	43	39
Physically disabling health conditions and their likely progress	77	37	46	40	40	36
Ageing and the impact of life changes	63	30	30	26	34	31
Refugees and asylum seekers	49	24	28	24	24	22
Base:	**207**		**116**		**110**	

Table 41 presents the results of the subsequent question to first-year graduates, which asked them about employer expectations of their knowledge of those aspects they had said were relevant to their practice, re-ordered so that aspects where perceived expectations were highest are at the top. The table shows row percentages, based for each item on the number selecting this aspect earlier, as relevant to their practice (Table 40). Thus the bases for each row vary.

Employer impatience with newly qualified social workers' lack of ability in the preparation of court reports has been widely commented on over the years, corresponding to newly qualified social workers' own concerns. However, this raises the question of whether employer expectations are realistic and fair, or whether the process of dealing with courts or tribunals is something that should be taught to new graduates after they enter the workplace. In this research among first-years graduates, employer expectations were highest of previous knowledge in this area of court-reporting; predominantly in LA Children's departments, where the great majority of those who said they were expected to know more than they did about court-reporting were currently working. Strangely, for those picking court-reporting as an area of relevant knowledge <u>and</u> who found out about their current job through having worked there on placement, the expectation of knowing more than they did about it was even higher. This implies that student practice placements are not always providing sufficient learning and experience of court-reporting to fulfil employers' expectations, even when this is part of the work undertaken in the placement setting.

Over a third of these graduates picking 'Child protection' as an area of specialist knowledge relevant to their practice felt that they were expected to know more about this than they did, again predominantly in LA Children's departments. This

too echoes recent criticism by childcare organisations of graduates' preparedness for the workplace. But if these sentiments from line managers are typical of employer expectations, they explain a great deal about the shortage of children's social workers…

> *…she hadn't had statutory placements. She came in* [to a child protection team] *with her placements being around a project for young people and she'd also then worked in an older people's organisation. So that was her two placements, and she came here and obviously a lot of our work is around assessments, whether it's core assessments, parenting assessments, and all those sorts of assessments. We go through a process, and she found it really difficult to actually comprehend the processes.*
>
> *R1 114 Theresa, Team manager, Children's services*

> [We want] *a social worker that we have to do relatively little to after graduation when they join us, to get them up to the standard that we want. It's being able to write a court report and present evidence in court to improve standards. It may be to do a child protection safeguarding case, with minimal supervision. It's having the confidence and the ability to do that; that's what my deputy director wants.*
>
> *R1 121 Stanley, Team manager, Children's services*

Table 41: Employer expectations of relevant 'service user' knowledge

	2008/I			2009		
	N	**You were expected to know more about this than you did**	**Your level of knowledge was acceptable**	**N**	**You were expected to know more about this than you did**	**Your level of knowledge was acceptable**
Preparing reports for legal proceedings in court/tribunal	108 %	*48*	*52*	61 %	*52*	*48*
Child Protection/ safeguarding children	135 %	*38*	*61*	71 %	*38*	*61*
Refugees and asylum seekers	49 %	*33*	*67*	24 %	*50*	*50*
Child development milestones	104 %	*30*	*70*	64 %	*23*	*77*
Mental health conditions and their likely progress	133 %	*26*	*74*	65 %	*34*	*66*
Communicating with children and young people	120 %	*28*	*71*	69 %	*16*	*84*
Physically disabling health conditions …	77 %	*26*	*74*	40 %	*25*	*73*
Adult Protection/ safe-guarding vulnerable adults	95 %	*23*	*77*	52 %	*33*	*67*
The Rights of the Child	115 %	*19*	*81*	67 %	*19*	*81*
Ageing and the impact of life changes	63 %	*17*	*83*	34 %	*24*	*74*
Drugs or alcohol dependency/misuse	129 %	*18*	*81*	55 %	*18*	*82*
Transitions in the lives of service users	113 %	*16*	*84*	64 %	*17*	*81*
Learning disabilities	81 %	*7*	*91*	43 %	*21*	*79*

Broadly this list reflects, in order, where social work graduates in general feel worried about their knowledge of different 'service user' topics after they qualify. The high position of 'Refugees and asylum seekers' in this list seems surprising, but may simply reflect one aspect of law, which graduates felt generally they ought to know more about.

There were relatively few overlaps (tested by paired correlations) between the aspects identified by first-year graduates as attracting employer expectations of their abilities when starting out in practice, though 'physically disabling health conditions and their likely progress' was often associated both with 'ageing' (r=0.64) and with 'mental health conditions and their likely progress' (r=0.61). 'Mental health' was also associated with 'Adult protection/safeguarding' (r=0.58).

A subsequent question to graduates asked them about more general topics they personally wished they knew more about. Table 42 shows that the two topics which graduates felt most uncertain about were risk-assessment, and dealing with hostility.

The importance of being able to deal with parental hostility and aggression in children's social work was highlighted in the 2010 Serious Case Review (Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board, 2010) of the tragic death of Khyra Ishaq in Birmingham in 2008.

There were few consistent differences by sector, except that those working 'mainly with adults' were more likely to identify 'Managing budgets' and 'Supporting carers' as topics they wished they knew more about, across all three surveys, and 'Attachment theory' among those working 'mainly with children'.

Table 42 also shows that graduates were able to identify many areas of 'knowledge gap' – an average of over five topics they wished they knew more about. Even so, there was no particular pattern of association; testing by means of paired correlations reveals a low-level correlation between 'Family dynamics' and 'Attachment theory' (r=0.37), but most others were considerably below this.

Dividing the first-year graduates into three groups according to how many 'knowledge gaps' they selected (up to 3; 4-8; 9 or more), and applying the job-related factors previously discussed (section 2.3) showed a strong association with Supportive colleagues, and to a lesser extent with Values. These findings seem to suggest that with a friendly and supportive team, graduates were less likely to identify topics they wished they knew 'a lot more about' because the acquisition of necessary knowledge came easily and naturally, without fuss – and similarly if the job allowed for the expression of social work values in practice.

Table 42: Perceived gaps in knowledge

Q: Which of the following topics, if any, do you personally wish you knew more about?	2008/I		2008/II		2009	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Dealing with hostility, aggression or conflict	128	62	67	58	68	62
Assessing risk	125	60	72	62	66	60
Services and resources available locally 'in your patch' that might benefit the service users or carers on your cases	98	47	46	40	39	35
Evidence base for your area of social work practice – 'what works'	90	43	54	47	47	43
Legal basis for social work interventions	89	43	48	41	56	51
Acquiring advanced and specialist skills and knowledge qualifications	83	40	55	47	36	33
Engaging effectively with people with special communication needs (eg. children and young people, stroke survivors, people with learning disabilities)	75	36	37	32	44	40
Family dynamics	59	29	36	31	45	41
Good record-keeping	56	37	27	23	34	31
Using your 'self' as a Resource in achieving outcomes with service users	54	26	36	31	25	23
Managing budgets	52	25	25	22	29	26
Leadership and management	47	23	33	28	26	24
Encouraging or empowering service users to take control of their lives and make choices	47	23	22	19	25	23
Inter-professional working, inter-disciplinary collaboration	40	20	13	11	10	9
Supporting carers	40	19	21	18	19	17
Attachment theory	34	16	20	17	26	24
Group work	24	12	22	19	24	22
Anti-discriminatory practice	11	5	7	6	8	7
Other	22	11	11	9	9	8
None of these	2	1	-	-	2	2
Not stated	14	7	-	-	3	3
Base:	**207**		**116**		**110**	

Only a few of these topics came up in the manager interviews. Virtually no-one mentioned dealing with aggression, local services, or the evidence base for particular areas of practice, for example, and there were very few references to inter-professional working or to carers. The legal basis for social work interventions in different contexts came up in most discussions with managers (section 4.6), and good record-keeping was a regular theme too. Risk assessment could also be problematic for managers. Students were much more satisfied with the teaching they received on Law than on Risk assessment or on Report-writing (Evaluation of Social Work Degree Qualification in England Team, 2008a, 98-99).

Managers tended to lay deficiencies in knowledge of legislation and associated policies at the door of graduates themselves, rather than the HEIs, pointing out that they expected job applicants to have ensured that they knew about these areas before attending an interview.

Returning to the graduate survey: information was sought on how they would have expected to learn about the topics they had previously picked as wishing they knew more about (Table 42). In order to simplify this task for graduates who picked more than three topics, they were asked which one was the most important, then the second and third most important – and just for these top three 'important' topics, they were then asked how they would have expected to learn about them. Table 43 below shows how these topics were distributed overall by 'means of learning'.

Strikingly, for first-year graduates, learning about the topic on their degree programme outstripped all other possible sources of learning, by a considerable margin – though of course other sources could be mentioned as well. But whether this emphasis on the degree as the main source of learning reflects what new graduates have heard in the workplace about what they are expected to know having completed qualifying training, or whether graduates felt disappointed themselves about their level of skill or knowledge having qualified, is a matter for speculation. Specific work training was the next most popular 'means of learning' for first-year graduates; but for second-years this became the most frequently mentioned source of learning. Self-study remained at a disappointingly low level, even for second-year graduates – possibly reflecting lack of time in busy jobs and/or the absence of easily accessible learning resources.

Table 43: Expected means of learning

Q: How you have expected to learn (more) about this aspect of your practice	2008/I		2008/II		2009	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
During your degree programme	368	70	183	55	217	72
At work – Induction	169	32	97	29	94	31
At work – specific training	248	47	203	61	140	47
At work – learning from colleagues 'on the job'	158	30	97	29	81	27
PQ Consolidation module	73	14	66	20	40	13
Reading up or research on your own	170	32	101	31	66	22
Base: (no. of topics identified as wishing they knew more about)	529		331		300	

Learning on their degree programme was the favourite option for first-year graduates for all the topics except:

- Services and resources available locally
- Acquiring advanced and specialist skills
- Leadership and management

… where workplace means of learning were picked as often or more often.

The survey results overall highlight the following issues as causing new graduates some level of anxiety about their practice:

- Knowledge of mental health conditions (among very many more graduates than work specifically in mental health)
- Knowledge of child protection
- How to deal with hostility, aggression or conflict
- Assessing risk
- Preparing reports for legal proceedings

Mental health, child protection and risk assessment all featured as areas for training of new workers as specified by managers (section 3.5). However, dealing with hostility and court reporting were not mentioned in this context – perhaps suggesting that training in these areas is not readily available in the workplace, but should be.

4.9   Making the transition from student to practitioner – the interface between qualifying training and 'readiness to practise'

The Social Work Task Force in its interim report in July 2009 noted as one of its six key themes of enquiry that *"We have been told that new social workers are often not properly prepared for the demands of the job…"* (Social Work Task Force, 2009b)

The data obtained in **Into the Workforce** confirm the need for good preparation and opportunities for ongoing development mentioned by the Task Force. While graduates, line managers, employers and HEIs all had ideas about ways in which qualifying training could be improved, their reported experiences suggest that issues about the extent to which professional qualifying programmes prepare social workers to be effective practitioners are considerably more complex than has been presented in some media reports. The workplace context into which newly qualified workers go has a considerable bearing on whether they feel appropriately prepared, or not.

The transition to the workplace could be a difficult experience. Several first-year graduates commented on the pressures they were put under on entering the workplace:

> *The difference in expectation between being a student and a newly qualified worker is immense and unreasonable. Processes and procedures are assumed and little or no time has been offered to me to help me to develop my understanding. I feel very much cast adrift!*

> *Newly qualified social workers are put under very difficult conditions when told they are able to perform certain tasks that they have had no prior knowledge and experience of.*

> *Managers do not allow extra time for newly qualifieds to familiarise themselves with new organisations and IT systems.*

> *[First-year graduates 2008/I,*
> *verbatim responses to open-ended question about omissions in degree learning]*

These comments underline the importance to new graduates and to their self-confidence of proper introductory processes in employer organisations, which are not always in place.

This study has focused on the interface between qualifying training and professional practice, and what constitutes 'readiness to practise', drawing on its predecessor study, the evaluation of the social work degree (Evaluation of Social Work Degree Qualification in England Team, 2008a) as explained earlier.

Readiness to practise

The review of readiness to practise to inform this study (Moriarty *et al.*, 2011 advance access) shows that there are differing approaches to the concepts of 'readiness to practise' and 'preparedness' between employers and educators across a range of professions and internationally, and that tensions can ensue. This present study has shown that there are some common and some differing expectations between the parties about the outcomes desired. HEIs were aiming overall for graduation to mark a threshold of professional competence (section 4.7): with graduates able to act as critical and reflective practitioners; adaptable to different contexts; and 'ready' as beginning social workers. Their view was that employers then have to provide the support and training to help newly-qualified social workers to function in the particular job, and develop professionally. However, employers, especially in the statutory sector, increasingly require workers who can undertake complex work right from the start because that is often the nature of the work that has to be done.

Much has been said about the rising thresholds of eligibility for social work services and the high level of need required by service users in order to get a service (for example, Commission for Social Care Inspection, 2008; Sheppard, 2009). Many new graduates in the study were going straight into child protection (CP) work because that is where the vacancies are, but not all graduates had CP experience. Line managers suggested that opportunities for newly-qualified social workers to learn from more experienced colleagues were even fewer in child protection teams, where workers with the most expertise chose to move from front line work into less pressurised services such as adoption and fostering, so that in the words of one manager:

> *We've got a limited group of people supporting an even more limited group of people.*
> *R1 115 Denise Team manager, Children's services*

In the past, child protection was regarded by both HEIs and line managers as too complex for newly-qualified social workers to handle effectively, as they need first to accumulate experience in lower-risk cases. Many still hold this view. Some newly-qualifieds in Adult services are also reported as taking on complex work from the start. This marks a difference in expectations since HEIs, particularly, see the long-term nature of professional development and the need to match the caseloads of newly-qualified social workers with their level of experience.

While it must be the case that students should acquire some basic knowledge and understanding of the processes involved with present-day social work, it is also fair to say that employers have a duty to introduce their new staff to their own particular way of working, build on their existing knowledge and ensure they know what they should be doing. This study provides evidence that this duty is not always fulfilled or even acknowledged, and the expectation that new graduates can immediately 'do' every task causes anxiety and dismay.

The evaluation of the social work degree drew on the conceptualisation of stages of professional development (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986; Fook *et al.*, 2000) whereby social workers start their careers as 'advanced beginners' and develop with time and experience into competent, proficient workers and perhaps eventually experts. This model was incorporated into the early thinking of the Social Work Task Force and has influenced the Reform Board's proposed Career Structure. It also helps place the point of graduation on a continuum of learning and development, thereby facilitating better understanding of 'preparedness' and of what it is reasonable to expect from new graduates. However, many employers appear unwilling or unable to embrace this long-term view, and there is a disjuncture between what they require from beginning workers and what HEIs feel they should be providing.

There is also a disjuncture in the type of work that HEI respondents said they were training students to do, especially in working with ongoing relationships – and what newly-qualified social workers often face. HEI staff were conscious that more and more managerialism, accountability procedures and targets had restricted direct work with service users and that practice was no longer about working with relationships – intervention was no longer over time

The consequences for new graduates are that they can struggle in the new worker's role even more than in other transitions which require adjustments. This study suggests that there are specific factors which may result from the nature of the work that new graduates undertake on qualifying which could lead to a mismatch of expectations, and consequent dissatisfaction – possibly leading to intention to leave.

Working life

While line managers in this study generally indicated that they tried to support newly-qualified social workers with protected caseloads and more frequent supervision, at least initially, the results of the graduate surveys show that this is not happening consistently. Supervision frequency fell short of the currently recommended once a month, especially after the first year of employment, and the content of supervision was dominated by management oversight of cases, with development opportunities less prominent. Induction was by no means universal.

An important finding of this study is that the graduates' job satisfaction (enjoyment), although high generally, depended to some extent on job-related factors, consistent with other studies. But here specific aspects have been identified that affected graduates most strongly: values (ability to put their social work values into practice, and transmit them to others), and job engagement (a mix of access to learning, and emphasis on working in partnership with service users and carers). The finding about values fits well with the strong and pervasive altruistic motivations of students demonstrated in the evaluation of the social work degree (Evaluation of Social Work Degree Qualification in England Team, 2008a), continuing into working life. As graduates, not being able to put their social work values into practice or transmit them to others was also found to be correlated with not feeling well-prepared. Thus, beliefs about how well their degree has prepared social work graduates for working life are to some extent a function of their actual job experiences. Stress and burnout have been assumed to be associated with too much work, but the effect of 'Manageable workload' (see section 2.3) on job enjoyment and retention has been shown to be lower priority for new entrants to the profession than their ability to adhere to their values. This is a key finding, suggesting that the type of work available to, or expected of, new graduates may not always meet their expectations in helping service users. It also

implies that more explicit attention in managing caseloads to facilitating the way individual workers' practice accords with social work values, would reap rewards.

