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Evaluation of the New Social Work Degree Qualification in England

Volume 1: Findings

June 2008
**Document Purpose**  
For Information

**Gateway Reference**  
10174

**Title**  
Evaluation of the new social work degree qualification in England

**Author**  
Commissioned by DH - Workforce Directorate

**Publication Date**  
09 Jul 2008

**Target Audience**  
Local Authority CEs, Higher Education Institutes

**Circulation List**  
Directors of Adult SSs, Directors of Children's SSs, Voluntary Organisations/NDPBs

**Description**  
This report is an evaluation of a three-year research project, launched in 2004, evaluating the effects of the policy change in social work education from a 2 year Diploma to a 3 year honours degree as the professional qualification in social work.

**Cross Ref**  
None

**Superseded Docs**  
None

**Action Required**  
None

**Timing**  
N/A

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ISBN: 0-9546481-7-X

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Acknowledgements

We thank the Department of Health for funding this research. We are especially grateful to Anne Mercer and Dr Carol Lupton for their help and advice throughout the project. Considerable thanks and appreciation go to Marie McNay in her role of Department of Health Evaluation Coordinator and particularly for her contribution to the editing of the final report and commentary on the contextual and policy issues outlined within it.

We should also like to acknowledge the help of the project Advisory Group. This included the following people who brought their personal experiences of using services and/or caring to the evaluation: Christopher Burgess, Molly Burnham, Jeanne Carlin, Bill Davidson, Pat Finnegan, Adrian Fisher, Shally Gadhoke, Perlita Harris, Sarah King, Helena Madden, Nicola Maskrey, Denise Roney, and Richard Smith. Four other members have chosen to remain anonymous. Tom Eckersley also provided advice in the early stages of the project and it is with great regret that we should like to acknowledge the expertise of Vicki Raymond who sadly died in July 2007.

We also benefited from the advice of the project Reference Group: Cathy Aymer, Avril Butler, Vic Citarella, Anne Cullen, Helen Cosis Brown, Andrew Dalton, Mike Fisher, Ann Harrison, Carol Lupton, Nicola Maskrey, Anne Mercer, Marie McNay, Professor Jennie Popay, Helen Wenman and Sally Weeks. Others serving on the Reference Group for part of the evaluation were: Alison Berry, Owen Davies, Tom Eckersley, Daphne Obang, Vicki Raymond and Carol Holloway.

Janet Robinson of the Social Care Workforce Research Unit provided considerable administrative support throughout the project to the whole evaluation team. Professor Jan Fook advised on the methodology and analysis of the vignettes and Professor Peter Huxley of the Centre for Social Carework Research in Swansea, and formerly of the Social Care Workforce Research Unit, provided guidance on designing and undertaking the study. Transcriptions of interviews were undertaken by Sheila Cartwright, Christine Maxwell, Linda Pitt, Jackie Shelton, and Liz Moor. Colin Richards and colleagues at Digitab set up the online surveys and provided initial analyses of the data. Stephen Martineau, Victoria Bisala, and Carla Isaacs helped with data entry for the practice assessors’ questionnaires and Greg Price and Joan Rapaport helped with the HEI fact find. Tessa Dunning helped entering data for the practice assessors’ questionnaires and with the HEI Fact Find. Kathryn Dutton worked on the evaluation in its early stages.

The research team would also like to express its gratitude to Helen Wenman, John Barker, Carol Walker, and other staff at the General Social Care Council for their help in providing us with anonymised data. It is especially important to acknowledge the role of John Barker. He provided the data for this study, as he had earlier provided the sampling frames for the University of East London surveys and for Marsh and Triseliotis’s Readiness to Practise. This aptly demonstrates how any research study is not merely the work of the research team but relies upon the contribution of other people.

This evaluation has also been dependent upon the goodwill of students, staff and service user and carer representatives at all the universities and colleges, practice assessors and employers, who have been involved in the project. We must record our thanks to all those who have participated directly in the evaluation and those who have participated indirectly by arranging meetings or providing other help.
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<tr>
<td>CCETSW</td>
<td>Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRB</td>
<td>Criminal Records Bureau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCSF</td>
<td>Department for Children, Schools and Families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DH</td>
<td>Department of Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DipSW</td>
<td>Diploma in Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECDL</td>
<td>European Computer Driving Licence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPF</td>
<td>Daily Placement Fee</td>
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<tr>
<td>GSCC</td>
<td>General Social Care Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEI</td>
<td>Higher Education Institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HESA</td>
<td>Higher Education Statistics Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>JSWEC</td>
<td>Joint Social Work Education Conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LRN</td>
<td>Learning Resource Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NVQ</td>
<td>National Vocational Qualification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI</td>
<td>Performance Indicator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLTF</td>
<td>Practice Learning Taskforce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCIE</td>
<td>Social Care Institute for Excellence</td>
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<tr>
<td>SfC</td>
<td>Skills for Care</td>
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<td>SWAP</td>
<td>Social Work and Social Policy</td>
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<td>Topps</td>
<td>Training Organisation for Personal Social Services</td>
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<td>UCAS</td>
<td>Universities and Colleges Admissions Service</td>
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Executive Summary

1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings from the *Evaluation of the Social Work Degree Qualification in England* which was funded by the Department of Health between 2004-2007 to look at the impact of the new degree level professional qualification in social work. The change was widely welcomed by social work educators, employers, and service users and carers as a way of improving the status of social work and of increasing the numbers of people attracted to the profession. It was accompanied by substantial financial investment in student recruitment, practice placements, involvement of service users and carers, and other measures aimed at improving the quality of learning in higher education. The first new degree level social work qualifying programmes began in the 2003-2004 academic year.

2. POLICY CONTEXT

The introduction of the new degree for qualifying education reflects wider government policy objectives to modernise social care services and develop a skilled and motivated workforce. The previous professional qualification in social work, the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW), was a two-year qualification at sub-degree level, but it could be offered alongside undergraduate or postgraduate academic qualifications. Many educators had questioned the adequacy of the DipSW’s competences-based approach in preparing social workers for professional practice. There were other concerns about:

- the status and image of social work and the decline in the number of applications to study for the profession;
- the fact that although intakes were more ethnically diverse, men and people with disabilities were still under represented;
- different rates of progression among sub-groups of students and the reasons for this, despite good overall progression rates;
- whether these factors were affecting the extent to which new professionals represented the populations they served;
- specific areas which were seen as problematic in terms of the quality of teaching and the relevance of specific subject areas, although most students were satisfied with the DipSW overall.

3. OTHER POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

The development and implementation of the new social work degree was influenced by other policy initiatives, including:

- changes to the post-qualifying framework;
• the setting up of the social work register;
• new codes of practice for social care workers and their employers.

In addition, there were wider policy developments:

• The White Paper *Every Child Matters* (HM Government, 2003) set up separate Children’s Services in order to provide better integration and accountability in national and local services, a programme of workforce reform to attract people into the workforce and to retain them, and the development of a common core of training for those working solely with children and families.

• The White Paper, *Our Health, Our Care, Our Say* (HM Government, 2006) outlined a set of seven outcomes which emphasised preventative services and enabling people to take more control over their lives. It recognised that the workforce would need support in developing new skills and greater confidence in these approaches and highlighted the challenges of delivering support to people with complex and often long-term needs.

• The Department of Health and the Department for Education and Skills’ (as it was then) review of the social care workforce, *Options for Excellence* (2006) considered the challenges faced by the social care workforce, including the social work workforce, over the period leading up to 2020 and how it could be prepared to meet the anticipated changes. The report acknowledged the role of the new degree in social work as one of the foundations of excellence for the workforce arising from the Care Standards Act 2000.

• The publication of the *Children’s Plan* (Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, 2007) raised further issues for social work education and for employers in terms of the proposals to pilot a Newly Qualified Social Worker status so that social workers are better supported during their first year in employment and to develop fast track routes designed to attract mature graduates into children’s social work.

• *Putting People First* (HM Government, 2007) envisaged a situation in which people who use services take greater control over their lives, meaning that the role of social workers in Adult services may move away from assessment and more towards safeguarding, advocacy, and brokerage.

Taken together, these documents highlight two central issues for the future. Firstly, the entire workforce employed in Children’s and Adults Services is expected to work more closely with other professionals and is increasingly likely to be located in different settings, such as schools or primary care. Secondly, the primary purpose of the workforce is to help people using their services assume greater control of their lives. This has raised questions about the extent to which generic qualifying programmes produce social workers equally well prepared to work in Adults or in Children’s services (Blewett and Tunstill, 2007).
4. AIMS AND SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

The Department of Health intended that the reforms to social work education would produce a qualification that rigorously assessed graduates in respect of the following attributes:

- the practical application of skills, knowledge, research and analytical abilities to deliver services which create opportunities for users;
- the ability to reflect social work values in their practice;
- the ability to manage change and deliver required outcomes;
- the ability to communicate with users and carers of all ages and from all sections of the community;
- the practical application of social work theory;
- the ability to function effectively and confidently in multi-disciplinary and multi-agency teams.

(Department of Health, 2003a, p.1)

4.1 Existing published research on social work education

The introduction of the new degree represented the biggest reform to social work education since the introduction of the DipSW. However, a major challenge for the evaluation was the lack of United Kingdom (UK) baseline data which offered some measure of the performance of DipSW students entering the workforce. Of the limited number of studies that existed, the majority were descriptive accounts of a single aspect of programme delivery.

4.2 Aims of the evaluation

In 2003, the Department of Health published a tender for research examining the implementation and impact of the new degree in England. This outlined six areas on which the evaluation would provide more information, namely:

- baseline information;
- applications, recruitment and retention;
- the teaching/learning experience;
- the practice learning experience;
- innovations (in learning and teaching and in organisation of social work education); and
- entering the workforce.

Based on this framework, the evaluation sought to answer four main questions:

i) How has the move to degree level professional social work education and training been implemented?
ii) What are the main outcomes of the change from diploma to degree-level study?

iii) How far has the new degree met the expectations of those entering the profession and other stakeholders?

iv) Has the new social work degree increased the quality and quantity of qualified social workers entering the workforce?

5. DESIGN AND METHODS (Chapter 2 and Technical Appendix)

The study employed a mixed mode design, collecting qualitative and quantifiable data through a range of different methods and techniques. Population-level data on all students beginning social work programmes between 2003-2006 were obtained from the General Social Care Council (GSCC) and national data from an online survey of students collected over seven phases were combined with in-depth work in six case study sites.

6. KEY FINDINGS

The following is a synthesis of the detailed findings reported in the body of the report. They relate both to the specific DH requirements for the delivery of the degree, but also acknowledge the ways in which some of the contextual changes identified above have impacted on the process and outcomes of raising the qualifying level for social work to an undergraduate degree. The progression data apply to the cohort of students that started in 2003-2004.

6.1 Recruitment and retention (Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 11)

- Compared with a decade ago, when there were just 4114 DipSW enrolments, there has been an increase of 38 per cent in enrolments on the new degree - 5676 students in 2005-2006.

- Almost 70 per cent of students enrolling on the first year of the new degree in 2003-2004 graduated, with only 15 per cent withdrawing. These results are broadly in line with those obtained on the DipSW. As with the DipSW, however there is some evidence of differential progression between sub-groups.

- Compared with the DipSW, there is greater diversity of applicants, mainly in the greater proportions of Black African and younger students. The proportion of students from Black African backgrounds, for example, rose from five per cent (n = 231) in 2001-2002 (DipSW) to 11 per cent (n = 591) in 2005-2006.

- Only 1-2% per cent of students started the DipSW under the age of 20, but the proportion has risen steadily since to 14 per cent (n = 974) in 2005-2006. This was due to removing the age barrier to qualifying as a social worker (previously 22 years).
• Flexible approaches to achieving a social work qualification, including opportunities for postgraduate entry, employment-based and part time routes appear to have been maintained, as does the success of social work education in facilitating the academic progress of students from non-traditional academic routes.