Graduates also most wanted more help in supervision with applying theoretical approaches to their practice (section 3.4) – three-quarters of second-year graduates picked this as top of their list (followed by reflection and self-awareness). Regular coverage of this element in formal supervision was quite low. Taken together with answers to attitudinal questions about theory, these findings suggest that insufficient attention is given to helping to apply theory to practice in normal working life. In answer to an open-ended question in the survey one graduate said:

> *The practice placements were really helpful to apply theory to practice. Supervision was really helpful to evaluate practice and challenge myself. It is not the same, however, now I am working as there is little scope for this reflective practice.*

> *[First-year graduates 2008/I,*
> *verbatim response to open-ended question about most help from degree learning]*

This has implications not only for the professional development of social workers but also for the service they believe they should be offering. It has been established that social work in statutory organisations has moved away from working consistently with relationships, (for example Munro, 2011) and this is being addressed. However, although Munro considers supervision in her Interim report, there is no consideration at all in her Final report of how theoretical understanding of situations can and should develop through supervision, despite a strong theme generally on professional development. Similarly, the SWRB Employers' Standards propose a supervision framework, but without any reference to theoretical understanding or how this develops. **_Into the Workforce_** suggests that this is a key area to consider, that newly-qualified graduates do not get the type of supervision that will help them integrate what they have learned on their qualifying programmes, and their development is therefore more limited.

Assessment skills – critical and analytical abilities of graduates

Much employer criticism has been levelled at some graduates' ability to make assessments, it being said that many are good at gathering information but not at pulling it together to make judgments. There are many factors that could contribute to this, including the type of work and quality of supervision available in practice placements to develop students' analytical assessments. Additionally, it is thought by HEI staff and some line managers that ICT systems limit analytical skills and critical thinking by prescribing a rigid format for assessment, which may spill over to students.

The system does all that for you. There is not the trigger to ask the question any more: 'How do I go about doing assessments?'. 'You fill in the form', is the frightening answer you get now, instead of 'Well, let's think about what sort of things you are going to ask'.

R1 115 Denise, Team manager, Children's services

A further view (McNay *et al.*, 2009) suggests that the process of gathering evidence for the National Occupational Standards on practice placement can be a problem. The argument is that the need to provide evidence for the range of indicators/elements for the competences necessarily fragments the issues and leads to descriptive work. Rather, the gathering of evidence from the users' situation should be for more holistic assessments (e.g. analytic summaries of work) which would develop analytical understanding better. This might also apply to the CWDC and SfC NQSW schemes if evidence has to be presented separately for each Outcome Statement.

Considering these factors, and there are likely to be several others, suggests that there is no one explanation of why some new graduates may not be acquiring the assessment skills required for professional practice during their qualifying programmes – a process developing through academic and practice work combined. This study also highlights that the continuing professional development of social workers is contingent on the processes available to facilitate the integration of theory and practice – a finding which is particularly important for the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE). Many HEI participants in the study compared the lack of a *"learning culture"* in social work employer organisations against the routine ongoing learning built in to other workplace settings, especially health. This may be partly a problem of organisational function, but it is important to build in to the workplace the continuing theoretical development of social workers if they are to achieve the professional skills necessary for the range of work required by service users.

Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE)

There was strong support from line managers for the policy of NQSW transition schemes which are to inform the setting up of the ASYE. Most of them generally acknowledged that newly-qualified social workers needed additional support during their first year of practice. However, they noted that they should be able to use their discretion in deciding when new workers were ready to undertake certain activities, and also pointed out that other skills took longer than a year to acquire. Most managers considered that they themselves had only felt confident about their abilities around two years after qualifying.

HEI respondents saw the ASYE as an opportunity for universities and employers to work together to share responsibility for graduates' readiness for practice and subsequent development over the year. It was experience in a job that helped graduates apply their learning and fully develop. However, there was some doubt about whether the NQSW schemes as currently operating would be the best basis for developing the year. One respondent whose HEI was involved in these schemes stated that analytic and critical perspectives were not being mapped in the Outcome Statements. Given the findings from this study, it seems important to ensure that the ASYE gives to newly-qualified workers opportunities to develop their theoretical understanding in order to provide the most effective service to meet the needs of service users. This will very much depend on the quality of the supervisor or mentor, and on the opportunities newly-qualified workers are offered to further their qualifying training.

Line managers drew a strong distinction between induction and a far more variable approach to the process of transition from student to social work practice, which could take anything from two weeks to over a year. In part the variability was related to the needs of particular new graduates. For example, those who had been on placement in a particular local authority or team, or who had worked there before qualifying, were felt to have less need of the basic introductory kind of induction. Other factors such as age and personality could also be influential. Most managers in this sample had developed programmes of this more detailed transition, rather than following a prescribed approach. The following quote from a senior manager typifies many of the processes described by the managers:

> *No, it's reasonably flexible* [in terms of time]. *I mean, we'd probably go for a couple of weeks for the intensive 'getting to know you' bit, before you start to get into any great casework. Well, we would want to be starting to get into some casework by the end of that time, but it's getting that balance right, isn't it. If the person was newly qualified and they were 21, we might be doing something different to somebody who's been in employment previously... Although, obviously, lots of it would probably be similar, but it's just being able to tailor it to the person's life experiences as well, I think.*

> *R1 109 Daisy, Team manager, Adult services*

Levels of preparedness

The Munro final report states that *"Not all newly-qualified social workers are emerging from degree courses with the necessary knowledge, skills and expertise; and they are especially unprepared to deal with the challenges posed by child protection work"* (2011, para 8.18).

As suggested above it may not be appropriate for newly-qualified workers to deal with child protection cases. A social work blog recently commented on the Munro report:

I have never understood, not really, why it is the jobs in child protection social work that are taken by the newly-qualified social workers. Surely it makes sense to have some kind of post-qualifying training similar to the AMHP role before taking on what is one of the more complex and risky areas of social work.

(Fighting Monsters, 2011)

However, one of the issues with preparedness is about what level of knowledge and skill can be expected at the point of qualifying. Munro recommends quite a lot of input into qualifying programmes, but what needs to be determined is how much and at what level it is appropriate. This applies to many aspects of qualifying training, for example risk assessment, which is an understandable concern of newly-qualified workers. Qualifying programmes already struggle with how much content it is possible to include in the relatively short time available, but it is also inappropriate to include teaching that is better absorbed at a later stage of professional skill. The proposed Professional Capabilities Framework should go some way to helping clarify this, but for the newly-qualified worker this is part of the problem with the transition from being a student. Giving clear messages about what can be expected at this early stage of professional development will help the new worker make a better transition than if 'thrown in at the deep end' and expected to take on more complex work than they should, as many experience.

Two 'Handbooks' have emerged recently (Keen *et al.*, 2009; Donnellan & Jack, 2010) which offer guidance on how to cope with the transition. Keen et al set out to help newly-qualified social workers 'mind the gap', and Donnellan and Jack discuss the 'transition gap' – moving from student to employee. The Handbooks also tackle areas to help promote further development.

HEI staff participating in this study welcomed the prospect of better partnerships with social work employers in future, with shared responsibility for qualifying and continuing education and mutual understanding about outcomes.

We've got to share responsibility with employers. Otherwise we're not going to have a workforce that has the requisite knowledge to function at the appropriate level that we're expecting them to.

HEI Group 5

As for the newly qualified workers themselves, this study has found a strong and persistent sense of altruism motivating decisions to become social workers. Two-thirds of these graduates agreed with the statement 'I feel a strong sense of identity with social work as a profession' (Table 46, appended), and it will be important to sustain into their professional careers this level of committed idealism by nurturing, respecting and supporting them to advance in their endeavours to help service users change their lives for the better.

VI CONCLUSIONS

Background and context

Into the Workforce was concerned with how well social work graduates in England were prepared by their degree-level education to enter the social work workforce. As explained in more detail in the Methods chapter, in addition to the new data collected as part of this study, we were fortunate to have information from the same respondents obtained while they were still students (Evaluation of Social Work Degree Qualification in England Team, 2008a). This makes *Into the Workforce* one of the few studies of newly qualified professionals to be based upon longitudinal data charting how students' motivations, views about their qualifying programmes, and long term career plans change over time as they move into the workplace (Moriarty *et al.*, 2011 advance access).

In view of the concerns expressed by employers to the Social Work Task Force (Social Work Task Force, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c) and the Task Force's own viewpoint that 'feedback from employers, practitioners, practice assessors and from independent research strongly suggests that there are certain areas of knowledge and skills which are not being covered to the right depth in social work initial training' (Social Work Task Force, 2009a, para 1.19), we also wanted to examine how the views of graduates participating in this study accorded with those of Directors, line managers, social work educators, and people using services and carers. Their accounts highlighted how perceptions of the extent to which graduates are 'ready to practise' vary between different types of informant and are influenced by their differing priorities. They also illustrate the intricacies of the interplay between social work qualifying education and the organisational context in which newly-qualified social workers are practising in determining how these judgements are made.

The project took place at a time when social work has been the focus of extensive scrutiny – most obviously in the establishment of the Social Work Task Force (Social Work Task Force, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c) and the subsequent work of the Social Work Reform Board (2010) and in the Munro Review of child protection arrangements (Munro, 2010a, 2010b, 2011). In addition, changes to higher education funding (Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance, 2010; Secretary of State for Business, Skills & Innovation 2011) and the planned review of the social work bursary (Social Work Reform Board, 2010) have ensured continued policy interest in identifying the most cost-effective models of social work education and in securing an adequate supply of social workers for the future.

An added methodological challenge is that new policy emphases on reducing bureaucracy (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011),

achieving effective and proportionate regulation (Secretary of State for Health, 2010), developing new ways of co-ordinating and arranging services through mutuals and co-operatives (HM Government, 2010), finding new ways of supporting individuals and communities (Department of Health, 2010b), and likely changes to child protection services – all amid a climate of fiscal austerity (HM Treasury, 2010) – mean that the key question is not simply how well social work qualifying education prepares graduates to work in the workplace as it is currently constituted but also needs to consider if graduates have the flexibility and adaptability that will help them work effectively in the more pluralistic working environments of the future.

Employment patterns

Despite the substantial investment in social work recruitment by central government – for example, the 'Help Give Them a Voice' campaign (Peacock, 2009) and initiatives by individual employers, such as 'golden hellos/handcuffs' (Baginsky *et al.*, 2010), an average of one in ten social work posts (McGregor, 2010a) continues to be vacant. Although the highest vacancy rates are found in London (Commission for Social Care Inspection, 2009; Local Government Association, 2009), and in Children's services in particular (Local Government Association, 2009), they represent a widespread problem. While some councils are reported to be cutting social work posts (McGregor, 2010b; UNISON, 2011), the majority have tried to maintain their expenditure on social work staffing – despite cutbacks to other services – because spending on Adult and Children's social care is viewed as a priority (Local Government Association Analysis and Research Team, 2011).

The proportion of first-year social work graduates participating in the online surveys designed as part of this study who were employed is no worse than for graduates in general; graduate unemployment rates, at 20 per cent, are higher than they have been for a decade (Office for National Statistics, 2010). Of those in employment, almost all were working as social workers, with a minority working in other social care posts. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of those in social work posts were on permanent contracts. The proportion of respondents still looking for a social work job six months after graduating (12% of respondents in 2008 rising to 16% in 2009) indicates their determination to follow their vocation.

Although some participants had first found out about a job vacancy having first undertaken a practice placement in the organisation in which they worked, the majority were recruited externally through advertising.

The results also showed that local authorities continue to be the main source of employment for newly-qualified social workers, with comparatively few

respondents working for the voluntary or private sector or for temporary employment agencies.

These findings raise four important issues. Firstly, the changes to Adult and Children's services over the past 30 years have been characterised by a shift from publicly funded and provided services to services that continue to be publicly funded but are mainly provided by private and third sector organisations (Harris, 2003; Glasby, 2005). This has created a mixed picture in terms of how this has affected employment terms and conditions within the social care workforce with some evidence that there is now a more flexible labour market, enabling workers to achieve more control over the hours and times of day that they work set against other indications that employment terms and conditions, such as access to employment-based pensions, are less favourable (Conley, 2006; Cunningham & Nickson, 2010; Rubery *et al.*, 2011). Until now, social workers have been comparatively unaffected by this trend because they generally work in the public sector – with the exception of those working for voluntary organisations (Clark, 2007) or temporary employment agencies (Department of Health, 2002; Carey, 2007; de Ruyter *et al.*, 2008; Cornes *et al.*, 2010). However, the study highlights the need to monitor the impact of any changes away from publicly provided social work services towards more pluralistic models. Will the extra autonomy that Social Work Practices are intended to provide mean that they can attract the most experienced workers, leaving those services that are still retained by local authorities increasingly dependent upon newly-qualified workers? Alternatively, will new forms of social work service prefer to recruit from newly-qualified workers, on the assumption that they may be more creative than those whose social work experience has been largely obtained undertaking what some consider to be overly bureaucratic types of social work (Postle, 2001; Farrell & Morris, 2003; Broadhurst *et al.*, 2010)?

Secondly, the finding that half of first-year graduates in social work worked in a local authority Children's Department adds to the evidence nationally (Wallis-Jones & Lyons, 2002; Social Work Task Force, 2009b) and internationally (Tham, 2007; Burns, 2011) that newly-qualified social workers are disproportionately employed in child protection compared with other types of service user group, partly because this is where vacancies are and partly because it is seen as a 'starting off point' (Burns, 2011) for their future careers. At the same time, reports (Laming, 2009; Social Work Task Force, 2009a) have highlighted the risks to organisations experiencing recruitment and retention difficulties of an over-reliance upon newly-qualified workers. There is some evidence from this study that the pressures of running a service in which there are comparatively few experienced social workers lead some line managers and employers to emphasise the disadvantages of newly-qualified social workers rather than seeing them a long term investment for their future workforce.

It is important to recognise that recruitment difficulties in child protection are not restricted to the UK; there is international evidence (Tham, 2007; Healy & Oltedal, 2010) suggesting they happen elsewhere. Thus, the results presented here may have a greater salience beyond the experiences of newly-qualified social workers in England, and imply there is a need for further research aimed at understanding differential patterns of recruitment and retention across different organisations and types of service.

Thirdly, the proportion of respondents still looking for a social work job confirms the need for more accurate forecasts of supply and demand in social work (Social Work Task Force, 2009a) and the need for clearer information about how many new graduates are needed to replace those leaving the workforce. It also suggests there is a need for more information identifying the reasons why some graduates seem to find it harder to find a social work post and if this relates more to differences in the personal circumstances of graduates, such as a greater willingness to move to different parts of the country where more jobs are available, or differences in their experiences as a student, such as having completed a practice placement in the type of service to which they are applying for a job.

Finally, the findings about respondents' employment patterns need to be considered within the context of other findings, such as their motivations, and it is to this that we now turn.

Motivations

Existing research has already looked at student motivations and has highlighted the importance of a sense of altruism in determining which students are drawn to social work (Christie & Kruk, 1998; Furness, 2007; Stevens *et al.*, 2010 advance access). This information can be used in developing recruitment material and informing decisions about student selection. However, we know much less about motivations once students qualify and this is, to our knowledge, the only UK-published study of social work that has looked longitudinally at motivations over time.

Respondents were invited to select their reasons for choosing social work from a 13-item list developed as part of the previous study (Evaluation of Social Work Degree Qualification in England Team, 2008a). 'Helping individuals to improve the quality of their own lives' followed by 'wish to tackle injustice and inequalities in society' remained the most important motivations for respondents as students, as new graduates, and 12-18 months later as comparatively seasoned professionals. Indeed, in proportional terms, the importance of 'helping individuals to improve the quality of their own lives' rose as respondents became more experienced.

An exploratory factor analysis suggested that, based on respondents' answers when they were first year students, the 13 different motivations could be 'clumped' or grouped together into four constructs: career, working conditions; interaction with people; and having a worthwhile job. However, after graduation, the importance of career reasons for doing social work declined; while the importance of having a worthwhile job increased. One possible explanation for this is that, as respondents' expectations of their career prospects faded, they sought to compensate for this by emphasising the worthwhile aspects of their jobs. This is a somewhat confusing finding in policy terms and it is important to set caveats about the comparatively small number of respondents overall and the possibility of sample bias. For instance, those who completed the online survey three times might have been those most committed to social work. However, this finding does seem to resonate with the concerns of the (Social Work Task Force, 2009a) and the former Select Committee for Children, Schools and Families (House of Commons Children Schools and Families Committee, 2009) that the problem with social workers' pay is not the starting salary but that salary progression throughout a career is slow and limited. Thus, it is possible that, as students, respondents thought their pay and career prospects were quite inviting, and it was not until they were actually in the workforce that they decided their options were more limited.

Does it matter then, that participants were more motivated by having a worthwhile job than by other considerations? There are no definitive answers to this question but there is a substantial literature suggesting that many social workers experience stress and burnout (for example, Lloyd *et al.*, 2002; Coffey *et al.*, 2004; Evans *et al.*, 2006). It is possible that if social workers feel that having a worthwhile job is the key *raison d'être* for their work, they are especially vulnerable to burnout or stress when circumstances over which they may have limited control prevent them from improving the lives of service users or tackling injustice because they lack other motivations that may buffer the impact of doing a difficult job, such as being in an occupation that offers variety and good pay. Alternatively, if social workers feel that they cannot do a worthwhile job then other aspects, such as poor pay or lack of flexibility in terms of the working environment which would ordinarily be seen as comparatively unimportant, assume a greater significance (Rubery *et al.*, 2011).

Providing more detailed answers to these questions would, of course, require further work but it may be salutary to draw lessons from a study of newly qualified nurses (Maben *et al.*, 2007) which contrasted the ideals the nurses held on graduation with the sense of frustration and burnout they felt as a consequence of being unable to implement their ideals in practice. For the nurses in this study, this led to disillusionment, 'job-hopping' and, in some cases, a decision to leave the profession. This suggests that future work could usefully explore the links between motivations and long term retention. This now leads us into a discussion of the study findings on job satisfaction and retention.

Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction is generally considered to be important in all sectors of employment because it is thought to lead to better service delivery and better retention rates. Job satisfaction was measured using a single global item asking respondents: 'Taking everything into consideration, how are you enjoying this job so far?' Nearly half of respondents replied that they were enjoying their job 'very much' while another four in ten thought that they were 'quite enjoying it'.

A series of regression models was undertaken to identify which factors contributed most to job satisfaction. This showed that just three factors predicted whether respondents felt dissatisfied with their jobs:

- Whether they felt that degree had prepared them well for their job – those who did not feel the social work degree had prepared them well for their job were more likely to be dissatisfied. (This will be discussed in more detail below.)

- Whether they considered they were able to put their social work values into practice – those who did not feel able to put their values into practice felt less satisfied.

- Level of job engagement, calculated using a 5-item scale measuring elements such as whether staff felt encouraged to take part in learning and development, and whether they considered the views of people using services were taken seriously in their organisation – those who did not feel 'engaged' with their jobs in this sense felt less satisfied.

Notably, the influence of having a manageable workload was found to be much lower than these three factors.

While much of the existing work looking at social workers' job satisfaction, has focused on issues such as workload size and levels of stress, there is a comparative shortage of work examining the positive factors that contribute to job satisfaction (Collins, 2008) – including those factors that make jobs 'exciting, challenging and fulfilling' (Otkay, 1992, 437, cited in Collins, 2008). These findings highlight the positive aspects of respondents' job satisfaction, such as feeling well prepared and being able to put their social work values into practice. They also raise questions about the conceptual links between initial motivations when enrolling on a social work programme and the espousal of professional values on graduation. Does the importance assigned to putting their values into practice indicate they had internalised a very important part of the curriculum, what has been called the 'moral core of the profession' (Bisman, 2004), or is it explained by their initial altruistic motivations to choose social work? More work in this area could assist in

helping inform the process of student selection. At the same time, job satisfaction was also directly influenced by their working environment. The interaction between perceptions of the quality of qualifying education and the quality of the work environment was a constant theme throughout the study and suggests that the two cannot be seen in isolation.

Retention and intention to leave

Within the social work and social care literature, there is a large body of research using intention to leave as a proxy for job retention (for example, Huxley *et al.*, 2005; Brannon *et al.*, 2007; Tham, 2007; Evans & Huxley, 2009; Carpenter *et al.*, 2010; Rubery *et al.*, 2011) and this study provides further confirmatory evidence of the validity of this approach.

In their first year of employment, a quarter of respondents working in social work reported they expected to remain with their current employer for the next five years while a further third expected to remain with their employer for the next two to four years. Allowing for differences in question wording, only a handful of first-year respondents planned to leave social work, much lower than the 7.5% reported in a survey of newly qualified social workers working in Children's services (Carpenter *et al.*, 2010). Eighteen months later, around half of the 2008 graduate cohort provided details of where they were currently working. This showed that approximately three-quarters of those who had expected to remain with their employer had indeed remained in their original job while two-thirds of those who thought they might leave had switched jobs. Strikingly, with one or two exceptions, those who moved jobs were still working as a social worker. Consistent with other research (Huxley *et al.*, 2005; Carpenter *et al.*, 2010), those who were more satisfied with their jobs were less likely to report that they were already looking for another job.

Further regression models were developed in order to test the interactions between job satisfaction and already looking for another job. This showed that, after controlling for everything else, the factors that made respondents want to stay in their jobs were having a supportive team, while already looking for another job was associated with working in the private and voluntary sector. Once the three factors associated with job satisfaction (being well prepared by degree, able to put values into practice, and job engagement) were included in the model as interaction terms, job satisfaction was no longer statistically significantly associated with intention to stay, although the direction was still the same – that is, the higher the job satisfaction, the greater the intention to stay.

In policy terms, the importance of the findings on job satisfaction, intention to leave and having a supportive team varies. There is a large literature linking job satisfaction to intention to stay so the fact that, among those planning to leave in the short to medium term, the finding that job satisfaction was no longer statistically significant probably reflects the comparatively small size of the sample.

As respondents working in the private and voluntary sector had similar levels of job satisfaction to those working for local authorities, it seems likely that intentions to leave among those employed in the private and voluntary sector were mainly driven by the idea that they would become more employable if they could demonstrate experience of working in a statutory setting. Possibly the short-term nature of posts in the voluntary and private sector, because most are working with contracts from local authorities, may play a role in their feelings of uncertainty about the potential of a career or long-term future.

The finding that having a supportive team decreased intention to leave is probably the most important of these three findings because it feeds into the literature on high performance work organisations (Lloyd & Payne, 2005; Rubery *et al.*, 2011). High performance work organisations aim to achieve benefits for the employer and employee in terms of the organisation's performance and delivering greater autonomy and job security for the employee. The finding that more supportive social work teams are associated with an intention to stay suggests that if more social work employers invest in creating supportive teams – by, for instance, encouraging communication, creating flexible working conditions, and celebrating achievements – then they may find that this also helps to improve retention.

Organisational context

The work of the Social Work Task Force (Social Work Task Force, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c), and subsequently the Social Work Reform Board (Social Work Reform Board, 2010), and the Munro Review (Munro, 2010a, 2010b, 2011) has renewed interest in the organisational context in which social workers work and this study collected information which can contribute to these debates.

The Task Force recommended that a clear national standard be developed for the support social workers should expect from their employers and that the new standard should be supported by clear national requirements for the supervision of social workers (Social Work Task Force, 2009a, 12). The Reform Board has taken this forward in the Proposed Standards for Employers of Social Workers in England and Proposed Supervision Framework.

Included in these standards are the needs to:

- Implement transparent systems to manage workload and case allocation in order to protect service users and practitioners.

- Make sure that social workers can do their jobs safely and have the practical tools and resources they need to practise effectively.

- Ensure that social workers have regular and appropriate social work supervision.

<div align="right">(Social Work Reform Board, 2010, 25-26)</div>

Into the Workforce reinforces the concerns of the Task Force and the Reform Board that greater attention must be paid to achieving a consensus about what constitutes a manageable workload. Although line managers reported that new graduates were generally given a reduction in caseload, either in terms of numbers and/or complexity, between a quarter and a third of graduates themselves responding to the survey were dissatisfied with their caseloads. This is consistent with other work (Carpenter *et al.*, 2010) reporting that NQSWs considered that they did not have (or at least they thought they didn't have) the 10 per cent reduction in caseload that they were meant to have. Carpenter and colleagues' study also found an increase in NQSWs' stress levels over time, with about a third of their sample scoring above the threshold for stress on the GHQ-12. Although *Into the Workforce* did not use this, or a similar measure of stress, only half of new graduates agreed with the statement that they were 'able to achieve a good work/life balance' in their current job and more than a quarter disagreed. This has resonance with the findings reported in the Munro Review (2011) that workloads for social workers in reconfigured social work units are more manageable than in those where systems have not been redesigned.

Into the Workforce also adds to the existing evidence suggesting that many social workers are concerned about the quality of the IT systems with which they work (Pithouse *et al.*, 2009; Social Work Task Force, 2009b, 2009c; Baginsky *et al.*, 2010). Nearly half of first-year graduates complained about the IT systems in their organisation and their concerns were echoed by the line managers interviewed as part of the study. In addition, some HEI staff and line managers thought that where IT systems prescribe a rigid format for assessment, this may hinder the development of analytical skills and critical thinking.

The Munro Review (Munro, 2010a) describes professional supervision as a:

> …core mechanism for helping social workers critically reflect on the understanding they are forming of the family, of considering their emotional response and whether this is adversely affecting their reasoning, and for making decisions about how best to help.
>
> (Munro, 2010a, para 4.10)

Other work has pointed to the benefits of supervision in protecting against burnout (Lloyd *et al.*, 2002). However, the Munro Review also draws attention to a gradual shift away from the professional casework supervision of practice towards the management oversight of caseloads. A further trend identified in other research (Baginsky *et al.*, 2010) has been the use of supervision time to discuss aspects of performance such as attendance.

Newly-qualified social workers taking part in this study confirmed all these trends, including the use of supervision to manage performance and to pass on agency policies. Strikingly, only a minority reported that supervision was used to help them apply theoretical approaches to their practice, although this was the area in which they most wanted more help.

When this information is combined with data on the frequency of supervision, it raises questions about the wisdom of taking a multi-purpose approach to supervision. Both managers and newly-qualified social workers taking part in this study reported a process by which the frequency of supervision tapered as workers became more experienced. Across all three waves of the online survey, between a half and two thirds of respondents received supervision once a month. Strikingly, between a quarter and a fifth of first-year respondents received supervision once a fortnight compared to around one in seven of those in their second year. However, this still left a sizeable proportion – varying between 13%-22% across the three waves of data collection – who received supervision less often than once a month. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that respondents set so much store by having supportive colleagues because they would have been very reliant upon such informal supervision from colleagues.

In the context of the suggestion made in the Munro Review that 'perhaps the traditional view of the frontline worker carrying a caseload with a modest amount of supervision needs to be modified' (Munro, 2010a, para 3.52), the other findings worth reporting are that alternatives to the traditional model of one-to-one supervision by a line manager, such as group or peer supervision, did not appear to be frequent and that direct observation of new graduates' practice was rare, although they sometimes had opportunities to shadow a more experienced practitioner. Taking these findings as a whole, they suggest that a clear priority for future research must be to identify the effectiveness of different models of supervision, including such issues as their timing, content, and whether they are delivered by line managers, senior practitioners, peers, or others in consultant roles.

Readiness to practise

The extent to which newly qualified social workers are 'ready to practise' is an enduring theme in research into social work education (and indeed research in other professions), despite the lack of consensus about what constitutes practice readiness (Moriarty *et al.*, 2011 advance access). Whichever term is used – 'readiness to practise', 'preparedness', 'competence' or 'confidence' – the issue has acquired an added importance following the conclusion reached by the Social Work Task Force that the quality of initial qualifying education was uneven and did not always equip newly qualified social workers with the right skills and knowledge:

> These include: assessment frameworks; risk analysis; communication skills; managing conflict and hostility; working with other professionals. An understanding of the research, legislation and policy basis for practice is also essential…The right knowledge and skills must be learnt to sufficient depth to provide a strong foundation for high quality practice and continuous development throughout a social worker's career.
>
> (Social Work Task Force, 2009a, para 1.19)

The Social Work Reform Board has taken this forward by developing a Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) which consists of 'nine core social work capabilities which should be relevant, to a greater or lesser degree, to all social workers and social work students no matter what their level of experience or the setting they work in' (Social Work Reform Board, 2010, para 2.1). Crucially, the PCF aims to distinguish between the varying capabilities at different stages of a social worker's career, ranging from newly qualified social workers through to advanced practitioners, social work managers, and practice educators.

In 2012, regulation of social work is expected to pass from the GSCC to the Health Professions Council (HPC) (while will then likely be renamed the Health and Care Professions Council). The HPC sets Standards of Proficiency which are the professional standards that every registrant must meet in order to become registered, and must continue to meet in order to maintain their registration (Health Professions Council, Undated). These are the minimum standards the HPC considers necessary to protect members of the public and work is currently taking place on developing new standards of proficiency for social work.

There are three key areas in which *Into the Workforce* can contribute to these debates. Firstly, it elaborates on some of the key skills and knowledge that graduates, educators, employers and service users considered that newly qualified social workers should possess. Next, it highlights the importance of distinguishing between 'readiness to practise' as a newly-qualified social worker and the level of skills acquired over a career, and finally it looks at the inter-relationship between readiness to practise and the work environment.

Almost three-quarters of respondents thought their qualifying programme had prepared them for their current job 'very well' or 'fairly well'. The proportions feeling 'very well' prepared and 'fairly well prepared' are similar to the proportions of Directors who felt 'very' and 'fairly satisfied' with the quality of newly qualified social workers they had recruited into their organisation over the past three years, although Directors of Children's services were less satisfied than Directors of Adult services, a pattern reported elsewhere (Baginsky et al., 2010). Overall, the responses to the 2009 online survey for Directors were more favourable about the quality of newly qualified social workers than the responses received in 2006 when the overwhelming majority of respondents would only have known newly-qualified social workers who had taken the DipSW or predecessor qualifications.

Nevertheless, the study confirmed that there were certain areas in which some skills and knowledge were reported to be lacking among newly-qualified social workers. Consistent with other reports (Social Work Task Force, 2009b; Bates *et al.*, 2010; Carpenter *et al.*, 2010), graduates responding to the online surveys wished they knew more about dealing with hostility, aggression or conflict; assessing risk; the evidence base for their area of social work practice; mental health; and the legal basis for social work interventions. In addition, they also wanted to know more about the services and resources available in their locality, highlighting the way in which 'readiness to practise' also involves the acquisition of some on-the-job knowledge. At the same time, social work educators were concerned that lack of consensus about the level of knowledge and skills that could be acquired on an initial qualifying programme could result in the curriculum becoming ever more crowded, as new topics were added to it in response to concerns from employers.

In common with other studies (Marsh & Triseliotis, 1996; Pithouse & Scourfield, 2002; Bates *et al.*, 2010; Jack & Donnellan, 2010), *Into the Workforce* found that there was broad agreement among newly-qualified social workers, line managers, employers, and service users and carers about the core skills that newly-qualified social workers needed, but that there was more divergence about the specific skills and knowledge that graduates should possess. For example, graduates felt that they were expected to know more about preparing court reports and child protection than they did, but social work educators considered that some employers placed too much emphasis on procedural skills such as preparing court reports rather than transferable skills, such as criticality and reflexivity. Some educators also considered that working in child protection was too complex a role for a newly-qualified worker. Line managers pointed out that the nature of practice was such that cases initially seen as routine could escalate. This meant that a case allocated on the basis that it was suitable for a newly-qualified social worker could become more serious once the situation was examined in more detail. Taken as a whole, these comments are redolent of earlier work with speech and language therapists (Brumfitt *et al.*, 2005) which contrasts employers' emphasis on fitness for purpose with educators' criteria about what constitutes 'fitness for award'.

In the same way, although all informants emphasised the need for good communication skills, for Directors and line managers this primarily related to having good verbal and written communication skills, whereas for service users and carers good communication skills were characterised by newly-qualified social workers demonstrating empathy and contacting them when they said they would. Service users and carers also placed greater emphasis on social workers being able to liaise effectively with other professionals.

Existing work looking at how social workers acquire expertise, particularly in terms of reflexivity and criticality and the ability to apply theory to practice (Fook *et al.*, 1997, 2000; Sheppard *et al.*, 2000), emphasises the iterative way in which these skills are acquired and developed. This is in line with the Professional Capabilities Framework which distinguishes between social workers' capabilities at different stages of their career. Although this study was not designed to map skills acquisition, it did collect information suggesting that graduates responding to the surveys experienced improvements in their practice skills over time.