• There has been a steady increase since 2003 in the number of applicants for social work degree programmes, including a rise to over 10,000 through UCAS in 2006. The ratio of applicants to acceptances through UCAS has risen from around four applicants for every three acceptances to five applicants for every three acceptances.

• Having a larger pool of potential students from which to select appears to have resulted in an increase in the educational qualifications and, to a lesser extent, the overall quality of applicants.

• Raising the qualifying level does not appear to have deterred applicants from non-traditional academic routes and there is some evidence that programmes are attracting a wider ‘pool’ of applicants.

• The gender balance of social work students remains heavily skewed towards women, with the proportion of men remaining unchanged. Students from Asian backgrounds also remain under represented.

• Male students are significantly more likely than females to report having any form of disability.

• Selection procedures are seen to be rigorous and designed to test students’ literacy, numeracy, motivations, and potential.

• Overall, students appear to be highly committed with a range of motivations for studying, including altruism, personal experience, and career prospects; they value the varied and interesting nature of social work. Black students are more likely than other ethnic groups to have job-related motivations.

• The new bursary is the most frequent form of financial support mentioned by students. There is some (provisional) indication that there has been an overall reduction in the number of students who are financially supported by an employer.

• The proportion of postgraduate students passing was significantly higher than undergraduates (81 and 66 per cent; n = 94 and 1380 respectively) and the proportion of deferring (6%) was significantly lower than among undergraduates (12%).

• A significantly larger proportion of ‘White’ students passed (69%) than from ‘Black’ (62 %) or ‘Other’ (57%) ethnic minority groups.

• A lower proportion of students self-identified as ‘Black’ withdrew (13 %), compared with those who described themselves as ‘White’ (15%) or ‘Other’ (18%). However, Back students had the highest referral rate.
Overall, the proportion of ‘White’ students who failed (2%) was significantly lower than that among students of other ethnicities (5%).

The proportions of students with any form of disability who failed, withdrew, deferred or referred were significantly higher than non disabled students and the proportion passing was significantly lower.

A very small proportion of relatively very young degree students (under 20) failed their social work studies (2%, n = 6). Younger students had a significantly lower percentage of referrals and deferrals than other under graduates. However, the same age group had the highest percentage of withdrawal (23%, n = 58) compared to older students.

Almost half of all the first year students responding to the online survey currently had family or other unpaid caring responsibilities.

Almost half (46%, n = 66) of Black students are caring for school age children compared to just over one third (36%, n = 539) of all students (online survey).

On the basis of progression and retention rates to date and stated career path intentions of current students, the degree is likely to lead to an increase in the number of qualified workers joining the workforce.

Comment

Overall, the evidence suggests that the new degree has improved substantially on the DipSW numbers of enrolments and to some extent on the range and quality of recruitment. The findings indicate that policy initiatives to attract a wider range of students to the social work profession have been successful. While there was evidence of some initial resistance to the suitability of younger entrants to the profession, progression and retention rates suggest that this policy initiative has had a positive impact on the number of recruits to both the degree and the profession. Funding mechanisms to support the increase in places in HEIs also seem to have had a positive impact.

The decision to fund a social work bursary appears to have attracted applicants that are more diverse and supported those who might otherwise have been unable to enter higher education. However, whilst the bursary has been an important factor in attracting applicants, rigorous selection processes are used to identify suitable candidates, thus allaying fears that unsuitable applicants might be attracted by the possibility of a bursary. The selection procedures for the programmes appear to be innovative, involving service users, carers, and employers in different ways, and test motivations and eligibility as well as suitability.

There are particular challenges for postgraduate courses given the requirement for students to spend 200 days on practice placements out of two academic years. Despite this, this report shows that social work postgraduate courses are popular; recruit well, and there is very little withdrawal or failure. In the light of greater proportions of young people entering higher education on a variety of courses, postgraduate social work may remain a key route into the profession.
The increase in the number of younger entrants with ‘A’ levels and the requirements for numeracy and literacy means that programmes will have to balance academic suitability with the commitment to supporting people with relevant personal and vocational experience but lacking academic qualifications. Younger students who stay the course are significantly more likely to succeed in their studies with fewer deferrals or referrals than older undergraduates. It will be important to continue to monitor the number of successful applicants from access courses and other non-traditional entry points.

More work needs to be done to address particular areas of diversity, in order to attract students from all backgrounds and to ensure the social work workforce represents society, particularly given the differential progression rates for students from Black and minority ethnic groups. The proportion of Black students who are caring for school age children suggests that they may be more likely to have to combine their studies with other family responsibilities, potentially increasing pressures for some of these students. Additional strategies of support may need to be considered.

The indication of an overall reduction in the number of students funded by an employer needs further investigation as does the availability and cost effectiveness of flexible approaches, such as employment-based and part time routes. These have been an important source of recruitment in the past and some have operated as a skills escalator to attract a range of people into the profession and to widen participation in higher education.

6.2 Teaching and learning (Chapter 6)

- Overall, the evaluation finds that social work educators are delivering the DH requirements for the degree. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Benchmark Statement in Social Work was seen to be helpful in setting out the components of undergraduate social work education.

- Teaching staff see an increase in academic and practice standards of students and both they and students report largely positive experiences of teaching and learning on the new social work degree.

- Of the topics covered by the end of the second year, students reported highest levels of satisfaction with ‘Anti-oppressive practice’ and ‘Social work values and ethics’.

- ‘Children and families’ appeared at the top of the list of 25 topics which were seen to relate strongly to working in practice settings and came joint fourth overall in terms of student satisfaction.

- The degree appears to have been the impetus for developing new methods of delivery of the curriculum, especially in skills lab work, in e-learning and in involving service users and carers.

- Courses have different arrangements for delivering the curriculum but all seem to have developed mechanisms for ensuring core generic learning and providing opportunities for specialist learning.
• One area that appears more problematic is inter-professional education. Courses are currently testing varied models to address the difficulties encountered.

• The new degree seems to have afforded the opportunity for programmes to create more diverse methods of assessment and innovations (for those programmes) in a range of assessment methods e.g. linking theory with individual/family observations, involving service users and carers.

• Most informants consider that the new degree has resulted in a refining of assessment systems and an increase in the rigour of assessment. About three quarters of students are highly satisfied with their assessment but those without previous experience in social care, and postgraduate students tend to be less satisfied.

• Most practice assessors report that service users are involved in a variety of ways and in many aspects of students’ assessment in placement, although some report that service user involvement is limited.

**Comment**

While overall most participants report positive experiences of teaching and learning on the new degree, there are some concerns.

Increases in the numbers of students and in the number of practice learning days and the further integration of some social work courses into higher education systems (which involves standardising timetabling and so on) has meant that there are some pressures on the curriculum, timing of assessments and resources. There may be an issue to resolve about whether social work educators have received sufficient institutional support in return for the substantial funding that social work education now brings to many HEIs and the extent to which social work education enables HEIs to meet their targets of student completion, diversity and employability.

Some informants were concerned about the way that students’ values were assessed compared to the DipSW requirements. There was a view that the previous requirements for the DipSW more strongly addressed anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice. The current DH requirements have moved to a more outcome focussed approach and some informants felt that these represented a more diluted statement of values and, potentially an erosion of previous practice. It may be that programmes would value further consultation about this important area and that the GSCC could explore this in its review process.

6.3 Practice **teaching and learning (Chapter 7)**

• The data show that the number of placements provided each year has risen with the increase in student numbers. In 2005-2006, 8,087 placements were provided by the statutory, voluntary and private sectors.
The increase in the number of practice learning days, the funding arrangements and the work undertaken in developing practice placements all seem to have had positive impacts on the variety of practice learning opportunities in the statutory, voluntary and private sectors.

Providing increased resources through the daily placement fee has been well received and is seen to have resulted in extra placements, particularly in the voluntary and private sectors.

The existence of practice learning as a Performance Indicator for statutory agencies (which has now been withdrawn) was thought to have been particularly important in ensuring the supply of practice learning opportunities in the statutory sector.

There are varied experiences with some programmes able to secure a high percentage of statutory placements and other programmes more reliant on the voluntary and private sectors for placements.

There are pressures on HEIs to identify and access good quality placements. These include the increase in placement days in the new degree, increase in the number of students, local conditions, and new requirements of the degree, including meeting the different needs of younger students.

The main factors seen to contribute to the overall quality of placements are: the ability of different agencies to provide students with a useful range of practice learning opportunities; the quality of practice assessment; and how students are treated.

The increased number of students and pressures to secure a sufficient quantity of placements have raised questions about the capacity of some placements to offer students high quality learning experiences. Nevertheless 78% of placements are rated as 'excellent, very good' or 'good' by students.

Student satisfaction with placements in non-statutory settings tends to be lower but higher where there is a qualified social worker present for 'all or most of the time'.

Analysis of students’ overall rating shows that the better placements fulfil criteria which are achievable as much in non-statutory as statutory placements.

Almost 90% (n = 1198) of students for whom information was available had at least one placement working with children and families and almost 75% (n = 1002) had at least one placement working with adult service users.

The Fact Find conducted in 2004-2005 showed that 38% (n = 26/42) of undergraduate programmes on which information was obtained offered practice placements in Year 1/Level 1 with the number of days ranging from 20-60.
• Practice assessors identify that, on final placement, the proportions of students performing as well as, or better than DipSW students has risen on every aspect (communication skills, approaches to equalities, theoretical knowledge, performance and preparedness) and are seen to have improved most on two aspects emphasised in the *Requirements for Social Work Training* - communication skills and theoretical knowledge.

• Students and practice assessors identify practice placements as a key way of learning about multi-agency and inter professional working. The quality of placements is seen by staff and students as a critical factor in the overall quality of the course and as a tipping point in terms of withdrawal.

• The separation of children and adult services represented an unforeseen challenge in accessing the required number of placements working with both groups. This appears to have been largely met by HEIs.

**Comment**

Students appear satisfied with some aspects of voluntary and private sector placements. However, teaching staff and students also identified a need for capacity building, extra monitoring and support for some voluntary and private sector placements, in order to ensure that students are able to benefit from their placements to the required level of skills and to undertake the right kinds of tasks.

Difficulties were experienced by many programme providers in finding an adequate supply of placements in the statutory sector, despite the support from Learning Resource Networks. This suggests that there is scope for judicious consideration of what future incentives might be developed to help programme providers find more statutory placements.

Many programmes split the required 200 days of practice learning between two long placements. Longer placements are seen by some to offer a more in-depth experience for students and mean that the actual *number* of placements required for degree students remains the same as that under the DipSW. Others argue that there are educational and practice benefits to be derived from placements that occur at every stage of a student’s programme, i.e. in the first year of undergraduate programmes (as in the DipSW) as well as years two and three. However, because of the difficulties in organising Year 1 placements for some programmes, it appears that there has been a reduction in them. Further investigation of the educational value of them may be beneficial.

The practice learning component may place additional demands on some students, particularly for people with parenting and caring responsibilities. Further investigation of this issue may also be beneficial.
Overall, the report suggests that some innovations have been implemented more successfully than others.

The new degree seems to have provided a spur for the increased involvement of people using services and carers in social work education and appears to have produced a ‘step change’ in the level and range of opportunities for users and carers to be engaged in social work education.

Students value service user and carer input to their training and education as providing a unique perspective. In turn, those using services and carers appear to find involvement in professional education and training worthwhile and beneficial. However, there is evidence that barriers to service user and carer involvement still exist, including security of funding.

There are generally high levels of support for the new requirement for Assessed Preparation for Direct Practice (APDP) and programmes have developed a wide range of ways to meet it. In addition to shadowing, other methods included assignment/portfolio, exercises (e.g. videos), statement or interview and whole module.

APDP has been interpreted in social work programmes as having two main elements, the element to ensure ‘safety’ to practice, and the element of ‘preparation’ for practice placements. All programmes met the former but varied in the extent to which the preparation element was tackled.