Sixty six per cent of second-year graduates considered that the overall quality of their practice had 'improved a great deal' since starting work in their present job with a further 30% considering it had 'improved a little'. Furthermore, the proportion of 2008 graduates who thought that their manager rated their performance 'very highly' rose to 41% in their second year compared with 32% in their first, suggesting that both respondents and their managers thought that their performance had improved demonstrably over the year.

The final – and possibly most important – findings to be discussed in this section are the links between graduates' opinions about how well their qualifying programmes had prepared them for their current job and their perceptions of their current job. Compared with those who felt 'very' or 'fairly' well prepared, those who felt 'not very well' or 'not at all well prepared' scored lower on all six job-related scales measuring their ability to apply values, job engagement, manageability of their workload, supportiveness of their line manager, pay and prospects, and supportiveness of their colleagues. They also had lower levels of job satisfaction. This suggests that the quality of their qualifying education and their working environment both contributed to respondents' views about their readiness to practise.

Continuing professional development

Research into skill development in the social care sector (Rainbird *et al.*, 2009) has suggested that, in addition to the skills that employees bring with them into the workplace, in order to use these skills effectively, they need access to training and development to improve their skills, to work in an organisational culture that facilitates the sharing of knowledge and expertise, and the flexibility and autonomy that enables them to work in this way. One of the 15 Task Force recommendations for skill development in social work was to set in place 'a more coherent and effective national framework for the continuing professional development (CPD) of social workers, along with mechanisms to encourage a shift in culture which raises expectations of an entitlement to on-going learning and development' (Social Work Task Force, 2009a, 40). The Reform Board has reinforced this recommendation by commenting that the purpose of CPD is to 'contribute to high quality support for children, adults and families; it is also shown to reduce burn-out and improve retention' (Social Work Reform Board, 2010, para 1.1).

The establishment of the Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) schemes (Children's Workforce Development Council, 2011; Skills for Care, Undated) were aimed at establishing a more consistent baseline of experiences, abilities and expertise for NQSWs that would give greater assurance to employers around what NQSWs have achieved (Children's Workforce Development Council, 2009) and create a structured process of continuing professional development, including induction (Skills for Care, Undated). Lessons from these schemes are being used to inform the models for the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) (Social Work Reform Board, 2010).

Evidence from *Into the Workforce* suggested that two-thirds of social work graduate respondents had received some kind of induction. Only just over half of these respondents rated their induction as 'excellent, very good' or 'good', and lack of induction was associated with lower job satisfaction and lower scores on most of the job-related scales, and in particular with having a supportive manager or colleagues. Line managers also endorsed the policy of NQSW transition schemes, acknowledging that newly qualified social workers needed additional support during their first year of practice. However, they noted that they should be able to use their discretion in deciding when new workers were ready to undertake certain activities, and also pointed out that other skills took longer than a year to acquire. HEI respondents saw the ASYE as an opportunity for higher education and employers to work together to share responsibility for graduates' readiness for practice and subsequent development over the year.

In addition to induction, almost all the graduates responding to the online surveys had undertaken other training. This training was generally provided in-house and

almost 90% of respondents rated it as 'excellent, very good', or 'good'. The main problem they identified was access to protected development time. This is similar to the research on NQSWs in Children's Services (Carpenter et al., 2010) where many respondents reported that their workload had not been reduced in order to enable them to follow the programme.

However, there appeared to be a dissonance between respondents' overall satisfaction with access to training provided by their employer and the number of areas in which they wished they knew more, such as dealing with hostility and aggression or mental health. Given that most respondents reported that they discussed their training needs in supervision, it is not clear why respondents were generally satisfied with access to training, and to a lesser extent induction, but still felt that there were so many areas in which they were expected to know more than they did – unless the training provided was not well-matched to their specific needs.

A surprising finding was the low number of respondents choosing the option 'reading up or research on your own' as a way of finding out more about topics that they felt under pressure to know more about in their work. This might be seen as surprising among a group of recent graduates, and suggests that the message from the Reform Board that all social workers have a responsibility for their own CPD will need to be discussed more widely within the profession and during professional qualifying programmes.

An issue which has only emerged since data collection for this study was completed is the question of whether access to CPD is maintained or becomes more difficult in the current economic climate. Much of the success of the proposed PCF depends upon continuing access to opportunities to maintain and develop skills. It is likely that employers and practitioners will need to engage in discussions about which training should be prioritised and why.

Views on qualifying education

The Task Force concluded that 'there is too much variation in the…quality and consistency of the [social work qualifying] courses themselves' (Social Work Reform Board, 2010, para 1.31) so it was important to obtain information on respondents' views of their own experiences.

Four-fifths of respondents reported they had 'very much' or 'quite' enjoyed their qualifying programme. This is slightly lower than the responses they made when they were first year students. The areas in which they thought they had been helped most were in their ability to be a 'reflective practitioner'; in being 'analytical, able to analyse a case critically'; and 'empowering, a creator of opportunities to for

service users to give them more control over their lives'. These opinions broadly accord with the outcomes of social work education desired by social work educators, but Directors were less convinced of newly qualified social workers' analytical abilities. The areas in which graduates had felt helped least was in being 'adaptable, responsive to changing work demands' and in being 'good at working with other professionals from different disciplines and/or different agencies'. This last point fits in with the importance that service users and carers placed on interprofessional working. Both graduates and Directors were reasonably satisfied with what they had been taught about legislation, although line managers emphasised the need for qualifying programmes to update teaching about key policy developments in Adult and Children's services. A key tension between employers and educators – and one that has been identified elsewhere (Healy & Meagher, 2007; Manthorpe *et al.*, 2011 advance access) – was the extent to which qualifying social work education should equip graduates with the skills needed to do a particular job and the extent to which it should teach them underpinning skills which are transferable into many different aspects of social work practice. The impact of new policies such as personalisation (Department of Health/ADASS/Skills for Care/BASW/Social Care Association, 2010) or the Big Society (Cabinet Office, Undated) highlight key areas in which social workers may begin to undertake roles that are different from those they perform currently. Equally, polices aimed at reducing bureaucracy and increasing professional autonomy (Department of Health, 2010a) may demand different skills in terms of decision making and autonomy. These changes highlight the tensions for qualifying education in adapting to policy or legislative changes while maintaining social work values.

One of the standards for employers proposed by the Social Work Reform Board is that employers should 'provide good quality practice placements, other types of practice learning, and effective workplace assessment to help ensure that the right numbers of new social workers of the right calibre are trained' (Social Work Reform Board, 2010, 25). Social work educators participating in the discussion groups expressed concern in HEIs that this was not always happening in some agencies, not just because of the quality of some practice educators but because the nature of current practice could limit the development of traditional and core skills of creating relationships with service users. While line managers emphasised the importance of good placement experiences in determining readiness to practice and the better quality of newly qualified social workers who had previously undertaken a practice placement in the organisation, comparatively few respondents had been recruited this way. This highlights the need for further work identifying how organisations are using the provision of practice placements as a way of recruiting their workforce.

Conclusion

The results from *Into the Workforce* suggest that the investment in social work qualifying education has achieved some successes in terms of producing graduates who are motivated and committed to social work. Consistent with the wider employment literature, they emphasise the importance of job satisfaction and the organisation of the workplace in terms of retention and how they can be adjusted to improve job satisfaction and performance. Comparisons of the views across employers, line managers, social work educators, newly-qualified social workers, and service users and carers highlight the existence of differing perspectives about the aims and purpose of qualifying education and the need to try and achieve greater consensus between them, while recognising that this may not always be possible. In particular, the changing nature of social work itself, the emergence of new policy imperatives, and new forms of service, will always create a tension between what was needed in the past, what is needed now, and what will be needed in the future. Equally, evidence on the changes in graduates' perceptions of their performance over time emphasises the importance of debates aimed at achieving greater clarity about the differing levels of skills and knowledge that can be expected of social workers at successive stages of their career. At the same time, while highlighting the contested nature of concepts such as 'readiness to practise' and the interconnectedness between the outcomes of social work education and the impact of the work environment, the study does identify some areas in which the quality of qualifying education might be improved. In particular, graduates' emphasis on helping them improve their risk assessments, dealing with hostility, and managing their workload highlight the need to prepare graduates to deal with uncertainty and complexity (Fook et al., 2000) as this may prepare them better for the environments in which they will work. In this sense, the themes of this study are enduring themes, not those for which there is a set answer. In the context of new work aimed at building a model of social worker supply and demand, *Into the Workforce* points up the need to go beyond information on the number of social workers qualifying each year and their demographic characteristics, because the study also suggests the need to look at the less quantifiable factors, such as the impact of motivations and values on retention in the long term. Without this, it will be impossible to predict whether those who go *Into the Workforce* remain there or whether their experiences ultimately mean that they will seek employment elsewhere.

Study implications

The findings from *Into the Workforce* have implications for policymakers, employers and practitioners, social work educators and researchers. We draw together a set of implications and recommendations for different stakeholders; starting with policymakers.

Implications for policymakers

- The information on the service user groups with whom graduates were working and the number of graduates still looking for a social work job feeds in to current work looking at models of supply and demand in social work. There has been a considerable expansion of the numbers of places on social work qualifying programmes and it is clear that a high proportion of new graduates then go on to work in child protection. We recommend that further research is commissioned to identify whether this reflects an increased demand for child protection services or whether the rates of exit from child protection services are such that this is where the vacancies are. More research is also needed to explore whether the numbers of newly qualified social workers still seeking employment some months after graduating reflects an over-supply in the local labour market or if there are other reasons why they have been unable to find a job.

- The evidence from this study on the gradual process of skills acquisition strongly supports the development of an overarching professional standards framework which differentiates between the expectations of what should be required of social workers at each stage of their career, as recommended by the Social Work Reform Board (2010).

- Information on the frequency and content of supervision obtained in this study suggests that respondents were receiving comparatively small amounts of supervision – most frequently monthly and mostly provided by their line manager. Given the importance placed on supervision in the Munro Review (Munro, 2010a, 2011) and in the Proposed Standards for Employers and Supervision Framework (Social Work Task Force, 2009a; Social Work Reform Board, 2010), we recommend that continued attention is paid to monitoring how employers provide supervision and to developing resources that could assist them in this task.

- The investment from central government in providing funding for newly qualified social worker schemes appears to have resulted in a more consistent induction process for graduates making the transition *Into the Workforce* and was widely supported by line managers and Directors. While almost all respondents reported receiving some induction, coverage of the all the topics mentioned in the relevant Common Induction Standards prepared by Skills for Care and the Children's Workforce Development Council was variable. We recommend that Skills for Care and the Children's Workforce Development Council continue to have discussions with employers about the Common Induction Standards about ensuring that the Standards remain relevant and up to date.

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- While most respondents reported they were pleased with access to post-qualifying training, there appeared to be a gap between their overall satisfaction levels and the number of areas in which respondents wanted to know more. Given that many more respondents reported access to 'in-house' training than training under the current Post Qualifying Framework (General Social Care Council, 2009), we support the proposed hybrid model of continuing professional development recommended by the Social Work Reform Board (2010) which recognises accredited and unaccredited training as a way of identifying training needs. If, as proposed, the College of Social Work takes the leading role in developing post-qualifying training, we suggest that an important part of this work will be to compare the gaps in knowledge reported by employers and newly-qualified social workers, in order to clarify individual and employer responsibilities for continuing professional development and to achieve greater consensus about the content of continuing development programmes. In the context of the current financial climate, we recognise that agreement will need to be reached about the priority areas in which newly-qualified social workers will receive continuing professional development.

- While the Social Work Reform Board (2010) calls for the development of close and effective partnerships between employers and higher education institutions as a way of ensuring better workforce planning and delivering high quality qualifying and post-qualifying training programmes, it is important that such partnerships are not too narrow in their scope and are able to adapt to changing government priorities aimed at creating a greater role for voluntary and private organisations and new forms of service provision.

Implications for employers

- This study provides substantial information that employers could use as part of their preparations for meeting the proposed Standards for Employers and Supervision Framework (Social Work Reform Board, 2010). In particular, we recommend that employers investigate the possibility of developing more tailored approaches to the frequency and amount of supervision that newly-qualified social workers receive and consider the effectiveness of providing more diverse and innovative approaches to enabling staff to develop their skills, such as peer and group supervision, external supervision, the use of action-learning sets (for example, Munro, 2011), and the potential for separating managerial from professional supervision (Beddoe, 2010).

- Evidence on workloads in this study provides strong support for the proposals in the Employers Standards (Social Work Reform Board, 2010) for better workload management to prevent work overload. At the same time, the finding that job engagement was a more important predictor than workload and remuneration in determining job satisfaction, is an important message. It suggests that external constraints such as demand for social work services or limitations on pay awards can be counteracted by creating a workplace in which employees feel involved and which reflects their values. We recommend that employers undertake workplace audits and reviews to identify how well staff and people using services are helped to feel valued and involved.

- Having a supportive line manager was a key reason for respondents looking for another job. We recommend that employers consider the training and development needs of their line managers, and endorse the work going on through Skills for Care and the Children's Workforce Development Council trialling the development of a framework for training for social work front line managers.

- The employment of newly-qualified graduates in fields such as family support and counselling illustrates the government's vision (Department of Health, 2010b) of a modern system of social care built on seven principles, including prevention, partnerships, and plurality. As social work employers become more diverse, we caution against the assumption that social work qualifying education is simply about preparing graduates to work in statutory social work settings.

Implications for practitioners

- The finding that having a supportive team was an important factor in predicting which respondents would report wanting to stay in their current job, suggests that actions to create a more effective workplace by encouraging morale may have benefits in improving staff effectiveness and increasing retention.

Implications for social work educators

- The importance of feeling 'well prepared' by their qualifying education to newly qualified respondents' job satisfaction and the gaps reported in their knowledge base highlights the importance of achieving greater consistency in the quality of social work qualifying programmes (Social Work Task Force, 2009a).

- The process of overhauling the social work qualifying curriculum (Social Work Reform Board, 2010) gives an opportunity to social work educators of addressing the areas in which graduates working in whatever social work setting wanted more support, such as mental health and dealing with hostility and/or aggression. Published research has produced a consistent picture in terms of the areas in which newly qualified social workers would have valued more input on their qualifying programmes and it is important to consider how the classroom and practice-based curricula can address these issues.

- The existence of gaps in respondents' specialist knowledge alongside the fact that many were working in settings supporting more than one group of service users, highlights the need for further debates on what constitutes the 'core curriculum' and what opportunities should there be for students to specialise on an initial qualifying programme. It should be noted that while some of the 'gaps' reported by respondents in terms of the things they wished to know more about were specialist (for example, communicating with children), others such as family dynamics, managing budgets and record-keeping were not.

Implications for people using services and carers

- The importance that new graduates responding to the survey attached to empowering people using services and carers suggests that the involvement of people using services and carers in social work qualifying education has influenced the values espoused by newly-qualified social workers, although the study was not designed to see how these values operated in practice. As responsibility for the regulation of social work qualifying education passes to the Health and Care Professions Council, we recommend that arrangements are set in place to ensure that people using services and carers continue to be involved in the delivery of social work qualifying programmes and their regulation.

- The people using services and carers involved with this study would have welcomed a greater ability on the part of newly qualified social workers in being able to engage with other professionals. They also highlighted the need for good communication skills in terms of establishing relationships between workers and people using services. We suggest that social work educators, students, people using services and employers consider how to achieve greater consistency in the acquisition of these skills on qualifying programmes.

Implications for researchers

- Being able to undertake work which was consistent with 'social work values' was identified as a key factor influencing job satisfaction. We suggest that future research should explore relationships between these factors more fully.

- Having a 'worthwhile job' was an important motivation for participants. In view of the sizeable literature focusing on stress and job satisfaction in social work, we suggest that further work exploring the nature of what made social work worthwhile and fulfilling would help explain some of the reasons behind the continuing high vacancies for social workers but also provide more information on the larger group of workers who remain in the profession.

- Although there has been considerable investment in finding out the experiences of newly-qualified social workers (CWDC Research Team, 2009; Carpenter *et al.*, 2010; Sharpe Research, 2010), the design of these studies does not enable researchers to find out more about career progression and retention in the profession and explore how these relate to early experiences in employment. There is a need for future longitudinal research that is able to explore these issues because of the continuing sparsity of evidence on the extent of exit from the profession and information on whether such exits prove to be permanent.

- While longitudinal research is better placed to offer better answers to questions about the transition *into the workforce*, there are clear challenges in creating suitable samples and minimising attrition. There is potential for exploring ways in which other data sources, such as the National Student Survey (2011) and the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education Survey (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2011) could be used to develop ways of following social work students into employment.

- The use of the Social Care Register to explore patterns of retention in social work is an unexplored resource. The transfer of the register to the Health and the development of a new framework for continuing professional development provide opportunities for discussing with registrants the opportunities for them to use participation in research as a way of developing their research-mindedness.

APPENDIX A

Responses to 'portmanteau' questions covering a range of different topics discussed separately in this report

Table 44: Graduates' beliefs about current job

2008/I Base: 207 2008/II Base: 116 2009 Base: 110			True	Not True	Don't know
The values of the agency/service are clear to everyone	2008/I	%	71	18	10
	2008/II	%	71	22	7
	2009	%	75	19	6
Staff are encouraged to take part in learning and development activities	2008/I	%	87	9	4
	2008/II	%	90	9	1
	2009	%	91	4	5
Service users' views and perspectives are taken seriously	2008/I	%	78	9	13
	2008/II	%	78	9	12
	2009	%	74	16	10
There are a lot of unfilled staff vacancies	2008/I	%	38	48	13
	2008/II	%	39	54	5
	2009	%	40	49	10
There is/has been recently a lot of organisational re-structuring	2008/I	%	71	19	10
	2008/II	%	77	21	3
	2009	%	83	9	8
The IT system generally works well	2008/I	%	51	43	5
	2008/II	%	61	36	2
	2009	%	51	45	4
Good day-to-day working relationships exist with professionals form other agencies	2008/I	%	82	11	6
	2008/II	%	84	8	5
	2009	%	85	8	5
The working environment is very pressured	2008/I	%	75	21	3
	2008/II	%	85	13	1
	2009	%	76	19	5
Your line manager is a qualified social worker	2008/I	%	86	12	1
	2008/II	%	84	14	2
	2009	%	92	8	-

Table 45: Graduates' satisfaction with aspects of current job

2008/I   Base: 207
2008/II   Base: 116
2009   Base: 110

			Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	DK/NS
Accessibility of your line manager when necessary	2008/I	%	43	39	6	7	3	2
	2008/II	%	47	40	5	8	1	-
	2009	%	51	36	8	4	1	-
Professional support and guidance from line manager	2008/I	%	41	38	4	10	5	2
	2008/II	%	36	42	8	10	3	1
	2009	%	43	43	5	7	3	-
Professional support and guidance from colleagues	2008/I	%	59	26	8	3	1	2
	2008/II	%	50	37	9	2	2	1
	2009	%	59	30	5	5	-	1
Amount of contact time with service users or carers	2008/I	%	22	28	13	24	11	2
	2008/II	%	15	31	11	31	12	-
	2009	%	16	35	13	27	9	-
Widening your knowledge of areas of social work practice	2008/	%	27	39	18	11	3	2
	2008/II	%	16	40	24	20	1	-
	2009	%	25	46	15	13	1	-
Coping with your workload	2008/I	%	17	37	15	20	9	1
	2008/II	%	12	36	18	22	11	-
	2009	%	19	35	20	20	5	-
Teamworking	2008/I	%	38	41	10	7	4	1
	2008/II	%	30	51	10	6	3	-
	2009	%	46	42	5	6	-	1
Opportunity to put your own social work values into practice	2008/I	%	31	41	12	12	3	1
	2008/II	%	23	45	20	9	3	-
	2009	%	34	39	11	13	2	2
Ability to transmit your social work values to workers from other professions	2008/I	%	22	41	19	15	1	1
	2008/II	%	13	44	28	13	2	1
	2009	%	25	36	17	20	-	1
Friendliness of other staff in the workplace	2008/I	%	59	33	3	1	1	2
	2008/II	%	54	42	3	1	-	-
	2009	%	60	37	2	1	-	-
Your conditions of employment (pay, pension, annual leave, etc.)	2008/I	%	27	40	18	10	3	2
	2008/II	%	18	47	8	22	5	-
	2009	%	26	41	10	15	6	1
Your prospects for advancement and promotion	2008/I	%	19	39	28	8	3	2
	2008/II	%	11	42	28	14	5	-
	2009	%	24	38	27	8	2	-
Being able to fulfil your PRTL commitments for GSCC	2008/I	%	33	40	17	5	2	3
	2008/II	%	36	40	16	6	3	-
	2009	%	33	42	17	7	-	1
Working in partnership with service users to take their wishes into account	2008/I	%	29	45	14	8	2	1
	2008/II	%	25	46	13	13	2	2
	2009	%	33	41	12	14	-	1

Table 46: Agree/disagree statements – graduates

2008/I Base: 207 2008/II Base: 116 2009 Base: 110			Agree strongly	Agree slightly	Neither	Disagree slightly	Disagree strongly
Doing the degree programme strengthened my motivation to go into social work as career	2008/I	%	34	29	15	6	4
	2009	%	32	33	23	8	-
The academic work on the degree programme was more difficult than I expected	2008/I	%	15	24	21	19	10
	2009	%	25	23	32	13	3
Life experience is essential for successful social workers	2008/I	%	44	32	7	3	2
	2009	%	48	31	8	5	3
The right personal qualities and values are more important for successful social workers than academic ability	2008/I	%	37	29	15	7	1
	2009	%	40	38	11	6	-
The new degree will mean higher standards of social work practice	2008/I	%	17	37	20	13	2
	2009	%	23	47	22	3	-
Permanent jobs for newly qualified social workers are hard to get nowadays	2008/I	%	8	19	30	18	14
	2008/II	%	21	16	20	32	11
	2009	%	18	19	29	19	10
I feel confident of taking proper account of cultural differences when working with service users	2008/I	%	29	37	11	11	*
	2008/II	%	22	49	12	14	1
	2009	%	30	45	11	8	1
I feel a strong sense of identity with social work as a profession	2008/I	%	30	37	14	6	2
	2008/II	%	34	34	17	13	3
	2009	%	40	31	19	4	1
I am able to achieve a good work/life balance in my present job	2008/I	%	20	33	12	15	9
	2008/II	%	21	24	10	28	16
	2009	%	25	25	9	25	9
My employer takes my professional development seriously	2008/I	%	30	31	17	6	5
	2008/II	%	27	34	19	16	5
	2009	%	34	32	18	7	4
I find it difficult coping with the stress of my present job	2008/I	%	13	22	22	21	11
	2008/II	%	11	34	25	16	12
	2009	%	12	23	32	24	5
Not much of the theory I learned during my degree programme is useful in my present job	2008/I	%	10	26	14	26	14
	2009	%	5	27	23	25	15
My present job role prevents me from properly applying the theory I learned during my degree programme	2008/II	%	9	30	34	17	9
I am making a real difference to the wellbeing of service users	2008/I	%	19	47	16	6	*
	2008/II	%	25	59	9	7	1
	2009	%	27	45	18	3	2

Findings from Directors

Table 47: Directors' ratings of newly-qualified social workers' skills and abilities

Q: Thinking generally about the newly-qualified Social Workers you have recruited over the past three years, how would you rate them in terms of the following skills and abilities?	Years	ADULTS Weighted base 2006=100 Weighted base 2009=100				CHILDREN Weighted base 2006=100 Weighted base 2009=100			
		Excellent	Adequate	Disappointing	Not stated	Excellent	Adequate	Disappointing	Not stated
Effective engagement with service users and carers	2006	26	65	4	4	8	79	8	4
	2009	27	67	-	7	19	69	12	-
High standards of literacy in report-writing	2006	-	57	39	4	8	42	42	8
	2009	7	63	23	7	4	35	58	4
Analytical abilities	2006	-	52	39	9	4	25	67	4
	2009	13	60	20	7	4	31	65	-
Teamworking	2006	13	70	4	13	29	67	-	7
	2009	37	57	-	7	38	58	4	-
Ability to prioritise their workload	2006	-	65	17	17	-	87	8	4
	2009	17	70	7	7	4	69	27	-
Inter-professional working (with colleagues in Health, Education, etc)	2006	17	57	13	13	13	79	4	4
	2009	25	70	-	7	23	54	23	-
IT	2006	30	39	13	17	42	50	4	4
	2009	37	50	7	7	42	50	8	-
Groupworking with service users, carers, community members	2006	4	61	17	17	4	58	29	8
	2009	7	60	23	10	8	58	31	4
Planning for specific outcomes for service users as a result of Social Work intervention/s	2006	9	39	39	13	8	54	33	4
	2009	17	47	30	7	12	38	50	4
Facilitating independence for service users, giving them control over their lives	2006	9	43	35	13	13	79	4	4
	2009	10	73	10	7	8	69	23	-
Working with diverse communities	2006	17	52	17	13	17	75	4	4
	2009	13	77	3	7	23	58	15	4
Monitoring and evaluating the impact of interventions	2006	-	35	52	13	4	29	63	4
	2009	-	63	30	7	4	31	65	-

Table 48: Directors' ratings of newly-qualified social workers' knowledge

Q: Still thinking generally about the newly-qualified Social Workers you have recruited over the past three years, how would you rate them in terms of their knowledge?	Years	ADULTS Weighted base 2006=100 Weighted base 2009=100				CHILDREN Weighted base 2006=100 Weighted base 2009=100			
		Excellent	Adequate	Disappointing	Not stated	Excellent	Adequate	Disappointing	Not stated
Their legal powers as Social Workers	2006	13	61	13	13	4	54	38	4
	2009	20	50	27	3	4	65	31	-
Underpinning theories about social problems and disadvantage	2006	13	48	26	13	8	71	17	4
	2009	20	63	13	3	27	50	23	-
Local Authorities – functions, responsibilities and structures	2006	4	39	43	13	4	58	33	4
	2009	3	60	33	3	-	46	54	-
Availability of specific local services, resources, etc. for service users and carers	2006	-	65	22	13	-	75	21	4
	2009	10	57	30	3	4	62	35	-
Evidence-based practice	2006	-	70	17	13	8	46	42	4
	2009	7	67	23	3	4	58	38	-
The GSCC Codes of Practice	2006	13	57	13	17	8	83	4	4
	2009	13	77	7	3	12	73	15	-

Table 49: Directors' ratings of newly-qualified social workers' values and personal qualities

Q: And how would you rate the newly-qualified Social Workers you have recruited over the past three years in terms of their values and personal qualities?		ADULTS Weighted base 2006=100 Weighted base 2009=100				CHILDREN Weighted base 2006=100 Weighted base 2006=100			
		Excellent	Adequate	Disappointing	Not stated	Excellent	Adequate	Disappointing	Not stated
Enthusiasm for their work as a Social Worker	2006	65	22	-	13	63	33	-	4
	2009	53	40	-	7	69	27	4	-
Commitment to the best interests of service users and carers	2006	65	22	-	13	63	33	-	4
	2009	47	40	3	10	65	31	4	-
Cultural sensitivity	2006	35	39	13	13	33	63	-	4
	2009	17	77	-	7	31	62	8	-
Taking responsibility for (taking ownership of) their own decisions	2006	9	57	22	13	4	63	29	4
	2009	3	67	23	7	-	58	42	-
Initiative and resourcefulness in helping service users and carers resolve their problems	2006	9	52	26	13	8	63	25	4
	2009	13	53	27	7	8	73	19	-
Coping with stress and pressure	2006	9	61	17	13	-	63	29	8
	2009	10	53	27	10	12	58	31	-
Self-confidence	2006	9	65	13	13	4	67	21	8
	2009	13	70	10	7	8	58	35	-
Adaptability, flexibility	2006	13	70	4	13	13	71	8	8
	2009	17	63	13	7	19	73	8	-
Interest in continuous learning	2006	26	57	4	13	42	42	4	13
	2009	57	37	-	7	50	42	8	-
Recognising the importance of internal procedures and policies	2006	13	48	22	17	8	71	13	8
	2009	17	60	17	7	12	65	23	-

Table 50: Importance to Directors of newly-qualified social workers' characteristics (continued on next page)

| Q: From all these qualities, which THREE would you say are the most important for newly-qualified Social Workers to bring into the workplace? | 2006 | | 2009 | |
| | ADULTS | CHILDREN | ADULTS | CHILDREN |
	Weighted base=100	Weighted base=100	Weighted base=100	Weighted base=100
Effective engagement with service users and carers	48	38	47	58
High standards of literacy in report-writing	4	17	17	35
Analytical abilities	26	54	17	62
Teamworking	4	-	-	4
Ability to prioritise their workload	13	8	7	8
Inter-professional working (with colleagues in Health, Education, etc)	13	8	27	19
Planning for specific outcomes for service users as a result of Social Work intervention/s	26	33	20	23
Facilitating independence for service users, giving them control over their lives	30	4	33	4
Working with diverse communities	-	4	-	-
Monitoring and evaluating the impact of interventions	9	-	7	19
Knowledge of Social Workers' legal powers	9	13	13	-
Knowledge of underpinning theories about social problems and disadvantage	4	4	3	8
Knowledge of Local Authorities – functions, responsibilities, structures	-	-	3	-
Knowledge of specific local services, resources, etc. available to service users and carers	9	-	-	-
Knowledge of evidence-based practice	17	29	7	8
Knowledge of the GSCC Codes of Practice	-	-	-	4

Q: From all these qualities, which THREE would you say are the most important for newly-qualified Social Workers to bring into the workplace?	2006		2009	
	ADULTS	CHILDREN	ADULTS	CHILDREN
	Weighted base=100	Weighted base=100	Weighted base=100	Weighted base=100
CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE				
Enthusiasm for their work as a Social Worker	9	8	20	4
Commitment to the best interests of service users and carers	9	8	13	4
Cultural sensitivity	-	-	-	-
Taking responsibility for (taking ownership of) their own decisions	9	4	10	18
Initiative, resourcefulness in helping service users and carers resolve their problems	9	13	7	12
Coping with stress and pressure	9	4	7	8
Self-confidence	-	-	3	-
Adaptability, flexibility	4	8	7	-
Interest in continuous learning	-	4	3	-
Recognising the importance of internal procedures and policies	-	4	-	-

Table 51: Employer activities – according to Directors

Q: Here is a list of various activities, etc which different employers sometimes undertake. Can you please say which ones apply in your case?		ADULTS Weighted bases: 2006: 100; 2009: 100				CHILDREN Weighted bases: 2006: 100; 2009: 100			
		We don't want to do this at all	We do this well	We could do this more, or better	Not stated	We don't want to do this at all	We do this well	We could do this more, or better	Not stated
Induction programme for newly-qualified Social Workers	2006	-	52	35	13	-	38	54	8
	2009	3	37	50	10	-	46	50	4
Closer supervision for newly-qualified Social Workers than for more experienced recruits	2006	-	52	35	13	-	75	13	13
	2009	-	60	27	13	-	58	38	4
Limited initial caseload for newly-qualified Social Workers	2006	-	43	43	13	-	54	33	13
	2009	-	43	43	13	-	46	50	4
Sponsor unqualified staff to qualify as Social Workers by paying their salaries while they are studying	2006	9	43	30	17	-	67	25	8
	2009	17	57	17	10	15	42	38	4
Take Social Work students on placement	2006	-	74	13	13	-	83	8	8
	2009	-	77	13	10	-	77	15	8
Provide 'Shadowing' for Social Work students	2006	-	43	39	17	-	33	58	8
	2009	10	40	40	10	4	58	31	8
Qualified Social Workers on your staff giving (occasional) lectures/ seminars to students at University/College	2006	9	22	57	13	8	13	67	13
	2009	10	27	47	17	12	38	46	4
Participate in Careers' Fairs for students	2006	4	52	30	13	17	38	38	8
	2009	7	37	40	17	31	19	46	4
Recruit newly-qualified Social Workers from among those having undertaken a student placement in your organisation	2006	-	74	13	13	-	63	29	8
	2009	-	67	20	13	-	81	15	4
Encourage staff to gain a PQ award in Practice Education (inc. PTA)	2006	-	70	17	13	-	63	29	8
	2009	-	60	30	10	-	58	38	4
Provide further training opportunities to qualified Social Workers	2006	-	74	13	13	-	67	25	8
	2009	-	70	20	10	-	69	27	4

APPENDIX B

Graduate Questionnaire – first-years 2008/I and 2009

Q1 Are you currently in paid employment as a qualified, registered social worker?

1 Yes – as a qualified social worker
2 Yes – though technically unqualified while waiting for formal registration
3 No – in some other position/occupation, not social work
4 No – looking for a job as a social worker
5 No – looking for a job NOT in social work
6 No – taking a break
7 No – in full-time education
8 No – unable to work because of illness

IF NO
Q2 Since qualifying, have you ever been employed as a qualified social worker?