Students’ experiences of the quality of Information Technology (IT) teaching and resources at the case study sites seem to have been mixed and there were some difficulties around interpretation of the need to ensure that students are computer literate at the level of the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) or the equivalent.

Initial concerns around the ECDL requirement do not appear to have persisted and most case study sites had modified their approaches to allow students the greatest possible flexibility while allowing them not to incur financial costs. However, the need for greater clarity about the particular relevance of the ECDL to social work was evident.

All programmes in the case study sites have arrangements for Exit routes for students (providing they are eligible) who are not deemed suitable for the social work degree or do not wish to continue. There are awards in social welfare at different levels for those who have not passed their practice placements and transfers to other related academic courses.

**Comment**

Overall, the degree appears to have has acted as a catalyst and has facilitated reflection, innovation, and changes in social work education. The requirement
for service user and carer involvement in the delivery of the degree has universal acceptance. There is evidence of good practice in recruiting, resourcing, and organising networks of service users and carers and acknowledgement that there are opportunities for further development in this area. Modules appear to have been developed in conjunction with service users and carers that are innovative.

In particular, the research identified a high level of support for the provision for students to undertake a short period of Assessed Preparation for Direct Practice before entry to practice learning. This provision has been effectively used to prepare students for practice and to identify potentially unsuitable students in order to protect service users and carers. However, as the interviews with informants showed, there was a lack of precision in the way that it was described.

The requirement for IT training in social work education was a response to the concerns of employers and of newly qualified social workers who had undertaken the previous qualification. In this respect, programmes were faced with adopting new approaches to IT learning with varying successes. One option might be to examine other developments in health and in higher education for the delivery of IT training to see whether there are lessons for social work education.

6.5 Entering the workforce (Chapters 10 and 11)

- The evaluation found that students identified that studying for the degree strengthened their motivations to become social workers. Students seem keen to keep a range of options open in terms of their intentions to work with a specific service user group or in a specific setting.

- Social work educators feel that the new degree is better able to produce students who are more prepared for the complex and changing world of social work than the DipSW.

- There is evidence of a change over time in the way that students conceptualise practice. As they develop, students are seen to become more analytical and critical, more holistic, draw more on policy, legislation and theory, and are clearer about their role as social workers.

- At the final research assessment point, students had reached a level of skills acquisition appropriate for the completion of qualifying training - the ‘advanced beginner’ or ‘competent’ stage of professional development.

Comment

Despite the fact that there is no longer a requirement for the award to be delivered in partnership between HEIs and agencies there is continuing enthusiasm among academic staff and practice agencies for the degree and demonstrated potential for HEIs and employers to work together around workforce planning and strategies. This enthusiasm is associated with the view
of all stakeholders that the degree has increased the status of the social work profession.

Employers' views on the new degree confirm those of other key stakeholders that degree status is welcome. The qualities they most seek in new practitioner are effective engagement with service users and carers, analytical abilities and skills in outcome focussed planning. The extent to which these are met will not be known until qualified students have been in the workforce for some time.

7. CONCLUSION

Overall, the results from the evaluation suggest that the decision to implement the social work degree qualification represents a policy success and comprises an important part of the government’s overall objectives to modernise public services. The evaluation provides evidence that students appear to become more analytical and critical over time and that they acquire skills from a combination of classroom-based and practice learning. However, evidence from this study and previous work, suggests that there will always be a stage between achieving a professional qualification and operating as a professional. It is important to recognise that qualifying education is not intended to produce ‘proficient’ or ‘expert’ workers.

The impact of the degree will not be known until qualified students have been in the workforce for some time. Steps are already in hand to follow up newly qualified social workers through a project funded by the Department of Health’s Social Care Workforce Research Initiative examining perceptions of graduates and their employers of their preparedness for work. This Summary concludes by reinforcing the recommendation in the main report that there is a period of stability in social work education in order to establish an appropriate timescale in which to measure the outcomes of these changes on the performance of social work degree holders in the workforce. This will also allow for the results of this evaluation to be contextualised with the results for the new post-qualifying framework in social work.

REFERENCES


Chapter One: Introduction

We are ambitious for the social care sector, and recognise the essential role it plays in our society, including the fulfilment of statutory duties to protect children and adults. The social care workforce is increasingly working in an integrated way with other services, and we would expect this trend to continue in the future. We have seen increased levels of funding for training resulting in higher levels of qualifications for workers, and steps to improve the status of work in the sector - proving that the workforce can adjust and advance into the future.

(Department of Health/Department for Education and Skills, 2006, iii)

The Government’s vision is of a world-class children’s workforce that is competent and confident; people aspire to be part of and want to remain in - where they can develop their skills and build satisfying and rewarding careers; and parents, carers, children and young people trust and respect.

(HM Government, 2005, p.3)

Around 80 per cent of the money we spend on social care goes on the men and women who provide care to those most in need. Nothing is more important in helping us provide the best possible care than ensuring those who work in social care have all the skills they need to do their jobs.

(Lewis, 2006)

Summary

The introduction of new social work degree qualification in England in 2003-2004 was widely welcomed as a means of improving the status of social work and of increasing the numbers of people attracted to the profession. This chapter forms the start of a national report on the evaluation of the new social work degree qualification in England funded by the Department of Health and is based on research undertaken from 2004-2007. It outlines the main study aims, discusses the policy context for the changes, and summarises the main messages from published research on the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW), the qualification that preceded the degree.

Key points

- The reforms to social work education form part of a wider government policy objective to modernise social care services and to develop a highly skilled and motivated workforce.
- The introduction of the degree occurred at a time of widespread concerns about a decline in the number of people applying to train as social workers and about the perceived quality of some people working in the profession.
Key points (continued)

- Social work operates in an evolving policy context. However, the effects of changes to social work education may take some time to emerge. This may create tensions between being able to demonstrate clear educational outcomes in terms of the changes that are attributable to undergoing professional qualifying training and policy pressures to show that wider changes to the delivery of services to children and adults have occurred.

- While there was only a limited amount of research-based evidence based on the experiences of students undertaking the DipSW, it has provided important contextual information for this evaluation by illuminating issues that were longstanding and not related to the degree, thus helping to identify differing elements of continuity and change.

Purpose of the study

As the above quotations show, changes to social care have become a major part of the government’s programme for reforming public services. This report focuses on one of the most important of these developments, the move to a degree level professional qualification for social work. The change was announced in March 2001 (Department of Health, 2001b) and the first new degree level social work qualifying programmes began in the 2003-2004 academic year.

The Department of Health stated that the reforms to social work education were intended to produce a qualification that rigorously assessed graduates in respect of their:

- practical application of skills, knowledge, research and analytical abilities to deliver services which create opportunities for users;
- ability to reflect social work values in their practice;
- ability to manage change and deliver required outcomes;
- ability to communicate with users and carers of all ages and from all sections of the community;
- practical application of social work theory; and
- ability to function effectively and confidently in multi-disciplinary and multi-agency teams.

(Department of Health, 2003a, p.1)

Study aims and objectives

In 2003, the Department of Health published an open competitive tender that invited proposals for research examining the implementation and impact of the new degree in England. It outlined the six areas on which the evaluation was intended to provide more information, namely:

- baseline information;
• applications, recruitment and retention;
• the teaching/learning experience;
• the practice learning experience;
• innovations (in learning and teaching and in organisation of social work education); and
• entering the workforce.

Based on this framework, the team commissioned to undertake the evaluation agreed a programme of work with the Department of Health that sought to answer four main questions:

1. How has the move to degree level professional social work education and training been implemented?

2. What are the main outcomes of the change from diploma to degree level study?

3. How far has the new degree met the expectations of those entering the profession and other stakeholders?

4. Has the new social work degree increased the quality and quantity of qualified social workers entering the workforce?

**Policy context**

*Concerns about social work education*

The introduction of the new social work degree occurred against a background of longstanding concerns about social work education. The previous professional qualification in social work, the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW) (Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work, 1989, 1995, 1996) was a two-year qualification set at sub-degree level, but it could be offered alongside undergraduate or postgraduate academic qualifications. Many social work educators had criticised the DipSW's competence-based approach, arguing it was inadequate in preparing social workers for the professional judgements that had to be applied in practice (Clark, 1995; Dominelli, 1996; Ford and Hayes, 1996; Lymbery, 2003) and that the way in which competence was assessed was not as value free as it was intended to be, thus potentially disadvantaging students from under represented groups, such as those from black and minority ethnic backgrounds (Kemshall, 1993). Others (Orme, 2000; Preston Shoot, 2000) argued that the DipSW placed too great an emphasis on *training* and not enough upon *education*. It had also become apparent that there was a decline in the numbers of social workers qualifying each year. In England, these had fallen from 3,258 in 1993-1994 to 3,169 in 1998-1999 (Topss England, 2000, p66). Furthermore, not only were fewer people being attracted to the profession but publications as diverse as the report of the inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié (Lord Laming, 2003), research looking at public perceptions of social work and social care (Research Works Limited, 2001) and the opinions of commentators (Philpot, 1999) all suggested a degree of political and public disquiet about the
perceived quality of some of those who were working in the profession. Social work educators themselves had campaigned for some time for a degree level qualification as a way of ensuring that the workforce had the necessary knowledge and skills to undertake complex social work tasks (Orme, 2001). Responding to this disquiet, the Department of Health commissioned a series of reports and consultations (J M Consulting, 1999; Eborall and Garmeson, 2001; Research Works Limited, 2001; Barnes, 2002), which showed widespread support for change. The announcement that social work would become a degree level qualification (Department of Health, 2001b) was followed by the first national recruitment campaign to encourage more people to become social workers (Department of Health, 2001a).

Financial investment in the new degree

Further financial investment was to follow. The phasing out of the local education authority (LEA) maintenance grant and the introduction of university fees in 1999 had been widely seen as having negative consequences for social work, mainly because potential applicants tended to be older and more averse to taking on high levels of debt. The decision that full time home country students studying for the new social work degree and not sponsored by an employer would be able to apply for a non means tested bursary amounting to an average of £3,000 per annum (Department of Health, 2002b) was seen as an important means of increasing the numbers of social work applications.

As well as funding the bursary, other new resources were allocated to social work education. The following year, the Department of Health stated that it would be spending over £21 million in social work education and training in 2003-2004, rising to £81.45 million in 2005-2006 (Department of Health, 2003b). This figure did not represent the full central government investment in social work education since much higher education is funded by sources outside the Department of Health. It is not known how much of the £7,137 million allocated to the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2007) in 2007-2008 is spent on social work education since it includes funding for teaching, research, and widening participation that are designed to support all students, not just those who are studying social work.

Changes to post qualifying social work education

To build on the new qualifying degree, alterations were also made to the post-qualifying framework for social work education. These aimed to integrate links between professional development and the development of the workforce (General Social Care Council, 2005). While these developments were outside the remit of this evaluation, they formed part of its backdrop because higher education institutions (HEIs) were often developing new post-qualifying programmes alongside their basic qualifying programmes and making strategic decisions about the overall mix and type of social work programmes they intended to offer.
Legislative and regulatory changes

Changes to qualifying and post qualifying social work programmes occurred amid other legislative and policy developments. Following the implementation of the Care Standards Act 2000, new codes of practice for social care workers and employers were published (General Social Care Council, 2002a), the Social Care Register, a register of people who work in social care and who have been assessed as trained and fit to be in the workforce (General Social Care Council, Undated-a), was established in 2003, and from 2005 only registered social workers were able to use the term ‘social worker’ in their title (General Social Care Council, Undated-b). While these developments were not universally welcomed (for example, McLaughlin, 2007), they had long been advocated by the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) and the majority of UK social work academics (Orme and Rennie, 2006) as a way of offering additional protection and professional accountability to the public and of improving the status of social work.

Wider policy background

The introduction of the new social work degree coincided with the publication of government plans for increasing the proportion of people entering full time higher education (Secretary of State for Education and Skills, 2003). Although arguably many social work programmes already had comparatively well established systems for supporting so-called ‘non-traditional’ students from families where participation in higher education was less frequent (Parton, 2001; Jones, 2006; Moriarty and Murray, 2007), the need to set up systems that would both improve access to higher education and reduce the likelihood that students would leave without achieving a qualification became a more important priority within the higher education sector as a whole. HEIs were also expected to work with employers and professional bodies to develop new and more flexible ways of entry to the professions (Langlands, 2005; Secretary of State for Education and Skills, 2005). In many ways, social work programmes were already well placed to meet this expectation in the sense that employment based rotes to social work qualification had existed for some considerable time (Baloch, 1999).

By contrast, social work programmes were more directly affected by the publication of the White Paper Every Child Matters which set up separate Children’s Services in order to provide better integration and accountability in national and local services, a programme of workforce reform to attract people into the workforce and to retain them, and the development of a common core of training for those working solely with children and families (HM Treasury, 2003). It also established five outcomes for children (being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution, and achieving economic well-being) (2003, p.14) against which services would be measured. This meant that all relevant professional qualifying programmes, including social work, had to consider how they prepared newly qualified professionals to help children meet these objectives.

The requirement that social work programmes ‘ensure[d] that teaching and learning are continually updated to keep abreast of developments in
legislation, Government policy and best practice’ (Department of Health, 2002c, p.4) was put further to the test by the publication of a second White Paper, *Our Health, Our Care, Our Say* (HM Government/Department of Health, 2006). A set of seven outcomes was identified for adults (improved health and emotional well-being, improved quality of life, making a positive contribution, choice and control, freedom from discrimination, economic well-being, and personal dignity). These outcomes emphasised preventative services and enabling people to take more control over their lives. The White Paper recognised that the workforce would need support in developing new skills and greater confidence in these approaches and highlighted the challenges of delivering support to people with complex and often long-term needs.

Recognising the consequences of these policy changes for workforce development, the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Skills (as it was then) launched a review of the social care workforce, *Options for Excellence* (2006). This considered the challenges faced by the social care workforce, including the social work workforce, over the period leading up to 2020 and how it could be prepared to meet the anticipated changes. In particular, it highlighted that:

*Our vision is that by 2020 we will have a highly skilled, valued and accountable workforce drawn from all sections of the community. This trained and trusted workforce will work within the ‘social model of care’, looking at individuals in their personal, family and community context, and providing imaginative and innovative services. Alongside carers, volunteers and workers from a range of other services, the workforce will make a positive difference, contributing to people’s health, happiness and well being.*

(2006, p.6)

The publication of the *Children’s Plan* (Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, 2007) raised further issues for social work education and for employers in terms of the proposals to pilot a newly qualified social worker status so that workers are supported during their first year in employment and to develop fast track routes designed to attract mature graduates into children’s social work.

Equally, the ministerial concordat *Putting People First* (HM Government, 2007) envisages a situation in which people who use services take greater control over their lives, meaning that the role of social workers will move away from assessment and more towards safeguarding, advocacy, and brokerage (HM Government, 2007).

*Evolving policy context*

Taken together, these documents encompass two central themes with important implications for the future. Firstly, the entire workforce employed in Children’s and Adults Services is expected to work more closely with other professionals and is increasingly likely to be located in different settings, such as schools or primary care. Secondly, the primary purpose of the workforce is
to help people using their services assume greater control of their lives. This has led to questions being raised about the extent to which generic qualifying programmes produce social workers equally well prepared to work in Adults or in Children’s services (Blewett and Tunstill, 2007). These debates are not new. As the new draft document on the role of social work in the 21st century notes, ‘social work is an evolving profession, constantly responding to new policy aspirations, expanding knowledge and rising public expectations’ (General Social Care Council, 2007, p.4). However, as the first graduates from the new degree only entered the workforce in 2006, with the exception of a small number of postgraduates in 2005, the evidence on which to answer this question is not yet fully available. Instead, the evaluation can only offer some early indications of the extent to which social work programmes are developing to produce graduates with the flexibility and skills that will enable them to adapt to meet changing expectations.

### Key differences between the degree and the DipSW

The timing of the commissioning for the evaluation meant that it was not able to provide direct comparisons between the new degree and the DipSW. However, this brief outline of the differences between the degree and the qualification that it replaced sets the context for some of the findings reported in later chapters.

As mentioned earlier, students could obtain a DipSW by studying on sub-degree (also known as non-graduate) programmes, undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. A degree-level qualification meant that a three-year undergraduate degree would be the norm but graduates were permitted to undertake a two-year postgraduate qualification, so long as they met the Department of Health requirements within this period.

The requirements for the new degree were published in 2002 after widespread consultation (Department of Health, 2002a). At one level, they were less prescriptive than those for the qualification it replaced. In introducing it, the Department of Health recognized that higher education institutions (HEIs) were subject to other quality assurance mechanisms and sought to work in tandem with these. However, it did stipulate certain changes that it thought would improve the quality and quantity of entrants to the social work workforce. These included removing the minimum age for qualifying as a social worker (thereby allowing recruitment straight from secondary level education), requiring students to possess qualifications in mathematics and English at key skills level 2 (the equivalent of a GCSE qualification), and obliging them to declare health or disability-related conditions.

The degree curriculum and modes of teaching and learning were to some extent left to the discretion of the individual programme providers but there were specifications that core subject areas had to be addressed. These included:

- human growth and development, mental health and disability;
• assessment planning, intervention and review;
• communication skills with children, adults and those with particular communication needs;
• law; and
• partnership working and information sharing across agencies and disciplines.

(Department of Health, 2002c, pp.3-4)

Upon completion of the degree, students are expected to be competent to the level of the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) in information technology skills. Other curriculum requirements included expectations for innovation in teaching methods and flexibility in the delivery of programmes, including part time routes and provision for accrediting learning outside formal training. Providers of the degree were also expected to work with a range of stakeholders, including employers and service users and carers in all processes of the degree, such as student recruitment, curriculum delivery, and assessment. While many HEIs were already doing this, it was the first time that the Department of Health had allocated specific funds to support them (Department of Health, 2003b).

Increasing the programme length was not intended to give extra time for academic study. Announcing details of the curriculum, the then Health Minister stated that it was to focus on ‘practical training’ (Department of Health, 2002a). To achieve this, the amount of time spent in assessed practice was raised from 130 days to 200 days and funding was given to establish a Practice Learning Taskforce and fund increases in the numbers and types of placements (Department of Health, 2002a). A further innovative aim of the new degree was to protect service users and improve standards, which would be partly achieved through assessing students on their readiness to undertake 200 days of supervised practice.

The new requirements meant that HEIs could apply to the GSCC for accreditation at the same time as having their degree qualification validated in their own institution. The timescale meant that 46 HEIs were approved to offer the new degree in the 2003-2004 academic year, while a further 20 offered it the following year (Helen Wenman, personal communication). Unlike nursing, where both diploma and degree courses co-exist (Manthorpe et al., 2005), the last DipSW programmes began in the 2003-2004 academic year.

Existing published research on social work education

The introduction of the new degree represented the biggest reform to social work education since the introduction of the DipSW (Blewett and Tunstill, 2007). However, a major challenge for the evaluation was the lack of United Kingdom (UK) baseline data (Moriarty and Murray, 2007) which offered some measure of the performance of DipSW students entering the workforce. Of the limited number of studies that existed, the majority were descriptive accounts of a single aspect of programme delivery. For example, in their
review of comparative studies of European social work, Shardlow and Walliss (2003) found that the majority of studies were theoretical rather than empirical, and only two of the empirical studies in their sample focused on social work education. Carpenter (2005) has argued that, while some studies have been retrospective, none has conformed to strict methods of evaluation over time. Nevertheless, there was a body of work, albeit often limited in size and scope, which provided important background information.

Research based on data collected before the new degree

Student satisfaction and readiness to practice

The main source of data on the experiences of DipSW students was the series of studies undertaken by the University of East London and funded by the predecessor to the GSCC, the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW) (Lyons et al., 1995; Wallis-Jones and Lyons, 1996, 2001) and the Department of Health (Wallis-Jones and Lyons, 2003). These surveyed newly qualified social workers around six months or so after qualifying and achieved response rates of between 56-73 per cent. Taken together, the surveys showed remarkable consistency in the demographic characteristics of newly qualified social workers, with 80 per cent of respondents being women, 87 per cent describing themselves as white, and six per cent reporting that they had a disability. Lyons and Manion (2004) concluded that the demographic profile of newly qualified social workers had changed from the 1980s in that there were proportionally fewer men and more people from a minority ethnic group than in the past. The findings also indicated that, while the majority of students were aged 30-44, the average age of newly qualified social workers had begun to fall over time, particularly among those following undergraduate courses (Lyons and Manion, 2004).

Respondents also rated how relevant their training had been for their current employment. This showed that, although around two-thirds were satisfied with their training, men, younger respondents, and those who had followed undergraduate programmes all tended to be less satisfied. Furthermore, students’ satisfaction varied across different aspects of the DipSW curriculum, with particularly high levels of dissatisfaction with the way they had been taught work-based skills not specific to social work, such as information technology, record keeping, and budgeting (Lyons and Manion, 2004).

The other key source of existing UK data 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 and Triseliotis, 1996). This sample consisted of some 700 students (a response rate of 55 per cent) who had obtained either a DipSW or the previous professional qualification the Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (CQSW). Students were surveyed at the end of their programme and subsequently around nine months later. Seventy per cent of those responding to the first survey responded to the second. While 72 per cent of respondents had found their course ‘interesting’, only 54 per cent 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. The overall conclusion of the authors was that social work education did a ‘serviceable job’ (p208) but that improvements needed to be made. The study also involved surveying a sample of supervisors working in agencies in which newly qualified social workers 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.

Motivations for studying social work

Students' motivations have important repercussions for the way they learn and apply professional knowledge, values, and skills. They can either help sustain them through the professional and academic demands of the course, or contribute to a sense of disillusion and discontent (Christie and Kruk, 1998, p.21). One very striking finding from at least three different studies (Marsh and Triseliotis, 1996; Christie, 1998; Parker and Merrylees, 2002) was the influence of personal experiences in shaping decisions to study social work. As Christie and Kruk pointed out (1998), this has important implications for social work recruitment. As only a minority of the population has used or been employed in social care services, the perceptions of social work experienced by the majority of the population are largely influenced by media depictions, which are largely unrealistic (Henderson and Franklin, 2007).

There has been a longstanding debate about whether student motivations are influenced by their personal, professional, or political considerations (Christie and Kruk, 1998). Marsh and Triseliotis (1996) identified the need to distinguish between motivations to become and motivations to train as a social worker. This distinction emerged clearly from a study of 34 employment-based students in Scotland who had undertaken the National Open Learning Programme through the Open University. They were particularly likely to identify professional development as their prime motivation for undertaking training (Dunworth, 2007). Students such as these are likely to have taken the decision to become a social worker some time ago because of their length of experience, but the timing of their actual decision to enter social work education is likely to have been influenced by financial or personal constraints.

The Marsh and Triseliotis sample consisted of both employment-based and college-based students. They found that about half of their sample was driven by career considerations, around a third wished to offer a ‘service’ to people and the remainder had ‘idealistic’ notions, such as a wish to tackle injustice, they argued that these impetuses could co-exist; thus, social work was thought to offer the double attraction of a ‘meaningful career which also contributed to society’s wellbeing’ (p.28). Christie and Kruk (1998) shared the view that motivations consisted of a complex mixture of personal, idealistic, and professional intentions and warned against the dangers of ‘false
polarisations’ (p.24). They also suggested that motivations might change throughout the course of a student’s learning.

**Practice learning**

The University of East London surveys also provided valuable information on practice placements. Although the DipSW was intended to be a generic qualification, the use of elective pathways on many programmes meant that around 40 per cent of both first and second placements took place in children and families settings (Wallis-Jones and Lyons, 2003). The significance of this for future career intentions is important as it has been shown that practice placements and, to a lesser extent, students’ own demographic characteristics, have a greater impact on students preferred area of employment once qualified than classroom-based learning (Jack and Mosley, 1997).