Yes
No

Q3 If you want to say more about your current employment situation, please give details below:

_____

_____

IF CURRENTLY WORKING AS A QUALIFIED SOCIAL WORKER:

Q4a What is your job title?
PLEASE WRITE IN: _____

Q4b Is this a statutory job/position – where you exercise legal powers as a social worker (eg. removing a child)?

Yes – statutory job/position
No – non-statutory job/position

Q5 When did you start working in this job?

MONTH: _____ YEAR: _____

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Q6   Please say where you are working now, by answering all parts of the following question:

Q6a)   What type of agency/organisation do you work for?

PLEASE SELECT <u>ONE</u> ONLY
- Local Authority adult department
- Local Authority children's department
- Children's Centre
- NHS Acute Trust
- Other NHS Trust
- Joint Social Services/NHS agency (eg. Housing, Mental Health)
- School, LEA
- Connexions
- Youth Offending Team
- CAFCASS
- Probation Service/NOMS
- Voluntary sector (non-profit making)
- Private sector
- Self-employed
- Other: PLEASE WRITE IN:
  _____

Q6b)   What type of setting do you work in?

PLEASE SELECT <u>ONE</u> ONLY

Day care
Residential care, group home
Community work
Fieldwork
Care in the community– ongoing support for people at home
Hospital or other healthcare
School or other education setting
Other: PLEASE WRITE IN _____

Q6c) Which of the following is the MAIN service user group you work with?

PLEASE SELECT PRINCIPAL GROUPS, EVEN THOUGH CATEGORIES OVERLAP – LIMIT TO THREE ANSWERS!

Children and families - including Child Protection work
Children and families - NOT including Child Protection work
Looked-after children
Community/neighbourhood
Older people
People with a physical disability, including sensory impairment
People with learning disabilities
Users of mental health services
Palliative care
Refugees, asylum seekers
Young people
Drugs/alcohol/substance mis-users
People experiencing domestic violence
Offenders
Other PLEASE WRITE IN

_____

Q6d) Do you work mainly with children, or mainly with adults?

Children
Adults
Both

Q7   Is this post full-time, or part-time?

Full-time
Part-time

Q8   Is this a permanent post?

Yes, permanent post
No, fixed term contract
No, temporary post

Q9   Are you employed directly, or through an employment agency?

Employed direct   GO TO Q11
Employed through an employment agency

<u>IF AGENCY</u>
Q10a Is it your own deliberate preference to work for an employment
      agency?

Yes
No
<u>IF YES</u>
Q10b Why have you decided to work for an employment agency at this
      present time?

More flexibility in terms of the hours you work
Can move around to try different areas of social work
Less paperwork
Less responsibility
Better pay
Other reason – PLEASE WRITE IN…

_____

<u>ASK ALL</u>
Q11   Is this your first job in social work since you graduated?

Yes   GO TO Q13
No, my second
No, third or more

<u>IF NO</u>
Q12   Why did you leave your previous social work job?

Contract ended
You moved away to a different area of the country
Career break
Workload too high
Not enough contact time with service users or carers
You wanted to work in a different field of social work practice
Difficulty coping with the stress of the job
Other – PLEASE WRITE IN

Q13   How did you find out about this current job?

Through practice placement – worked here on placement
Through employment agency
Internal job advertisement
External job advertisement – newspaper/Internet
Careers office at university/college
Job fair
Informally through friends or other personal contacts
Jobcentre
Other – PLEASE WRITE IN:

_____

Q14   Before you accepted this job, did you have any particular preference
       for the service user group you wanted to work with?

Strong preference
Mild preference
No preference

Q15   How long is/was your probation in this present job?

No formal probationary period
Three months
Six months
Twelve months
Other period: PLEASE WRITE IN

Q16   In your present job, do you/did you have a mentor assigned to you
       for informal support (someone more experienced or senior to you,
       NOT your line manager)?

No, not at all
Yes, during induction period only
Yes, during probation period only
Yes, longer than induction/probation period

Q17 Taking everything into consideration, how are you enjoying this job so far?

Enjoying it very much
Quite enjoying it
Not enjoying it much
Not enjoying it at all

Q18 Which of the following would you say was true of your present job, in your opinion? PLEASE CLICK ONE ANSWER ON EACH LINE BELOW

	TRUE	NOT TRUE	DON'T KNOW
The values of the agency/service are clear to everyone			
Staff are encouraged to take part in learning and development activities			
Service users' views and perspectives are taken seriously			
There are a lot of unfilled staff vacancies			
There is/has recently been a lot of organisational re-structuring			
The IT system generally works well			
Good day-to-day working relationships exist with professionals from other agencies			
The working environment is very pressured			
Your line manager is a qualified social worker			

Q19a Which of these areas of specialist knowledge would you say are relevant to your present job? PLEASE CLICK ON AS MANY AS APPLY

The Rights of the Child
Child Protection/safeguarding children
Adult Protection/safeguarding vulnerable adults
Drugs or alcohol dependency/misuse
Refugees and asylum seekers
Communicating with children and young people
Transitions in the lives of service users
Learning disabilities
Ageing and the impact of life changes
Child development milestones
Mental health conditions and their likely progress
Physically disabling health conditions and their likely progress
Preparing reports for legal proceedings in court/tribunal
Other – PLEASE WRITE IN

FOR EACH ONE SELECTED
Q19b When you started working in this job, did you find that too much prior knowledge was expected of you, about this aspect of practice?

Yes, you were expected to know more about this than you did
No, your level of knowledge was acceptable

SAME LIST

Q20   How satisfied are you with the following aspects of your current job?

VERY SATISFIED
FAIRLY SATISFIED
NEITHER SATISFIED NOR DISSATISFIED
FAIRLY DISSATISFIED
VERY DISSATISFIED

- Accessibility of your line manager when necessary
- Professional support and guidance from line manager
- Professional support and guidance from colleagues
- The amount of contact time with service users or carers
- Widening your knowledge of areas of Social Work practice
- Coping with your workload
- Teamworking
- Opportunity to put your own social work values into practice
- Ability to transmit your social work values to workers from other professions
- Friendliness of other staff in the workplace
- Your conditions of employment (pay, pension, annual leave, etc.)
- Your prospects for advancement and promotion
- Being able to fulfil your PRTL commitments for the GSCC
- Working in partnership with service users to take their wishes into account

SUPERVISION

Q21a How regularly do you have a formal supervision meeting with your line manager?

Once a week
Once every two weeks
Once a month
Less often

Q21b Has this frequency changed since you started this job? Do these formal supervision meetings with your line manager take place less often nowadays, or more often, or about the same?

More often now than when you started
Less often now than when you started
About the same as when you started
Don't know yet – not been in the job long enough

Q21c What do formal supervision meetings with your line manager usually cover?

- Review of each of your cases
- Advice and guidance on more difficult cases
- Closing cases
- Discussion of your training needs
- Personal support, encouragement and appreciation
- Suggestions for developing reflection and self-awareness
- Help in applying theoretical approaches or explanations to your practice
- Agency policies
- Your performance against targets

Q22 How often does your line manager actually observe your practice, for example sitting in on your meetings with service users, accompanying you on visits to service users, etc?

About once a week
About once every two weeks
About once a month
Less often
Never

Q23   Have you had a formal appraisal yet?

YES
NO

Q24a How well do you think your line manager rates your performance so
      far in this present job?

Very highly
Quite highly
Not very highly

Q24b And do you consider this a fair assessment of your performance so
      far in this present job?

Yes, a fair assessment
No, line manager under-rates you – your performance is better
No, line manager over-rates you – your performance is not so good

Q25   Has your line manager discussed post-qualifying (PQ) social work
      education with you at all?

YES
NO

INDUCTION

Q26   When you started your present job, were you given any kind of
      Induction?

YES – and Induction period currently still in progress
YES – Induction period now finished
NO   GO TO Q29

Q27 Which of the following were, or will definitely be, covered during your Induction?

Very well covered in Induction
Partially covered in Induction
Not really covered, because previously worked in this organisation, and covered then
Not covered at all in Induction

- The values of your organisation
- The goals and future plans of your organisation
- Confidentiality
- Implementing person-centred approaches
- Risk assessment procedures
- Record-keeping
- Other policies and procedures of your organisation
- Your own job role
- Relationships with other workers
- General health and safety
- General security
- Communication with service users
- Identifying abuse and neglect
- 'Whistle-blowing'
- Arrangements for your support and supervision
- Arrangements for your continuing professional development

Q28 Overall, how would you rate the quality of your Induction?

Excellent, very good
Good
Neither good nor poor
Poor
Very poor

IN-SERVICE TRAINING

Q29a Apart from Induction, have you received any other training provided by your employer?

YES – in-house training
YES – externally provided training
NO   GO TO Q30

IF YES:

Q29b Overall, how would you rate the quality and relevance of this training provided to you in your present job?

Excellent, very good
Good
Neither good nor poor
Poor
Very poor

ASK ALL
Q30   Do you have a Personal Development Plan (PDP)?

YES
NO   GO TO Q32

IF YES …
Q31a Did you draw up your PDP while still a student?

YES
NO

Q31b Has your line manager discussed your PDP with you?

YES
NO

Q31c Has your line manager helped you implement your PDP?

YES
NO

Q32   How long do you expect to remain with your current employer?

I expect to remain with my current employer for the next five years
I expect to remain with my current employer for the next two to four years
I expect to start looking for another social work job within the next two years
I am already looking for another social work job – in Britain
I am already looking for another social work job – abroad
I expect to leave social work within the next two years

ASK ALL

Q33   From what you learned during your degree programme, what would you say has helped you most, in your present job?
PLEASE WRITE IN:
_____
_____
_____

Q34   And what would you say is the most important omission, or gap between what you learned during your degree programme, and what you are expected to know now, for your present job?
PLEASE WRITE IN:
_____
_____
_____

Q35a Some new social work graduates have mentioned certain topics they say they wished they knew a lot more about. Could you say which of the following, if any, you personally wish you knew a lot more about?

- Family dynamics
- Attachment theory
- Anti-discriminatory practice
- Dealing with hostility, aggression or conflict
- Assessing risk
- Encouraging or empowering service users to take control of their lives and make choices
- Engaging effectively with people with special communication needs (eg. children and young people, stroke survivors, people with learning disabilities)
- Inter-professional working, inter-disciplinary collaboration
- Good record-keeping
- Acquiring advanced and specialist skills and knowledge qualifications
- Leadership and management
- The evidence base for your area of social work practice – 'what works'
- Services and resources available locally 'in your patch' that might benefit the service users or carers on your cases
- Managing budgets
- Supporting carers
- Using your 'self' as a resource in achieving outcomes with service users
- Groupwork
- Legal basis for social work interventions
- Other – PLEASE WRITE IN

Q35b Which THREE of these would you say is the most important for you to know more about? SAME LIST

THREE COLUMNS -   MOST IMPORTANT
SECOND MOST IMPORTANT
THIRD MOST IMPORTANT

Q35c How would you have expected to learn (more) about this aspect of your practice?

During your qualifying degree programme

At work – induction

At work – specific training

At work – learning from colleagues 'on the job'

PQ Consolidation Module

Reading up or research on your own

Don't know

ASK ALL

Q36   Which of the following personal skills or characteristics would you say are particularly important for you in your present job?

VERY IMPORTANT

FAIRLY IMPORTANT

NOT IMPORTANT

- A good listener

- A reflective practitioner

- Analytical, able to analyse a case critically

- Able to engage effectively with users and carers

- Empowering, a creator of opportunities for service users to give them more control over their lives

- Adaptable, responsive to changing work demands

- Good at working with other professionals from different disciplines and/or different agencies

- A literate writer of fluent English

Q37   To what extent do you feel your degree programme helped you to develop each of these characteristics? SAME LIST

Helped a lot

Helped a little

Did not help at all, though I needed help

Did not help at all because I was already very good at this

Q38   Overall, how well do you feel your degree programme prepared you for your present job?

Very well prepared
Fairly well prepared
Not very well prepared
Not at all well prepared

ASK ALL

Q39a. What attracts or motivates you towards Social Work as a career?

Q39b Which one is the MOST IMPORTANT factor?

	Important	MOST important
Good career prospects		
Well paid jobs		
Opportunities for flexible working patterns (part-time, career breaks, etc.)		
Personal ability to get on with people		
Working in a team		
Wish to tackle injustice and inequalities in society		
Helping individuals to improve the quality of their own lives		
Especially suitable career for someone with life experiences like mine		
High job satisfaction		
Variety of work day-to-day		
Interesting, stimulating work		
Being able to exercise individual responsibility for making my own decisions		
Encouragement from family or friends		

Q40   Which of these have you actually found to be fulfilled in your social work career so far?

Good career prospects
Well paid jobs
Opportunities for flexible working patterns
Personal ability to get on with people
Working in a team
Opportunities to tackle injustice and inequalities in society
Helping individuals to improve the quality of their own lives
Especially suitable career for someone with life experiences like mine
High job satisfaction
Variety of work day-to-day
Interesting, stimulating work
Being able to exercise individual responsibility for making my own decisions
Encouragement from family or friends

YOUR DEGREE PROGRAMME
Q41   Taking everything into consideration, how did you enjoy your degree programme?

Enjoyed it very much
Quite enjoyed it
Did not enjoy it much
Did not enjoy it at all

Q42   On your degree programme, did you have the opportunity to specialise in either children and families social work, or adult social work?

Yes, and chose children and families social work
Yes, and chose adult social work
No, but would have liked the opportunity to specialise in children and families social work
No, but would have liked the opportunity to specialise in adult social work
No, and happy not to have specialised

Q43   Here are some comments that newly qualified social workers have made, based on their experiences. For each one, could you say whether you agree or disagree with the statement?
AGREE STRONGLY
AGREE SLIGHTLY
NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
DISAGREE SLIGHTLY
DISAGREE STRONGLY

- Doing the degree programme strengthened my motivation to go into social work as a career
- The academic work on the degree programme was more difficult than I expected
- Life experience is essential for successful social workers
- The right personal qualities and values are more important for successful social workers than academic ability
- The new degree will mean higher standards of social work practice

- Permanent jobs for newly qualified social workers are hard to get nowadays
- I feel confident of taking proper account of cultural differences when working with service users
- I feel a strong sense of identity with social work as a profession
- I am able to achieve a good work/life balance in my present job
- My employer takes my professional development seriously
- I find it difficult coping with the stress of my present job
- Not much of the theory I learned during my degree programme is useful in my present job
- I am making a real difference to the wellbeing of service users

ABOUT YOURSELF
PLEASE REMEMBER THAT YOUR ANSWERS BELOW WILL <u>NOT</u> BE LINKED BACK TO YOUR PERSONAL IDENTITY. THIS SURVEY IS SIMPLY ATTEMPTING TO INVESTIGATE WHETHER DIFFERENT GROUPS OF NEWLY QUALIFIED SOCIAL WORK GRADUATES HAVE SIMILAR EXPERIENCES IN THE WORKPLACE, OR NOT.

Q44 Do you regard yourself as having any kind of special needs or disability?

YES
NO

Q45   Day to day, do you look after, or give any caring help and support to family members, or friends, neighbours or others, because they are:

PLEASE CLICK ON ALL THAT APPLY
Pre-school children
School age children
Adults or children with long-term physical or mental ill-health or disability
Older people
No – no day-to-day caring responsibilities

<u>CLASSIFICATION</u> (where not already known from previous survey/s)

- DoB
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Degree course followed: undergraduate, postgraduate
- Full-time/part-time
- HEI
- Sexuality

Are you gay, lesbian or bisexual:
> Yes
> No
> Prefer not to answer

Q   Did you receive any financial help from your employer while you
        were studying for your degree?

No   GO TO Q40

Yes – my tuition fees were paid, but no salary
Yes – book allowance/expenses, but no salary
Yes – I received my full salary while a student
Yes – I received part of my salary while a student

Q39b Did you have to sign an agreement to continue working for this
        employer for a period after you graduated?