While DipSW students generally tended to give positive evaluations about their experiences of practice learning (Marsh and Triseliotis, 1996; Wallis-Jones and Lyons, 2003), placements could create a source of stress for some students because of the new demands placed upon them and the fewer opportunities for peer support. Two small scale internal evaluations highlighted the value of group support (Lindsay, 2005) and peer mentoring (Topping *et al.*, 1998) for students on practice placements. Nor should practice learning only be seen as stressful for students. A survey sent to practice placement co-ordinators across the UK which resulted in 49 replies (a response rate of 50 per cent), found that many experienced role overload and role conflict (Collins and Turunen, 2006). Their findings were important for this evaluation because the change to the degree meant that they would need to provide longer and more varied placements, thus potentially increasing the workloads of practice placement co-ordinators.

**Workforce diversity**

Three studies, one using secondary data and the others using small scale qualitative techniques, provided information on the extent to which social work students were representative of the wider population. Perry and Cree (2003) looked at applications and acceptances on social work programmes and found that, although it was well known that the number of students applying to study social work had declined over the previous 10 years, there was less recognition that proportionally there had been a greater decline in applications from men than from women. They concluded that it was important to improve the status of social work and social workers’ terms and conditions. The two qualitative studies (Baron *et al.*, 1996; Crawshaw, 2002) examined the experiences of social work students with disabilities, showing that systems were not always in place to support them. While not based upon empirical research, two accounts by black social work educators (Aymer and Bryan, 1996; Cropper, 2000) highlighted the value of support from tutors and peers for students from minority ethnic groups. Although no UK-published studies of the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered students were identified, there was evidence of concerns (Trotter and Gilchrist, 1996; Trotter,
1998) that DipSW programmes failed to address issues of homophobia and heterosexism properly.

**Progression and achievement**

The research on workforce diversity described above raised tantalising questions when combined with data on progression rates among all students starting DipSW programmes between 1995-1998 (Hussein et al., 2006, BJSW Advance Access doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcl378). This showed that, at 87 per cent for full time students and 81 per cent for part time and distance students, overall retention rates on DipSW programmes compared well with other subjects and with students in higher education in general. However, men, students from a minority ethnic group, and students with a disability all experienced lower rates of progression. There was also evidence that students in some HEIs had better progression rates than others and that this could not simply be explained by the characteristics of students themselves. Further indications of the difference that practices on individual programmes could make to progression and achievement rates came from case studies of individual social work programmes looking at how adaptations to timetabling and the style of classroom learning (Green Lister, 2003) and support with academic writing (Rai, 2004) could be used to support non traditional students.

*Published research on the new degree*

**Practice learning**

The first published results from research undertaken after the introduction of the social work degree are now beginning to emerge. Given the increase in time spent on practice placements and the additional financial support provided for practice learning in the new degree, it is perhaps unsurprising that the only published study at the time of writing derived from data collected from more than one HEI is the survey of practice learning commissioned by the National Organisation for Practice Teaching (NOPT) and the Practice Learning Taskforce (PLTF) (Doel et al., 2007). This resulted in 71 replies, 39 of which came from agencies (55 per cent response rate), 16 came from individuals, and 16 from HEIs (each representing a 23 per cent response rate) (Doel et al., 2004). The replies indicated that some positive changes had occurred since the introduction of the degree, for example in the use of a wider variety of practice settings and in the greater involvement of service users and carers. Better support systems for students, such as the increased use of group supervision and peer support, appeared to be in place. However, concerns were expressed about the divergence between the experiences of postgraduates and undergraduates, with the longer programme length for undergraduates giving them more opportunities for a professional ‘gap year’ (p224) in which they could work in non-social work settings and become more familiar with the wider world of social care and welfare. There were also still some uncertainties about funding and partnership arrangements.
Developing social work values

In a fascinating analysis of 148 responses written by applicants for a social work degree programme to the task of writing about ‘a social problem in Britain today’ and identifying its causes, Gilligan (2007) found that their answers tended to be divided between those who identified reasons such as individual ignorance or irresponsibility and those who identified social factors, such as a lack of political will on the part of government. He suggested that many appeared to be less critical of the current state of society than their predecessors 20-30 years ago but that they had a genuine wish to improve the lives of individuals and their families.

Gilligan also highlighted the importance of the role played by teaching and learning in developing students’ understanding of wider social issues. However, a study of 94 examples of written feedback provided to students on one social work degree programme in Scotland by tutors and practice teachers (Heron, BJSW advance access doi: 10.1093/bjsw/bcl348) was critical of their overall quality. It queried whether their content suggested that issues to do with race and ethnicity had become more marginalised than in the past. It also identified the importance of written feedback beyond its intrinsic importance in helping students meet the required academic standards but as a way of transmitting social work values.

Student diversity and progression

A small-scale qualitative study looked the experiences of social work students and tutors in the context of increasing diversity on social work programmes and concerns about retention rates. It highlighted the importance of tutor-student relations in identifying difficulties and finding solutions but also pointed to students’ resilience and determination to continue their studies (Hafford-Letchfield, 2007).

Discussion

While research undertaken from the mid-1990s onwards had highlighted evidence of positive achievements in social work education, most notably in overall progression rates and in examples of good practice in support for non-traditional students, it had also revealed the clear challenges that it faced:

- There were concerns about the status and image of social work.
- There had been a decline in the number of applications to study social work.
- Student social workers were now more ethnically diverse but men and people with disabilities were still under represented.
- While overall progression rates were good, there were questions about the extent of differential progression among different types of student and the underlying reasons for its existence.
- The decline in applications, the existence of differential progression, and the demographic composition to be found among social work
students had created repercussions for the future supply of the social work workforce and the extent to which it represented the population it served.

- While most students were satisfied with the DipSW overall, specific areas were seen as problematic in terms of the quality of teaching and the relevance of specific subject areas.

- Employers and, to a lesser extent, newly qualified social workers had concerns about the extent to which the DipSW had given them the skills needed to enter the workforce.

In many ways, the size and scope of this body of evidence reflected some of the historical underinvestment in social work research (Shaw et al., 2004; Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee, 2006). Much of it was small scale in nature, often only reporting on the experiences within a single HEI, and, apart from the studies of 1999 and 2001 DipSW qualifiers (Wallis-Jones and Lyons, 2001, 2003), many of the key sources of information (Lyons et al., 1995; Marsh and Triseliotis, 1996; Wallis-Jones and Lyons, 1996) were based on data collected some 10 years previously. Most of this research was descriptive, for example, giving an account of how one aspect of the curriculum had been developed, and did not report on outcomes (Carpenter, 2005). This posed major challenges for this evaluation in that there was little published data on which to make fair comparisons between the DipSW and the degree and there were only limited examples on which to build the study methodology. This is discussed in more detail in the next section, which describes the study methodology.

Equally, the changing policy context also had an impact upon the issues that had to be addressed by the evaluation. Social work is an evolving profession, especially sensitive to policy and legislative changes (Nash, 2003). This makes it harder to attribute changes to a single policy decision, in this case, the decision to move to a degree level qualification; rather they often represent the complex interactions between different aspects of national policy developments and local circumstances. As the next chapter on the study methods aims to show, this highlighted the value of collecting national data and detailed local perceptions of how the changes had been implemented in practice.
Chapter Two: 
Methods

At this point, it is perhaps worth clarifying that evaluating the outcomes of social work education can enable us to answer the following questions: (1) Does it work? In other words, do students learn the outcomes which we as educators hope they do? (2) Are students able to put their learning into practice? (3) If so, does it make a difference to the lives of service users and carers?

(Carpenter, 2005, p.21)

Summary

This section describes the study remit and methods. The evaluation followed a concurrent mixed-methods design, interweaving the findings from three main strands of enquiry, namely:

- Secondary analysis of data from the GSCC on over 25,000 students enrolling on DipSW and degree programmes from 2001-2006, combined with a telephone/email survey of HEIs offering the social work degree.

- A whole population online survey of students carried out in six phases and achieving 3,137 responses together with a supplementary sample-based phase resulting in 807 replies; and

- Case studies of six HEIs which drew data from interviews and focus groups with students, service users and carers, tutors, HEI senior managers and employers, totalling 315 people overall, 195 questionnaires from practice assessors, and 352 written responses by students to a set of two vignettes administered at two points in time.

Key points

- Few studies of social work education have provided data on outcomes, as this one does, while drawing on both qualitative and quantitative data.

- Information was collected on the full range of student experiences, ranging from their motivations for applying for social work, to applying for and being selected for a social work programme, experiences of classroom-based and practice-based teaching and learning, through to programme completion.

- While the timing of, and timescale for, the evaluation meant that it was not possible to compare DipSW and degree students directly, we have sought to make comparisons with DipSW programmes wherever possible, for example, by reporting on enrolment and progression data.

- A summary of data sources and the methods by which they were collected can be found in Table 2.2 towards the end of this chapter.
Remit for the evaluation

As explained in Chapter One, the tender document for the evaluation outlined the six areas on which the evaluation was intended to provide more information, namely:

- baseline information;
- applications, recruitment and retention;
- the teaching/learning experience;
- the practice learning experience;
- innovations (in learning and teaching and in organisation of social work education); and
- entering the workforce.

(Department of Health, 2003)

These areas were included in a programme of work drawn up by the research team and agreed with the Department of Health. They formed the backdrop for the four study questions outlined at the beginning of Chapter One. The need to cover each of these aspects meant that the development of a methodology for the evaluation was not straightforward, as we have already reported (Orme et al., BJSW advance access: doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcm095). As well as drawing together lessons from existing published research, this article discussed in some detail some of the theoretical, policy and pragmatic factors that were considered and debated by the research team and which are summarised in this chapter. It begins by outlining the rationale behind the study methods and then summarises all the sources and types of data that were collected and the analyses that were undertaken. Copies of the study instrumentation and more detailed information about participants and data analysis are included in the Technical Appendix, which comprises Volume 2 of this report.

Methodological challenges

One of the challenges inherent in carrying out investigations in the ‘real world’ lies in seeking to say something sensible about a complex, relatively poorly controlled and generally ‘messy’ situation.

(Robson, 2002, p.4)

The first challenge stemmed from the fact that the remit for the evaluation did not focus on a single aspect but was to span the full spectrum of student experiences. Secondly, even the seemingly straightforward requirement to collect data on applications and retention was known to be problematic. Although a number of potential sources of secondary data existed, such as information from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), and the annual Data Packs published by the GSCC, they were insufficient to give a complete picture of application and retention rates (Moriarty and Murray, 2007). Thirdly, the evaluation needed to draw on multiple perspectives, which generates
challenges for both data collection and analysis. Writing about curriculum design Burgess (2004) has written:

*The notion of participation in [curriculum design for] the new degree...is far more complex, with a multiplicity of partners or stakeholders: academics, agency partners, users and carers, students and staff from other higher education departments for interprofessional education.*

(p.174)

However, these words could equally be applied to this research. The extent to which different stakeholders might perceive differing aspects of the social work degree to be successful could potentially vary. Thus, it was important to collect information from multiple sources, including students, people using services and carers, social work educators, those involved in assessing practice learning, and employers. Fourthly, a complex amalgam of data was required to investigate the different ways in which the degree level qualification and its attendant requirements and resources affected the quantity and quality of students entering the workforce and would have to encompass both teaching and learning in classroom and practice based settings. Fifthly, and most importantly, the timescale for the evaluation was such that it was not funded early enough to enable direct comparisons to be drawn between the degree and the DipSW, nor for long enough to be able to follow students into the workplace, as was possible in an Australian study (Fook et al., 2000). While the experiences of newly qualified social workers are the subject of new study funded under the Department of Health Social Care Workforce Research Initiative, which will follow up some of the students who have participated in this evaluation (entitled *Into the Workforce*), it is important to recognise that the end point in this report is the stage at which students are reaching, or have just achieved, their professional qualification but before they have begun to practise as newly qualified social workers.

**Mixed methods approach**

The evaluation remit and the strengths and expertise offered by the team suggested the need for a mixed methods approach. Mixed methods approaches, which combine quantitative and qualitative data (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003), are achieving increasing popularity in social research for a number of reasons. Firstly, every method has its limitations and the results from single method designs, even if well executed, tend to be open to more than one interpretation, either because they fail to provide all the data necessary or because the results stem from a bias in the study’s method. Multiple methods have complementary strengths and non-overlapping weaknesses, leading to richer and more reliable results (Brewer and Hunter, 2006). Secondly, mixed methods approaches are particularly suited to complex policy evaluation because they provide information on both processes and outcomes:

A process evaluation focuses on what services were provided to whom and how. Its purpose is to describe how the program was implemented - who was involved and what problems were experienced. A process evaluation is useful for monitoring program implementation; for
identifying changes to make the program operate as planned; and, generally, for program improvement.

(Gombey and Larson, 1992)

In the case of the social work degree evaluation, the methods were intended to produce information both on the content and delivery of social work programmes and on the social work students for whom they were provided.

The outcomes of social work education have been defined as:

Changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviour which may be attributed to the teaching and learning opportunities.

(Carpenter, 2005, p.5)

The evaluation aimed to provide two sorts of outcome data: evidence on skills acquisition (discussed in the case study methods section below) and evidence on progression rates among students in terms of the numbers achieving a qualification, failing or withdrawing from programmes.

In order to collect information on both processes and outcomes, data were collected from three main sources:

- HEI ‘Fact Find’ and secondary analysis of GSCC data;
- online student survey; and
- in-depth case studies of six HEIs.

Each was designed to address different aspects of the evaluation and to meet different data requirements. There are different models for collecting and analysing data obtained in mixed methods research (Cresswell and Plano Clark, 2007). In this study, while different data sources were collected concurrently, the research team held regular meetings to discuss progress. In particular, a series of ‘theme days’ were held in which the researchers discussed the separate topics covered by the evaluation looking for shared and diverging themes. These themes were also discussed with the evaluation’s Reference and Advisory Groups (see p.31).

**HEI Fact Find**

As mentioned earlier, information on social work applications and acceptances was available from UCAS. In addition, HESA published details of the numbers of social work students in higher education and on those had graduating each year. However, these data were not suitable for the evaluation because UCAS data excluded part time and employment based applicants applying to HEIs directly and HESA student records included students on courses such as youth work or applied social studies as well as the social work degree. For this reason, it was decided to continue using a short telephone/email survey, or Fact Find, of HEIs offering qualifying programmes in social work developed for an earlier project (Moriarty and Murray, 2004) and undertake two further surveys in 2004-2005 and 2006-2007. The number of replies totalled 46 in 2004-2005 and 52 in 2006-2007. This represented a response rate of 62 and 65 per cent respectively of all the
HEIs offering the social work degree in that period. The HEI Fact Find was generally completed by programme leaders and administrators.

**Secondary data from the GSCC**

Although the GSCC and its predecessor CCETSW published annual Data Packs on the number of students enrolling on social work programmes and the number achieving a qualification, these only provided aggregate data and did not include explorations of associations between different factors, such as gender and progression. Following an agreement between the Department of Health and the GSCC, the GSCC provided individual anonymised records on all 12,925 students enrolling on the new degree from 2003-2006 and comparative data for 12,565 DipSW students enrolling from 2001-2003. Additionally, in May 2007 the GSCC supplied information on 15,090 practice placements undertaken by 8,702 social work students during the period April 2003 to March 2006.

It is impossible to overestimate the contribution made to the evaluation through the acquisition of the GSCC data. Instead of relying on information drawn from a sample, the evaluation was able to provide a national picture on the numbers of people starting social work programmes over a three-year period and early information on the first students qualifying with a social work degree. Furthermore, although it is outside the scope of this evaluation, it created the potential to build on existing work already undertaken by members of the research team (Hussein et al., 2006, BJSW Advance Access doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcl378) which is attempting to examine the hierarchical effect of HEI and student characteristics using multilevel modelling.

As with any secondary data set, the type and format of data collected imposed constraints (Shaw, 2005). The GSCC records students’ key demographic and educational characteristics and the programme they are following but does not collect socio-economic information of the type collected by UCAS. Furthermore, it is more difficult to establish causal relationships using retrospective secondary data than with prospective data specifically designed to answer a research question (Hakim, 2000). However, unlike studies confined to secondary data sources, this evaluation was able to draw on complementary primary data. The advantages were two-fold. For example, once we had GSCC data some of the data obtained earlier through the Fact Find, for example on the size of programmes and practice placements, became redundant in that it was clearly preferable to use population-level data. However, as the GSCC does not record data on applications, it was decided to collect data on this topic in the 2006-2007 Fact Find.

**Online surveys**

It has been argued that it is both desirable and essential to engage students in the systematic evaluation of their own learning (Carpenter, 2005). A range of survey methods has been used to monitor student experiences, including administering questionnaires for self-completion in the classroom (Robinson et al., 2003), combining classroom-based surveys with those completed by students in their own time (Audin et al., 2003), and mixed mode surveys, such
as the National Student Survey (Surridge, 2007) which uses online questionnaires with postal and telephone follow ups for non-responders. In addition, students are regularly asked to complete evaluation forms at the end of modules, semesters, and courses as part of the internal audit procedures within HEIs.

**Comparison of online and paper-based surveys**

Within the extensive literature about how to achieve good survey response rates (for example, Roth and BeVier, 1998; Puffer et al., 2004; Nakash et al., 2006; Edwards et al., 2007), there is an emerging debate about the potential for using online surveys. These have been used for some time in market research but are now being used more extensively in other types of study, especially given declining response rates to traditional postal surveys (Dillman, 2006) and increased access to computers and the internet (Wright, 2005). They are thought to be especially useful as a means of reaching hard to access populations or respondents who have easy access to technology but might not be motivated to complete paper based questionnaires (Braithwaite et al., 2003; Wright, 2005). Among these groups, response rates to online surveys may be higher compared with postal surveys (Cook et al., 2000; Boyer et al., 2002), although overall response rates to online surveys tend to be lower than response rates to postal surveys (McDonald and Adam, 2003). Cook and colleagues' (2000) overview of the use of online surveys concluded that response representativeness was as important as response rate but the difficulty with online surveys is that it is harder to establish a reliable sampling frame from which response rate or response representativeness can be calculated (Braithwaite et al., 2003). In addition, while the number of contacts, personalized contacts, and pre contacts are thought to improve response rates to online surveys (Cook et al., 2000), in comparison with postal surveys, there is a less developed methodology for dealing with non-responders (Kaplowitz et al., 2004).

The chief virtue of online surveys is that they are viewed as being more cost effective because set up costs are generally cheaper than printing and postage and a separate data entry phase is unnecessary (McDonald and Adam, 2003; Al-Omiri, 2007).

**Data collection phases**

A whole population online survey was undertaken of students enrolled in the degree course over the three-year period of the evaluation. This is shown in Table 2.1, which shows the number of students participating in each phase, or wave, of data collection and the stage of their studies at which they completed the survey.

All students registered on the new degree in the academic year 2004-2005 were invited to participate in an online survey at the point of commencing the degree. They were encouraged to complete follow up online questionnaires in years two and three, thus giving a comprehensive overview of the experiences of one cohort of students over the length of the degree. Students commencing the degree in year 2005-2006 were also invited to complete the
online survey in years one and two. Finally, students beginning in 2003-2004 and 2006-2007 completed the survey in their final and first years respectively.

Table 2.1: Online survey phases and numbers of students responding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>2003 intake</th>
<th>2004 intake</th>
<th>2005 intake</th>
<th>2006 intake</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase One</td>
<td>N=437</td>
<td>Phase Two</td>
<td>N=1,362</td>
<td>Phase Seven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=807</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>Phase Four</td>
<td>Phase Six</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=443</td>
<td>N=534</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>Phase Three</td>
<td>Phase Five</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=137</td>
<td>N=224</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The research team had assumed that because HEIs were increasingly using web-based technology for teaching and assessment purposes students would be responsive to this mode of involvement. However, concerns about data protection meant that direct access to students was not possible. Various methods had to be used to engage with academic staff responsible for the degree to request that they facilitated students’ access to and completion of the online questionnaire. This inevitably reduced the overall response rates and meant that there were variations in response rates between different HEIs. More details on the process of student recruitment are included in the Technical Appendix.

The original plan had been to undertake just six phases of data collection. However, faced with both variation in response rates across different HEIs and low overall response rates, despite the different steps taken to improve response rates summarised in the Technical Appendix, a decision was made at the end of 2006 to undertake an additional phase of data collection. A purposive sample of 12 HEIs spanning the full range of programmes in terms of geography, programme size (small, medium and large) and route (college based versus employment based, full time versus part time, and undergraduate versus postgraduate) was derived using GSCC population level data. The sampling frame also included information on the gender, age, and ethnic profile of students enrolled on the programmes. This provided comparative data for interpreting the results of the Phase One and Two surveys, in that it would become clearer whether the views expressed by students taking part in Phases One and Two were similar or dissimilar to those of Phase Seven respondents.

When compared to alternative modes of surveying students, such as leaving questionnaires in students’ pigeonholes or handing them out in the classroom to be completed in students’ own time, classroom administration has been shown to be the most successful method of achieving high response rates (Audin et al., 2003) so it was decided that Phase Seven should consist of inviting first-year students who had enrolled in 2006-2007 in the sample of 12 HEIs to complete a shortened questionnaire in classroom settings. Eight hundred and seven first year students participated in this phase, a response
rate of 70 per cent. Of these, 705 completed a paper version of the survey and 102 completed it online.

Despite the low response rate to the survey, there appears to be no evidence of any systematic attitudinal bias in the findings reported here that could be attributed to the low response rates. Statistical tests were undertaken to check for differences in students' replies to key attitude questions at Phase Seven (first-years, 2006-2007), where the response rate was high, compared to Phases One and Two (first-years, 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 respectively). Differences are few and these can be explained by the changing context of social work over the course of time, as will be discussed in later pages of this report. For example, 'good career prospects' as a motivation for choosing social work rose substantially from 50 per cent (n=220) at Phase 1, to 58 per cent (n=784) at Phase 2, to 67 per cent (n=540) at Phase 7.

In addition to informing the development of a sampling frame for Phase Seven, the GSCC data also enabled us to overcome one of the common criticisms of online surveys cited earlier (Braithwaite et al., 2003), namely the lack of a sampling frame from which responders and non-responders can be compared. These showed that men, older students, part time students, and students from minority ethnic groups were slightly under represented among respondents to the online survey. This information is presented in more detail in Table 3.11.

GSCC profile data were subsequently used to weight the answers to certain attitude questions (see Technical Appendix), and the unweighted and weighted distributions compared and tested for agreement using the Kappa index. The Kappa co-efficients ranged between 0.687 and 1.0, with most above 0.9, indicating strong agreement between unweighted and weighted data. This is further evidence suggesting that while there were some differences between the profile of those responding to the online survey and the profile of the social work student population as a whole, this did not appear to influence the overall patterns of response.

Survey content

The aim of the survey was to give a comprehensive overview of the perceptions of students of their experience of the new degree and to provide individual and aggregate level data of students' views over time. While the evaluation timescale meant that a similar survey could not be administered to DipSW students, the collection of student views over four successive years will provide a basis for future comparisons.

The topics covered by the survey included details of students' backgrounds; their motivations for studying social work; expectations and experiences of aspects of teaching and learning, especially on those aspects of the new degree that were seen to be innovatory; and suggestions for improvements. The initial questionnaire was developed after holding discussion groups with students at different HEIs, selected for contrast in terms of their geography, programme size and programme type. During successive years, further group discussions were used to develop and refine the questionnaires relevant to
different points in their study. For example, additional survey questions on practice learning were asked of students in their second and final years. Answers to the questions were almost all pre-coded but there was an optional open-ended question at the end inviting any other comments.