No
Yes – 12 months
Yes – 2 years
Yes – 3 years or more

Q40   Before you started your degree programme, what experience of Social
        Work did you have?
PLEASE GIVE ONE ANSWER ON EACH LINE BELOW

	YES:		NO
	For a long time (more than 2 years)	For a short time (up to 2 years)	
Paid employment by social work employer: (eg. Social Work Assistant or equivalent, or Administrative)	1	2	3
Paid employment in related field: (eg, childcare, nursing, teaching, homeless people, etc)	1	2	3
Voluntary work (unpaid) with vulnerable people: (eg. youth/community work, people with physical or learning disabilities, offenders, etc)	1	2	3
Personal experience – self or close family: (eg. child/ren 'in care'/ 'looked after', physically disabled adult/ child, etc)	1	2	3

Graduate Questionnaire – second-years 2008/II

QA: Are you still in exactly the same job as you were when you completed our last online questionnaire (between November 2008 and August 2009)?

YES   –   GO TO Q17
NO
NOT SURE

<u>IF NO OR NOT SURE</u>

Q1   Are you currently in paid employment as a qualified, registered social worker?

1 Yes – as a qualified social worker
2 Yes – though technically unqualified while waiting for formal registration
3 No – in some other position/occupation, not social work
4 No – looking for a job as a social worker
5 No – looking for a job NOT in social work
6 No – taking a break
7 No – in full-time education
8 No – unable to work because of illness

<u>IF NO</u>
Q2   Since qualifying, have you ever been employed as a qualified social worker?
Yes
No

Q3   If you want to say more about your current employment situation, please give details below:
_____
_____

IF CURRENTLY WORKING AS A QUALIFIED SOCIAL WORKER:

Q4a   What is your job title?
PLEASE WRITE IN: _____

Q4b   Is this a statutory job/position – where you exercise legal powers as a social
      worker (eg. removing a child)?

Yes – statutory job/position
No – non-statutory job/position

Q5   When did you start working in this job?

MONTH: _____   YEAR: _____

Q6   Please say where you are working now, by answering all parts of the
      following question:

Q6a) What type of agency/organisation do you work for?
PLEASE SELECT ONE ONLY
   - Local Authority adult department
   - Local Authority children's department
   - Children's Centre
   - NHS Acute Trust
   - Other NHS Trust
   - Joint Social Services/NHS agency (eg. Housing, Mental Health)
   - School, LEA
   - Connexions
   - Youth Offending Team
   - CAFCASS
   - Probation Service/NOMS
   - Voluntary sector (non-profit making)
   - Private sector
   - Self-employed
   - Other: PLEASE WRITE IN:
     _____

Q6b) What type of setting do you work in?
PLEASE SELECT <u>ONE</u> ONLY

Day care
Residential care, group home
Community work
Fieldwork
Care in the community– ongoing support for people at home
Hospital or other healthcare
School or other education setting
Other: PLEASE WRITE IN _____

Q6c) Which of the following is the MAIN service user group you work with?
PLEASE SELECT PRINCIPAL GROUPS, EVEN THOUGH CATEGORIES
OVERLAP – LIMIT TO THREE ANSWERS!

Children and families - including Child Protection work
Children and families - NOT including Child Protection work
Looked-after children
Community/neighbourhood
Older people
People with a physical disability, including sensory impairment
People with learning disabilities
Users of mental health services
Palliative care
Refugees, asylum seekers
Young people
Drugs/alcohol/substance mis-users
People experiencing domestic violence
Offenders
Other PLEASE WRITE IN
_____

Q6d) Do you work mainly with children, or mainly with adults?

Children
Adults
Both

Q7   Is this post full-time, or part-time?

Full-time
Part-time

Q8   Is this a permanent post?
Yes, permanent post
No, fixed term contract
No, temporary post

Q9   Are you employed directly, or through an employment agency?

Employed direct   GO TO Q11
Employed through an employment agency

IF AGENCY
Q10a Is it your own deliberate preference to work for an employment agency?

Yes
No
IF YES
Q10b Why have you decided to work for an employment agency at this present
      time?

More flexibility in terms of the hours you work
Can move around to try different areas of social work
Less paperwork
Less responsibility
Better pay
Other reason – PLEASE WRITE IN…
_____

Q17   Taking everything into consideration, how are you enjoying this job so far?

Enjoying it very much
Quite enjoying it
Not enjoying it much
Not enjoying it at all

Q18   Which of the following would you say was true of your present job, in your opinion? PLEASE CLICK ONE ANSWER ON EACH LINE BELOW

	TRUE	NOT TRUE	DON'T KNOW
The values of the agency/service are clear to everyone			
Staff are encouraged to take part in learning and development activities			
Service users' views and perspectives are taken seriously			
There are a lot of unfilled staff vacancies			
There is/has recently been a lot of organisational re-structuring			
The IT system generally works well			
Good day-to-day working relationships exist with professionals from other agencies			
The working environment is very pressured			
Your line manager is a qualified social worker			
Your office operates 'hot-desking', where workers have no personal, individual work stations and desks are all shared			

Q19a Which of these areas of specialist knowledge would you say are relevant to your present job? PLEASE CLICK ON AS MANY AS APPLY

The Rights of the Child
Child Protection/safeguarding children
Adult Protection/safeguarding vulnerable adults
Drugs or alcohol dependency/misuse
Refugees and asylum seekers
Communicating with children and young people
Transitions in the lives of service users
Learning disabilities
Ageing and the impact of life changes
Child development milestones
Mental health conditions and their likely progress
Physically disabling health conditions and their likely progress
Preparing reports for legal proceedings in court/tribunal
Other – PLEASE WRITE IN

Q19b How much support have you received in your present job to enable you to develop your skills and knowledge to the level expected of you, for this aspect of your practice?

A GREAT DEAL OF HELP AND SUPPORT
A LITTLE HELP AND SUPPORT
NOT MUCH HELP AND SUPPORT
NO HELP AND SUPPORT AT ALL

SAME LIST

Q20 How satisfied are you with the following aspects of your current job?

VERY SATISFIED
FAIRLY SATISFIED
NEITHER SATISFIED NOR DISSATISFIED
FAIRLY DISSATISFIED
VERY DISSATISFIED

- Accessibility of your line manager when necessary
- Professional support and guidance from line manager
- Professional support and guidance from colleagues
- The amount of contact time with service users or carers
- Widening your knowledge of areas of Social Work practice
- Coping with your workload
- Teamworking
- Opportunity to put your own social work values into practice
- Ability to transmit your social work values to workers from other professions
- Friendliness of other staff in the workplace
- Your conditions of employment (pay, pension, annual leave, etc.)
- Your prospects for advancement and promotion
- Being able to fulfil your PRTL commitments for the GSCC
- Working in partnership with service users to take their wishes into account
- Access to PQ (post-qualifying education)

Q   Thinking about your caseload up to now in your current job, would you say that your level of experience in social work practice was taken into account in allocating these cases to you?

YES – to a great extent
YES – to a limited extent
NO

Q   Were you pleased about this, or not?

PLEASED
NOT PLEASED

SUPERVISION

Q21a These days, how regularly do you have a formal supervision meeting with your line manager?

Once a week
Once every two weeks
Once a month
Less often

Q21c What do formal supervision meetings with your line manager usually cover?

- Review of each of your cases
- Advice and guidance on more difficult cases
- Closing cases
- Discussion of your training needs
- Personal support, encouragement and appreciation
- Suggestions for developing reflection and self-awareness
- Help in applying theoretical approaches or explanations to your practice
- Agency policies
- Your performance against targets

Q   Which of these aspects of supervision would you like more of, or less?

MUCH MORE
A LITTLE MORE
JUST THE SAME
LESS

SAME LIST AS Q21c

Q   To what extent do you feel that your supervision helps you:
PLEASE GIVE ONE ANSWER ON EACH LINE BELOW

	A great deal	A little	Not much	Not at all
Prioritise your workload				
Cope with stress				
Maintain professional boundaries with service users				
Improve your professional practice				

Q22   How often does your supervisor or line manager actually observe your practice, for example sitting in on your meetings with service users, accompanying you on visits to service users, etc?

About once a week
About once every two weeks
About once a month
Less often
Never

Q23   Have you had a formal appraisal yet?

YES
NO

Q24a How well do you think your line manager rates your performance so far in this present job?

Very highly
Quite highly
Not very highly

Q24b And do you consider this a fair assessment of your performance so far in this present job?

Yes, a fair assessment
No, line manager under-rates you – your performance is better
No, line manager over-rates you – your performance is not so good

Q25a Are you yourself participating in either the CWDC or Skills for Care programme for NQSWs?

Yes – CWDC programme (children's social work)
Yes – Skills for Care programme (adult social work)
No   GO TO Q25d

IF YES:
Q25b When did you begin this programme?

2008
2009
2010

Q25c Does the work you are doing for the NQSW programme count towards PQ?   In other words, are you able to submit <u>for PQ</u> the evidence you have been gathering towards achieving the NQSW outcome statements?

        YES   GO TO Q26
        NO
Don't know

IF NO AT Q25a or c
Q25d Has your supervisor or line manager discussed post-qualifying (PQ) social work education with you at all?

YES
NO

IN-SERVICE TRAINING

Q29a Have you received any training provided by your employer?

	NQSW programme	<u>NOT</u> NQSW programme
YES – in-house training		
YES – externally provided training		
NO		

Q29b Overall, how would you rate the quality and relevance of this training
provided to you in your present job?

	NQSW programme	NOT NQSW programme
Excellent, very good		
Good		
Neither good nor poor		
Poor		
Very poor		

ASK ALL

Q30   Do you have a Personal Development Plan (PDP)?

YES
NO   GO TO Q32

Q31b Has your supervisor or line manager discussed your PDP with you?

YES
NO

Q31c Has your supervisor or line manager helped you implement your PDP?

YES
NO

Q32   How long do you expect to remain with your current employer?

I expect to remain with my current employer for the next five years
I expect to remain with my current employer for the next two to four years
I expect to start looking for another social work job within the next two years
I am already looking for another social work job – in Britain
I am already looking for another social work job – abroad
I expect to leave social work within the next two years

Q35a Some new social work graduates have mentioned certain topics they say they wished they knew a lot more about. Could you say which of the following, if any, you personally wish you knew a lot more about?

- Family dynamics
- Attachment theory
- Anti-discriminatory practice
- Dealing with hostility, aggression or conflict
- Assessing risk
- Encouraging or empowering service users to take control of their lives and make choices
- Engaging effectively with people with special communication needs (eg. children and young people, stroke survivors, people with learning disabilities)
- Inter-professional working, inter-disciplinary collaboration
- Good record-keeping
- Acquiring advanced and specialist skills and knowledge qualifications
- Leadership and management
- The evidence base for your area of social work practice – 'what works'
- Services and resources available locally 'in your patch' that might benefit the service users or carers on your cases
- Managing budgets
- Supporting carers
- Using your 'self' as a resource in achieving outcomes with service users
- Groupwork
- Legal basis for social work interventions
- Other – PLEASE WRITE IN

Q35b Which THREE of these would you say is the most important for you to know more about? SAME LIST

THREE COLUMNS - MOST IMPORTANT
SECOND MOST IMPORTANT
THIRD MOST IMPORTANT

<u>FOR EACH ONE (OF THREE) SELECTED AT Q35b:</u>

Q35c How would you have expected to learn (more) about this aspect of your practice?

During your qualifying degree programme

At work – induction

At work – specific training

At work – learning from colleagues 'on the job'

PQ Consolidation Module

Reading up or research on your own

Don't know

Q   Have you been allowed 'protected development time' in this job, ie. time off for study or learning, including specifically for undertaking your PQ Consolidation module and/or your NQSW programme?

- Yes, plenty of time off for study or learning
- Yes, but not enough time off for study or learning
- Yes, but not always able to spend the time allowed for development
- No

Q Have you had any experience of any of the following, in your current job?
PLEASE CLICK ON AS MANY AS APPLY

	During your <u>first</u> year of practice	<u>After</u> your first year of practice
A mentor assigned to you for informal support (someone more experienced or senior to you, NOT your line manager) REPLACES Q16		
Shadowing of a more experienced social work colleague – from your own team		
Shadowing of a more experienced social work colleague – from a different team		
Shadowing a colleague – from a different profession		
Co-working a case with more experienced social work colleague/s		
Peer supervision – when several social workers from your team share experiences with your professional supervisor		
Group session/s for newly-qualified social workers (including action learning sets or support groups) – within your <u>own team</u>		
Group session/s for newly-qualified social workers (including action learning sets or support groups) – involving NQSWs from <u>other teams/ agencies</u>		

Q   Was this just once, or on more than one occasion?

Q   How would you rate this in terms of the quality of the learning opportunity?
EXCELLENT, VERY GOOD
GOOD
NEITHER GOOD NOR POOR
POOR
VERY POOR

Q   How often have you met the following people in your current job?

Departmental Director
(Head of Adult or Children's services, or equivalent)

Learning and development staff

- Never
- Once or twice
- A few times, but not regularly
- Regularly – once a month or more often

Q   Since starting work, how much would you say each of the following has improved for you personally?

- the overall quality of your practice
- your choice of suitable interventions more likely to lead to better outcomes for the service users and carers on your caseload
- your own professional abilities
- your personal confidence
- the accuracy and analytical insights of your case assessments
- feedback from service users and carers on your practice

IMPROVED A GREAT DEAL
IMPROVED A LITTLE
NOT IMPROVED VERY MUCH
NOT IMPROVED AT ALL
NOT APPLICABLE – NO. 5 ONLY

Q　　How much appropriate help and support have you received in your current workplace for improving:

- the overall quality of your practice
- your choice of suitable interventions more likely to lead to better outcomes for the service users and carers on your caseload
- your own professional abilities
- your personal confidence
- the accuracy and analytical insights of your case assessments
- feedback from service users and carers on your practice

A GREAT DEAL OF HELP AND SUPPORT
A LITTLE HELP AND SUPPORT
NOT MUCH HELP AND SUPPORT
NO HELP AND SUPPORT AT ALL

Q　　On a scale of 1 to 10 (where 10 is totally capable as a social worker carrying out the tasks required for your current job, and 1 is not at all capable), where would you place yourself now?

10　　Totally capable
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
1　　Not at all capable

Q　　And where would you place yourself when you first started in this current job (on the same scale of 1 to 10)?

Q39a. What attracts or motivates you towards Social Work as a career?
Q39b Which one is the MOST IMPORTANT factor?

	Important	MOST important
Good career prospects		
Well paid jobs		
Opportunities for flexible working patterns (part-time, career breaks, etc.)		
Personal ability to get on with people		
Working in a team		
Wish to tackle injustice and inequalities in society		
Helping individuals to improve the quality of their own lives		
Especially suitable career for someone with life experiences like mine		
High job satisfaction		
Variety of work day-to-day		
Interesting, stimulating work		
Being able to exercise individual responsibility for making my own decisions		
Encouragement from family or friends		

ASK ALL

Q43 Here are some comments that newly qualified social workers have made, based on their experiences. For each one, could you say whether you agree or disagree with the statement?

AGREE STRONGLY
AGREE SLIGHTLY
NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
DISAGREE SLIGHTLY
DISAGREE STRONGLY

NB: THE FIRST FIVE STATEMENTS HAVE BEEN DELETED, AS MAINLY RELEVANT TO THE DEGREE

- Permanent jobs for newly qualified social workers are hard to get nowadays
- I feel confident of taking proper account of cultural differences when working with service users
- I feel a strong sense of identity with social work as a profession
- I am able to achieve a good work/life balance in my present job
- My employer takes my professional development seriously
- I find it difficult coping with the stress of my present job
- My present job role prevents me from properly applying the theory I learned during my degree programme
- I am making a real difference to the wellbeing of service users

ABOUT YOURSELF
PLEASE REMEMBER THAT YOUR ANSWERS BELOW WILL <u>NOT</u> BE
LINKED BACK TO YOUR PERSONAL IDENTITY. THIS SURVEY IS
SIMPLY ATTEMPTING TO INVESTIGATE WHETHER DIFFERENT
GROUPS OF NEWLY QUALIFIED SOCIAL WORK GRADUATES HAVE
SIMILAR EXPERIENCES IN THE WORKPLACE, OR NOT.

Q44 Do you regard yourself as having any kind of special needs or disability?

YES
NO

Q45   Day to day, do you look after, or give any caring help and support to family
members, or friends, neighbours or others, because they are:

PLEASE CLICK ON ALL THAT APPLY
Pre-school children
School age children
Adults or children with long-term physical or mental ill-health or disability
Older people
No – no day-to-day caring responsibilities

<u>CLASSIFICATION</u> (where not already known from previous survey/s)

- DoB
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Degree course followed: undergraduate, postgraduate
- Full-time/part-time
- HEI
- Sexuality

Are you gay, lesbian or bisexual:
            Yes
            No
            Prefer not to answer

Q   Did you receive any financial help from your employer while you were studying for your degree?