2006 online national employers’ survey

In 2006, an online national survey for statutory sector employers was undertaken. The sampling frame for the survey consisted of the email addresses of all members of the (then) Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS), as published on the ADSS website. The content of the survey was derived from unstructured interviews with senior staff in Adult and Children’s services in both the statutory and independent sectors.

This survey had not been included in the original evaluation proposal. It was added to provide up to date information on employers’ perceptions of newly qualified social workers – remembering that when the survey took place in the summer of 2006, it would have been highly unlikely that any newly qualified social work degree students would have been in employment – to provide a benchmark for measuring any changes once graduates were entering the workforce in significant numbers. As time was limited, it was decided to focus on statutory sector employers only. Newly qualified social workers tend to seek employment in the statutory sector for their first post (Wallis-Jones and Lyons, 2003), mainly because most voluntary sector employers seeking to fill social work posts are looking for experienced social workers to work in areas such as adoption or palliative care. Forty-seven replies were received to the survey, representing just under a third of the 151 councils with responsibilities for Adult and Children’s services.

Leavers

Research on retention rates in higher education (Davies and Elias, 2003; Yorke, 2004) has demonstrated the challenges in identifying students who have left without achieving their intended qualification. This is partly because of difficulties in establishing up to date contact details and partly because they may be unwilling to discuss what may have been very difficult experiences. It proved more difficult than expected to identify and interview students who had left and only ten responses from leavers were achieved. Three members of staff also shared their experiences of the reasons why some students leave before achieving their intended qualification.

Case studies

Summary of case study methodology

The third aspect of the methodology involved drilling down to provide richer, more detailed and multi-perspective data on the experience of implementing the new degree. Six case study sites were randomly chosen (the only criterion applied was to achieve a geographic spread). Taken as a whole, the six sites offered nine routes to qualification and provided places for 430 students.
The case studies’ methodology involved following the cohorts of students who undertook the degree during a three-year period (2004-2007). All documents related to the validation of the degree and handbooks for students, practice teachers and so on produced during the period were collected. Thirty-seven interviews were undertaken at the outset (Time One) with key stakeholders (course directors, Deans, staff overseeing recruitment and practice learning). Seventeen focus groups were held, attended by 112 students. Seven focus groups and four individual interviews were held with 35 service users and carers who had been involved in differing aspects of the degree within the case study sites. After the students had completed their first practice placement, questionnaires were sent to practice assessors who had provided placement opportunities to students undertaking their first placement, resulting in 122 replies. At the close of the three-year evaluation period, the interviews and focus groups were repeated (Time Two). Telephone interviews were undertaken with employers in organisations recruiting students from the case study sites and practice assessors were asked to describe their experiences of assessing students on their final practice placement. Assessment of students’ readiness to practice using written responses to two vignettes was made at the beginning and towards the close of their programme and this is discussed in more detail in the section on the development of the vignette methodology. Different case study approaches vary in the extent to which the intention is to produce evaluative or generalisable data (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). An important aspect of securing sites’ agreement to take part was the assurance that the evaluation was about evaluating the impact of the degree, and not individual programmes, and this is reflected in the way that data from the sites is presented.

**Realistic evaluation**

The approach to the case studies drew on the principles of realistic evaluation developed by Pawson and Tilley (1997) who argued that, especially for the evaluation of policy implementation, it is not possible to consider outcomes in a vacuum. Realistic evaluation provides a framework for this style of evaluation by establishing the extent to which there is a causal link between a programme and its outcomes. Its basic paradigm is based on the theory that to understand what works and why it works, a researcher has to consider:

- what is distinctive about the particular context; and
- how the measures (mechanisms) being introduced interact with the context to produce the outcomes.

Based on a formula (Context + Mechanism = Outcome (C+M=O)) this process maintains the uniqueness of each situation while suggesting what circumstances (context) are most favourable for successful results (outcomes) from the programme (mechanism):

*Realism, as a philosophy of science, insists that the outcomes unearthed in empirical investigations are intelligible only if we understand the underlying mechanisms which give rise to them and the contexts that sustain them.*

(Pawson & Tilley, 1997, p297)
For the purposes of this evaluation, it meant that as well as gathering data pertinent to the objectives of the degree, we also had to explore the complex inter-relationships between contexts (at both the local and national level) and the process of implementation at the case study sites. As discussed in the previous section, the degree was introduced at a time when policy about the role and purpose of social work was being reviewed and in the context of a higher education sector in a state of flux. Additionally, the evaluation took place at the outset of the new degree. Most programmes at the case study sites were offering a degree level qualification in social work for the first time. The case study method had the potential to monitor how the individual programmes developed in response to these emerging issues in addition to the data from other sources, which has a broader scope. Taken together, the data sources provide a rich and diverse exploration of context, mechanism and outcomes.

Pawson and Tilley (1997) have stated that in evaluation studies it is important to evaluate against the identified expectations of those involved, rather than against some objective, independently imposed criteria. In this study, the tender document represented one set of expectations against which the delivery degree should be measured. However, it was also important to establish a baseline that reflected the understandings and expectations of different informants about the impact of the change to and delivery of the degree.

Readiness to practise

Perhaps of even greater importance than finding out about the extent to which different stakeholder expectations about the new degree had been met, one of the main intentions behind the case study approach was to help answer the study question about whether the degree had led to an increase in the quality of social workers entering the workforce.

Chapter One described how some UK studies have used retrospective global evaluations of newly qualified social workers and employers’ perceptions of their readiness to practice (Marsh and Triseliotis, 1996; Pithouse and Scourfield, 2002; Wallis-Jones and Lyons, 2003). While the online survey contained an item inviting students to assess the likelihood that they would achieve a social work degree, and the employers’ surveys and practice assessor questionnaires asked about practice skills, it was felt to be necessary to find a more substantive method of ascertaining the difference of a degree level qualification, as outlined in the Subject Benchmark Statement for Social Work:

As an applied academic subject, social work is characterised by a distinctive focus on practice in complex social situations to promote and protect individual and collective well being. At honours degree level the study of social work involves the integrated study of subject specific knowledge, skills and values and the critical application of research knowledge from the social and human sciences (and closely related domains) to inform understanding and to underpin action, reflection and evaluation. Honours degree programmes should be designed to help
foster this integration of contextual, analytic, explanatory and practical understanding.

(Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2000, p.11)

Dreyfus and Dreyfus’ model of skills acquisition

While there have been few empirical studies on skills development in social work education, there is a body of literature on skills development in other areas. Most notably, Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) have provided a five-stage model of skills development (explained more fully in Chapter Ten):

- Novice
- Advanced beginner
- Competent
- Proficient
- Expert

While some have criticised this model for implying that skill acquisition is linear (Dall’Alba and Sandberg, 2006; Jacklin et al., 2006), it has proved very influential and has been applied in studies undertaken across nursing (Benner, 1982, 1984, 2004), teaching (Berliner, 1986; Berliner, 2004), occupational therapy (Spalding, 2000) and social work (Fook et al., 2000). All these have found similarities in the way that they identified the skills needed to acquire professional expertise with the Dreyfus and Dreyfus model.

Other published research analysing professional expertise

In addition to the studies cited above of students’ training for entry to different professions, a limited number of other studies have examined how social work students and social workers acquired professional expertise. Ford and colleagues (2004) looked at the development of ‘criticality’ (Barnett, 1997) and ‘critical thinking’ (Bailin et al., 1999) among undergraduates, linking it to social work theorising about ‘critical practice’ (Adams et al., 2002). The development of criticality, they argued, was especially important for:

Social work students [who] are expected not only to think, but to engage in self-reflection and self-development, and then to go out and act, to engage with traditions and solve problems.

(Ford et al., 2004, p.197)

In researching the development of criticality, their focus was on individual students as case studies. They made observations in the classroom, seminars, and tutorials, and on placement supervision sessions, analysed students’ written work and undertook interviews with students to reflect on how they had developed their use of knowledge and theory in their practice. However, the number of students involved in this study was small (n=18) and the method of data collection was clearly very resource intensive.

Floersch (2000) also used observational techniques in his ethnographic study undertaken in the United States looking at case managers’ written and oral
narratives of their interventions with a man with mental health problems. Based on his own research and that of others (2004), he argued that it was necessary to find a way of understanding the links between ‘technical rational’ knowledge (scientific or textbook knowledge) (p.162) and ‘knowledge in action’ (knowledge gained from practice) (p.163). Citing Fook (2002), he explained that this could also be viewed as looking at the connections between ‘top down’ and ‘bottom up’ theories. His thinking drew heavily on the work of Schön (1987) who had earlier argued that theoretical and technical skills were necessary but insufficient in themselves and that professionals must also rely on knowledge gained from practice.

While Floersch had focused upon the ‘real life’ interactions and records used by the case managers in his study, other researchers have used simulated examples, or vignettes, which have been described as ‘short stories about hypothetical characters in specified circumstances to whose situation the interviewee is invited to respond’ (Finch, 1987, p.105). Thus, while not real examples, they present participants with real life decision-making situations (Soydan and Stal, 1994; Taylor, 2006). They have a long history in social research and examples can be dated back as far as the early 1970s (Nosanchuk, 1972; Rossi et al., 1974), although longer vignettes designed to elicit more complex and detailed responses were not to emerge until later (West et al., 1984; Finch, 1987). They are thought to provide a less personal, and therefore less threatening, way of exploring sensitive topics (Barter and Renold, 1999), hence their wide use in studies of professional practice, (Hughes and Huby, 2002, 2004; Wilks, 2004; Charles and Manthorpe, 2007) where a practitioner might feel that his or her knowledge or skills are under scrutiny. They also offer the possibility of examining different groups’ interpretations of a ‘uniform’ situation. Responses can then be analysed to reveal the level of harmony or discord between different participants’ evaluations, thus providing benchmarks for understanding differences in interpretation (Barter and Renold, 1999).

Sheppard and colleagues (Sheppard et al., 2000; Sheppard et al., 2001; Sheppard and Ryan, 2003) asked social workers to ‘think aloud’ about how they would respond to a series of three vignettes as if they were actual referrals on which they needed to act. When presented with these situations, the social workers generated hypotheses showing the links they had made between theoretical knowledge and knowledge they had developed through experience. Nevertheless, differences did emerge in the way that various social workers in the sample had applied their knowledge. These differences, Sheppard and colleagues concluded, raised questions about how social work students were taught the reasoning processes that they would need to use in practice situations to inform decision-making.

On the one hand, Sheppard and colleagues’ work provided new evidence on how vignettes could be used to demonstrate the processes used by social workers in reaching decisions. On the other, the study was carried out at one point in time and with a sample of qualified social workers. At what stage had the social workers developed the ability to acquire knowledge and integrate it into practice and was this something that could be observed in students?
Further evidence on this came from the only published longitudinal study in social work to have observed professional development over time (Fook et al., 2000) and cited earlier in the sections on methodological challenges and the Dreyfus' model of skills acquisition. Commencing with a group of students starting their social work training, Fook and colleagues plotted social work students over a five-year period through university and into the workforce, seeking to build up a picture of expertise and how that expertise was learned and developed over time. The study drew on the concepts of professional expertise developed by Dreyfus (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1986) and Benner (Benner, 1984) and was an attempt to replicate Benner’s study of nurses (Benner, 1982, 1984). They also used vignettes to interview students about their practice and undertook critical incident analysis to establish what the students identified as informing their approaches to practice.

The findings showed that in their second and third years of practice, participants had become more confident and clearer about the social work role. Many of them also showed contextual knowledge in which they showed awareness of the organisational and bureaucratic boundaries in which they operated and of the resources available in the wider community on which they could draw. Nevertheless, distinctions could be drawn between those who were competent and those who were proficient. Competent workers focused on the ‘here and now’ (for example, should a child be removed from the family home?) and on not making any obvious mistakes. Proficient workers applied sophisticated situational rules, viewing situations holistically and focusing on the difference that they themselves could make in a situation.