No   GO TO Q40

Yes – my tuition fees were paid, but no salary
Yes – book allowance/expenses, but no salary
Yes – I received my full salary while a student
Yes – I received part of my salary while a student

Q39b Did you have to sign an agreement to continue working for this employer for a period after you graduated?

No
Yes – 12 months
Yes – 2 years
Yes – 3 years or more

Q40   Before you started your degree programme, what experience of Social Work did you have?

PLEASE GIVE <u>ONE</u> ANSWER ON EACH LINE BELOW

	YES:		NO
	For a long time (more than 2 years)	For a short time (up to 2 years)	
<u>Paid employment by social work employer:</u> (eg. Social Work Assistant or equivalent, or Administrative)	1	2	3
<u>Paid employment in related field:</u> (eg, childcare, nursing, teaching, homeless people, etc)	1	2	3
<u>Voluntary work (unpaid) with vulnerable people:</u> (eg. youth/community work, people with physical or learning disabilities, offenders, etc)	1	2	3
<u>Personal experience – self or close family:</u> (eg. child/ren 'in care'/ 'looked after', physically disabled adult/ child, etc)	1	2	3

Directors of Adult and Children's Social Services Online Questionnaire

2006, repeated in 2009

Q1   Thinking first about recruiting <u>newly-qualified</u> Social Workers – ie. those who finished their training up to two years before coming to work for you. Have any newly-qualified Social Workers been recruited on to your staff within the last THREE YEARS?

> Yes
> No – SKIP to Q5

Q2   Thinking generally about the newly-qualified Social Workers you have recruited over the past three years, how would you rate them in terms of the following <u>skills and abilities</u>?

> Excellent
> Adequate
> Disappointing

- Effective engagement with service users and carers
- High standards of literacy in report-writing
- Analytical abilities
- Teamworking
- Ability to prioritise their workload
- Inter-professional working (with colleagues in Health, Education, etc)
- IT
- Groupworking with service users, carers, community members
- Planning for specific outcomes for service users as a result of Social Work intervention/s
- Facilitating independence for service users, giving them control over their lives
- Working with diverse communities
- Monitoring and evaluating the impact of interventions

Q3   Still thinking generally about the newly-qualified Social Workers you have recruited over the past three years, how would you rate them in terms of their <u>knowledge</u>?

> Excellent
> Adequate
> Disappointing

- Their legal powers as Social Workers
- Underpinning theories about social problems and disadvantage
- Local Authorities – functions, responsibilities and structures
- Availability of specific local services, resources, etc. for service users and carers
- Evidence-based practice
- The GSCC Codes of Practice

Q4   And how would you rate the newly-qualified Social Workers you have recruited over the past three years in terms of their <u>values</u> and personal qualities?

> Excellent
> Adequate
> Disappointing

- Enthusiasm for their work as a Social Worker
- Commitment to the best interests of service users and carers
- Cultural sensitivity
- Taking responsibility for (taking ownership of) their own decisions
- Initiative and resourcefulness in helping service users and carers resolve their problems
- Coping with stress and pressure
- Self-confidence
- Adaptability, flexibility
- Interest in continuous learning
- Recognising the importance of internal procedures and policies

Q5   From all these qualities, which THREE would you say are the most important for newly-qualified Social Workers to bring into the workplace?

- Effective engagement with service users and carers
- High standards of literacy in report-writing
- Analytical abilities
- Teamworking
- Ability to prioritise their workload
- Inter-professional working (with colleagues in Health, Education, etc)
- IT
- Groupworking with service users, carers, community members
- Planning for specific outcomes for service users as a result of Social Work intervention/s
- Facilitating independence for service users, giving them control over their lives
- Working with diverse communities
- Monitoring and evaluating the impact of interventions
- Knowledge of Social Workers' legal powers
- Knowledge of underpinning theories about social problems and disadvantage
- Knowledge of Local Authorities – functions, responsibilities and structures
- Knowledge of specific local services, resources, etc. available to service users and carers
- Knowledge of evidence-based practice
- Knowledge of the GSCC Codes of Practice
- Enthusiasm for their work as a Social Worker
- Commitment to the best interests of service users and carers
- Cultural sensitivity
- Taking responsibility for (taking ownership of) their own decisions
- Initiative and resourcefulness in helping service users and carers resolve their problems
- Coping with stress and pressure
- Self-confidence
- Adaptability, flexibility
- Interest in continuous learning
- Recognising the importance of internal procedures and policies

Q6   Overall, how satisfied have you been with the quality of the newly-qualified Social Workers you have recruited into your organisation over, say, the past three years?

> Very satisfied
> Fairly satisfied
> Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
> Fairly dissatisfied
> Very dissatisfied

Q7   Here are some statements made by Social Work employers. Would you say how strongly you agree or disagree with each one?

> Agree strongly   +5
> Agree slightly   +4
> Neither agree nor disagree   +3
> Disagree slightly   +2
> Disagree strongly   +1

- These days, better quality candidates apply for our unqualified staff vacancies, than for our qualified Social Worker vacancies
- The new Social Work degree will increase the status of the profession
- The new degree will mean higher standards of Social Work practice
- Respectfulness to service users and carers is improving among Social Workers
- There is a serious shortage of qualified Social Workers
- Life experience is essential for successful Social Workers
- The level of stress associated with jobs in Social Work seems to be decreasing
- There is not enough emphasis in Social Work practice these days on therapeutic methods of intervention
- Too many Social Workers are over-cautious in their assessment of the risk of harm to service users or others

Q8   Here is a list of various activities, etc which different employers sometimes undertake. Can you please say which ones apply in your case?

> We don't want to do this at all   +1
> We do this well   +2
> We could do this more, or better   +3

- Induction programme for newly-qualified Social Workers
- Closer supervision for newly-qualified Social Workers than for more experienced recruits
- Limited initial caseload for newly-qualified Social Workers
- Sponsor unqualified staff to qualify as Social Workers by paying their salaries while they are studying
- Take Social Work students on placement
- Provide 'Shadowing' for Social Work students
- Qualified Social Workers on your staff giving (occasional) lectures/ seminars to students at University/College
- Participate in Careers' Fairs for students
- Recruit newly-qualified Social Workers from among those having undertaken a student placement in your organisation
- Encourage staff to gain a PQ award in Practice Education (inc. PTA)
- Provide further training opportunities to qualified Social Workers

Q9   For pre-qualifying Social Work education, are you in favour of the present generic approach covering both Adults and Children, or would you prefer to see separate programmes for Adult Social Workers and Children's Social Workers?

> Strongly in favour of generic Social Work education
> Moderately in favour of generic Social Work education
> Moderately prefer separate programmes for Adults and Children
> Strongly prefer separate programmes for Adults and Children

Q10   If an annual Open Day were to be held locally among different employers of qualified Social Workers, and Social Work students – for educational purposes, not just recruitment – would your organisation be interested in participating?

[NB: This question is designed to gauge the level of support for Open Days, NOT to identify volunteers!]

    Definitely interested
    Probably interested
    Probably not interested
    Definitely not interested

Q11   Do you have any additional comments you would like to make about the qualities of Social Workers?

_____

_____

Q12   Please confirm whether you are the Director of Social Services (or equivalent title) to whom this questionnaire was addressed, or someone else?

    Director
    Someone else – PLEASE STATE JOB TITLE: _____

Into the Workforce

Interview guide for social work managers

Thank participant for taking part in the interview. Remind them that project is about social work degree graduates, so it is not simply about newly qualified workers in their first year of practice but more about recent social work graduates in their first or second job.

1. Can we start off by asking about your current role?

2. And how does this involve contact with recent graduates?

Prompts: Direct or indirect contact? Number of graduates they have worked with? What this involved (e.g. as supervisor, team manager, mentor)

3. What are your expectations of a recently qualified social worker in his or her first or second job? Have there been changes in your expectations about what recently qualified social workers should be able to do?

Prompt: Changes in role, either because of legislation (e.g. direct payments) or organisational changes (e.g. outsourcing services to voluntary organisations)

4. Moving on to your direct experiences, how do you think the graduates you have worked with are getting on generally?

Prompts: Any areas where you have been impressed; any areas where you would like to see improvements; assessment skills; recording and report writing skills; assessing risk; prioritising; communication skills; team working; legislation; social work theory; knowledge and experience of working in [informant's sector]; knowledge and experience of child protection and safeguarding; adult protection and safeguarding; mental health; alcohol and substance misuse; comparisons with DipSW qualified social workers?

5. How do you think the newly qualified social workers you have worked with feel they are getting on?

6. What systems do you have in place for supervising recently qualified social workers? If time spent supervising them- same as or different from other workers in the team/organisation; what is covered; who does it; links between supervision and training?

7. How long do you think it takes for recently qualified social workers to work at the level you'd expect of other qualified social workers in the team/organisation?

Prompt: DCSF NQSW pilot programmes based on a year. Is this about right, or should it be longer or shorter?

8. What systems do you have in place for inducting recently qualified social workers? Are they any different from your standard induction procedures? Any specific training that is part of the induction?

9. Are there any developments in your induction and in-service training that you'd like to share?

10. Where do you mostly recruit recent graduates from? Are there any particular qualifying programmes that they have come from? Any areas that you think particular programmes do well? Any areas that you think are missing?

11. And how is recruitment and retention going within your organisation in general? Does this impact on the roles that recently qualified social workers might be expected to do?

12. (Check that informant is a qualified social worker or has another professional background.) Looking back to when you were a newly qualified (social) worker, what were the expectations of you in your first or second job?

Prompt: What were your experiences of the support that you had then? Are there any lessons from your own experiences that you like to see put into practice today? How have they affected your own ideas and influenced your current role?

13. Fewer than half of the newly qualified social workers who took part in our recent survey said they were satisfied with 'the amount of contact time with service users or carers' they had in their current job and a third were dissatisfied. What, if anything, would you say can realistically be done about this?

14. As you know, the Social Work Taskforce has been set up to help improve the quality and status of social work and to boost recruitment and retention. If you were in charge of the Taskforce, where would you like to see it working to make a difference?

15. Anything else?

Into the Workforce

Interview guide for social work managers (round 2)

Thank participant for taking part in the interview. Remind them that project is about social work degree graduates, so it is not simply about newly qualified workers in their first year of practice but more about recent social work graduates in their first or second job.

1. And can we start off by asking about your current role?

2. And how does this involve contact with recent graduates?

Prompts: Direct or indirect contact? Number of graduates they have worked with? What this involved (e.g. as a supervisor, team manager, mentor)?

3. How is recruitment and retention going within your organisation? Does this impact on the roles that recently qualified social workers might be expected to do?

4. What are your expectations of a newly qualified social worker in his or her first or second job?

Prompt:
a. Practice skills (e.g. assessment or recording skills)

b. General abilities and knowledge (e.g. general intellectual capacity, literacy)

c. Other aspects (eg ability to work in a team)

5. Have there been changes in your expectations about what recently qualified social workers should be able to do? Are they higher or lower now compared with a year ago?

Prompt:
- Changes in role, either because of policy (e.g. personalisation) or organisational changes (e.g. threshold levels, outsourcing services to voluntary organisations).

- Increased workload (too much work with too few people)

6. Moving on to your direct experiences, how do *you* think the graduates you have worked with are getting on generally? Any areas where you have been impressed? Any areas where you would like to see improvements.

Prompts:
a. Practice skills (e.g. assessment or recording skills)

b. General abilities and knowledge (e.g. general intellectual capacity, literacy)

c. Other aspects (e.g. ability to work in a team)

7. Which skills and areas of knowledge really matter to you as a manager?

8. How do you think the newly qualified social workers you have worked with feel that they are getting on?

9. What systems do you have in place for supervising recently qualified social workers?

Prompts:
a. Amount of time spent supervising them – same or different from other workers in the team/organisation?

b. Supervision contracts

c. What is covered by supervision?

d. Who does it?

e. What formats are used (eg one to one, group, peer supervision)

f. Are there links between supervision and training?

10. Is there a written policy on supervision in the agency?

If yes:
Probes
a. What does this cover?

b. How (if at all) useful is this policy?

11. How long do you think it takes for recently qualified social workers to work at the level you would expect of other qualified social workers in your team/organisation?

12. Are there any areas in which you think particular programmes do well? Any areas that you think are missing?

13. Does your organisation have any input into any social work programmes?

14. (Check that informant is a qualified social worker or has another professional background.) Looking back to when you were a newly qualified (social) worker, what were the expectations of you in your first or second job?

Prompt:
a. What were your experiences of the support you had then?

b. Are there any lessons from your own experiences that you would like to see put into practice today?

c. How have they affected your own ideas and influenced your current role?

15. What systems does your organisation have in place for the development of your own supervision skills?

16. How does your organisation help you develop your role as a line manager in developing staff skills?

17. Overall, what is your impression of the quality of recently qualified social workers? Are they ready to begin developing fully as a social worker?

18. As you know, following the Social Work Taskforce recommendations, the Social Work Reform Board has been set up to help improve the quality and status of social work and to boost recruitment and retention. If you were in charge of the reform process, where would you like to see it working to make a difference?

Prompt: What do you think of the proposals for an assessed year in employment (possibly starting in five years' time)?

19. If more social workers are able to set up independently (e.g as cooperatives, mutuals, or in the private sector) do you think that this will foster better peer support for newly qualified social workers? If the third (voluntary) sector, mutuals or private sector takes over more social work tasks, will this improve the level of mentoring for newly qualified social workers?

20. Do you think that constraints on public expenditure have any impact on the levels of support your team or organisation offers to newly qualified social workers? Please specify.

21. In your opinion what (if any) factors will affect future recruitment of newly qualified social workers – Please explain

22. Anything else?

Thanks etc.

SR092
May 2010
HEI Programme Leaders - Discussion Guide

1.   Introductions and purpose   (15 mins)

What the research is about – investigating graduates' opinions about their own readiness to practice, and comparing their views with the perceptions of NQSW line managers to identify areas of agreement/disagreement. The perspective of HEIs is being sought to provide a rounded picture of preparedness.

Researcher credentials

Respondent job role/s currently (and previously)

2.   Reports of employer views on readiness to practise   (20 mins)

"Why do you think some employers are complaining that graduates are NOT ready to practise?"
EXPLORE EXPLANATIONS

CHECK –   Have employer opinions changed over time?
             Have expectations risen over time?

What would be your views on graduates' competence in these 3 areas (mentioned in SWTF Interim report)?
* Communication
* Analysis
* Writing skills

Is there room for improvement?
How could improvement be brought about?

"It has also been suggested that entry standards to SW programmes might be raised. What do you see as the implications?

Agree/disagree with raising entry standards?
Mechanisms (What would change?)
Effects on own institution

3.   Beliefs about current frontline practice   (10 mins)

What can you say about the work new graduates are likely to be given in their first job:
* Type/s of case
* Caseload (no. of cases)

Where do these impressions come from?
SPONTANEOUS, THEN PROBE: Own most recent practice experience
                            Knowledge of current 'thresholds'

Views on impact of current eligibility thresholds on case complexity

4.   Quality of SW programmes   (20 mins)

"There have been references in various sources to the varying quality of SW programmes. How would you define a <u>high quality</u> programme?"

WHETHER OR NOT MENTIONED, CHECK:
Assessment
Explicit relevance of theory to practice
Personal professional accountability
Practice placements: ensuring quality and availability, esp. in statutory sector

Are SW employers involved in your programme?
        YES – in what way/s; to what extent; how useful, etc
         PROBE: quality assurance, influence on curriculum, managing
                                                differences in opinion
        NO – would this be useful? How to bring about?

5.   Aims of SW programmes   (15 mins)

After everything we have been talking about, what would you say should social work programmes be aiming for in awarding the qualification?

PROMPT: How does this compare with what you are aiming for in your own programme (and what is this?)?

6.   Summary of response

Glossary

CPD   Continuing Professional Development
CWDC   Children's Workforce Development Council
DCFS   (former) Department for Children, Schools and Families
DCLG   Department for Communities and Local Government
DFE   Department for Education
DH   Department of Health
DipSW   Diploma in Social Work
EEA   European Economic Area
GSCC   General Social Care Council
GYO   Grow Your Own (Social Worker)
HPC   Health Professions Council
ITW   Into the Workforce
LA   Local authority
LSCBs   Local Safeguarding Children's Boards
NOS   National Occupational Standards
NQSW   Newly Qualified Social Worker
PCF   Professional Capabilities Framework
PQ   Post qualifying
QAA   Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
SWRB   Social Work Reform Board
SWTF   Social Work Task Force
VCS   Voluntary and community sector

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