While broadly conforming to Dreyfus and Dreyfus’ five stages outlined in Table 2.2, Fook and colleagues also considered the learning that students had brought to their education, adding a pre-student stage, and dividing the expert category into experienced and expert in order to differentiate between experienced practice that might be routinised and expert practice that could be innovatory or creative. They also added more contextual dimensions in order to highlight their view of expertise in social work as demonstrating the ability to deal with complexities and uncertainties in changing situations (Fook et al., 2000, pp.181-186).

**Development of vignette methodology in the evaluation**

The development of a methodology that would discern the level of analysis and application of knowledge when considering practice at the outset of the degree, and on completion of the degree, was complex. The first consideration was that, while useful as a broad indicator, global self-assessments of skills and knowledge also have their limitations. Although there has been a longstanding culture of helping students to develop self-assessment skills in social work education (Burgess et al., 1999), there has been no published study testing the accuracy of self-assessed versus observed levels of skill in social work, or comparing student and assessor perceptions. There is, however, limited but cautionary evidence from other fields. One meta analysis of student, teacher, and peer assessment found that greater congruence might be achieved in academic assessments than when assessing professional practice (Falchikov and Goldfinch, 2000) and a
systematic review of physicians’ competence suggested that the most confident doctors were often those who were least skilled (Davis et al., 2006).

Secondly, the option of observational assessments, as used by Floersch (2000) or Ford and colleagues (Ford et al., 2004) was not possible given the Department of Health’s expectation that there would be six geographically dispersed case study sites. Finally, although using examples of actual assessed work from students was an option, given the variation in curricula and in the timing of modules on a given topic, it would have been difficult to find an example of assessed work that could be analysed in a uniform way.

For these reasons, a decision was made to use vignettes. Because of the potentially large numbers of students at the case study sites, we chose to administer the vignettes as a paper based exercise. While written responses might not yield such rich qualitative data as that obtained through interviews it allowed for more students to participate and provided an opportunity for quantitative analyses of vignette data, a hitherto unexplored process. Two vignettes (a children and families case and an adult social care case) were developed by the researchers and discussed with the study’s Advisory Group (see below), after which amendments were made. Students at each case study site were invited to attend a session in their first year of study and before they had started their 200 days of supervised practice. The same cohort was asked to respond to the same vignettes towards the end of their programmes after completing all their practice placements.

A major debate in the literature relates to the relationship between responses to vignettes and the actual practice of those who participate. There is no guarantee that the responses given will mirror behaviour of respondents in their professional practice (Wilks, 2004, p.82). However, the evaluation of the degree was not just about action and skills. It was about the impact that studying at degree level may have on students’ conceptualisations of professional practice:

There can be little doubt that vignette-based experiences are different from real life but whether this makes it an unsuitable research tool depends on the rationale for using it. If vignettes are employed in an attempt to match real life experiences then they have clear limitations. If however, they are used to provide an interpretation of the real world and present it in such a way that it provides people with a situated context in which to respond they can make a useful contribution to research methodology.

(Hughes, 1998, p.383)

In this study, vignettes were administered across different HEI settings, elicited responses to the same scenarios at two different time points, could be analysed in conjunction with other data from practice assessors, tutors and students themselves, and provided a point of comparison with other studies such as Benner (1984) and Fook and colleagues (2000).
Coding the vignettes and achieving reliability

Given the number of vignettes and the fact that they were rated by different members of the research team, it was important to achieve good levels of inter-rater reliability in coding. More information on the quality assurance process for coding and analysing the vignettes is included on pages 44-55 and in Annexes N and O in the Technical Appendix. In summary, firstly, a proforma and coding protocol were developed so that all the researchers worked from the same framework. It was then refined using pilot data at a training day attended by all the researchers involved in coding the vignettes. This was followed up by two discussion days in which the researchers identified themes that had emerged from the data. In an attempt to reduce potential sources of bias, student demographic data were separated from the vignette answers and researchers did not code answers from the sites in which they had undertaken fieldwork. However, the longitudinal study design meant that a large amount of fieldwork was scheduled for the final months of the evaluation. This meant that it was not possible to delay coding the Time One vignettes until after the Time Two vignettes were completed so that the researchers were not ‘blind’ to the stage at which students had completed them. However, a sub-sample of Time One and Time Two vignettes with all identifiers removed were analysed by one of the researchers who had not been involved the first round of coding. Members of the Advisory Group also coded an example of a completed answer individually and collectively and shared their views with the research team.

Role of Advisory Group and Reference Group

Advisory, or steering, groups play a key role in providing strategic and specific advice for researchers, particularly in large scale projects where the consequences of unanticipated problems are greater. By asking them to comment on material generated by the study, they can be used as a way of validating study data and findings (Cresswell and Plano Clark, 2007). The Advisory Group for the evaluation consisted of 17 people with experience of using services and of caring. They met nine times throughout the evaluation. Their contribution brought technical benefits to the research (Fisher, 2002) in that they were involved in commenting on schedules and questionnaires as well as analysing some of the data. The Reference Group for the project was made up of representatives of key stakeholders such as policymakers, representatives of regulatory bodies and employers’ organisations, social work educators and representatives from the Advisory Group. A total of 23 people served on the Reference Group over the course of the project and they reviewed the progress of the evaluation and provided advice to the research team.

Summary of data collected

In an evaluation such as this, drawing on multiple sources of information, it is difficult to follow conventions for reporting on sampling and response rates. Table 2.2 summarises the data collected for the evaluation and, where possible and appropriate, the response rates achieved. Details for case study
data collected at each of the case study sites is included in the Technical Appendix.

**Table 2.2: Summary of data collected for the evaluation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of data</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>% Response rate</th>
<th>Year collected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Population level data</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GSCC student data (new degree)</td>
<td>12,925</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>2003-2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GSCC student data (DipSW)</td>
<td>12,565</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>2001-2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GSCC practice placements*</td>
<td>15,090</td>
<td></td>
<td>2003-2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase One online survey**</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>9-10</td>
<td>2004-2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase Two online survey**</td>
<td>1362</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2005-2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase Three online survey**</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>2003-2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase Four online survey**</td>
<td>443</td>
<td>9-10</td>
<td>2004-2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase Five online survey**</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2004-2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase Six online survey**</td>
<td>534</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2005-2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006 national employers survey</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sample data</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leavers</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase Seven paper/online survey</td>
<td>807</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEI Fact Find</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>2004-2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEI Fact Find</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>2006-2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Case study data</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice assessor questionnaires</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Time One)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice assessor questionnaires</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Time Two)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service user and carer interviews</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>2005-2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Time One)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service user and carer focus</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>groups (Time Two)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service user and carer interviews</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>2005-2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Time Two)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service user and carer focus</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>2007</td>
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<tr>
<td>groups (Time Two)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutor and senior manager</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>2005-2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interviews (Time One)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutor and senior manager</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interviews (Time Two)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student focus groups (Time One)</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>2005-2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student focus groups (Time Two)</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer interviews</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vignettes (Time One)†</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vignettes (Time Two)†</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Relates to the number of placements for 8702 students. **Estimated using total number of students enrolled for the new degree in the given year as a maximum base and excluding those withdrew as minimum base- information on withdrawals was not complete for 2005-2006 cohort. These figures represent the response rate as a proportion of total potential response rate. The actual response rate, derived from the response rate among those who actually received the survey is unknown but it is likely to have been considerably higher than the potential response rate. †Calculated using the 430 places offered on all the programmes across the study sites as the base. This is likely to be an underestimate for Time Two as it assumes that the number of students remained unchanged.
Data analysis

The Technical Appendix includes detailed information on data analysis, in particular on the separate factor analyses undertaken to develop a scale for analysing the vignettes and for analysing the online survey. Depending upon the properties of the quantitative data, a combination of parametric and non-parametric statistics, logistic regression and factor analysis was used to analyse the quantitative data, such as the online survey or GSCC data. Qualitative data from interviews in the case study sites were analysed using NVivo. Nodes were developed to reflect the key research questions (see Technical Appendix) and transcripts of all interviews and focus groups were analysed using these nodes. Data relating to each of the research questions could then be collated for the purposes of analysis.

Discussion

Taken together, Chapters One and Two illustrate the challenges stemming from both the timing and remit of the evaluation. The topics identified in the tender document were extremely broad and had to span multiple aspects of the implementation of the degree. Our task was hampered by the sparse nature of much existing research on social work education. Although it provided important contextual information for the evaluation in terms of clarifying changes and continuities in social work education since the introduction of the degree, there was a limited evidence base on which to draw. Importantly, the evaluation took place at the early stages of the implementation of the degree but too late to enable a design based on a two-group comparison of DipSW and degree students. It ended before the students participating in the study had entered the workforce and so it is unable to offer any information on the performance of degree students in the workplace. Earlier research (Marsh and Triseliotis, 1996; Wallis Jones and Lyons, 2003) was based upon samples of former students who had qualified around six months previously. In choosing to look at students over the course of their studies, the evaluation was able to collect prospective, as well as retrospective data, which is subject to recall bias. However, such is the fast moving nature of much recent policy development, there is now greater interest in newly qualified social workers’ experiences in the workforce. Few could have predicted in 2003 when the first degree programmes began that questions would have been raised about the suitability of the generic nature of the qualification almost before the first students had even graduated, let alone entered the workplace. Otherwise, the focus of the evaluation might have shifted towards looking at the transitions into the workplace rather than on the early experiences of students.

Nevertheless, the evaluation itself provides some important methodological lessons that could help inform future evaluations of social work education. The experiences of administering questionnaires in classroom settings and for completion in students’ own time supports existing research that better response rates are achieved in classroom settings. However, this method is much more intensive in terms of researcher time and the levels of cooperation that have to be achieved with partners in the research, in this case the HEIs who had to dovetail the survey administration with other
requirements of the timetable and with students themselves who face multiple commitments in terms of demands on their time. In addition, using written responses to vignettes is novel and certainly enabled a larger dataset of responses to be gathered than if students had been interviewed. The use of secondary data from the GSCC highlights the value of combining primary and secondary data sources as each can complement the other. Finally, the evaluation highlighted the importance of being able to draw on multiple perspectives, rather than a single group of informants.

Despite the limitations and complexities outlined above, as the following chapters presenting and discussing the study findings will show, the evaluation was able to follow the process by which students chose to study social work; applied for a place on a programme; and their experiences as they progressed from being a new student to achieving a professional qualification in social work.

**Terminology**

Different social work programmes have differing managerial and organisational arrangements. In order to protect the anonymity of social work and other staff interviewed for the case studies, the generic term ‘programme leader’ is used in later chapters to describe those responsible for individual programmes, and ‘senior HEI/social work staff’ is used to describe heads of department, budget holders, and so on. On the advice of the Advisory Group we have used the term ‘service user involvement’, rather than participation as involvement was felt to better reflect the diversity in the levels of engagement that have taken place with people with experience of using services in social work education and to recognise that participation implies a greater sharing of power that accords more with democratic than with consumerist models of involvement (Beresford, 2002). We also recognise that the term ‘service user’ is controversial, and indeed, was rejected by some of those participating in this study. In using it, we draw on the experience of *Shaping Our Lives* (Undated) who define it as an active and positive term to describe the shared experiences of people who may have experienced oppression and discrimination as a result of their experience of using services and as a way of emphasising the collective knowledge and experience that they bring to any discussions (Beresford, 2005).
Chapter Three:
Numbers of Social Work Students and their Characteristics

*We all need to ensure that this comprehensive investment in social work education and training achieves our aims of improving services to users, a better trained workforce and an increase in the level of recruitment, and that social workers at long last are recognised for the professionals that we all know they are.*

(Smith, 2002)

*We must give care workers more opportunities to develop their skills, for their own sake, but for the good of the people they support as well.*

(Johnson, 2007)

**Summary**

This chapter uses national data on all DipSW and degree students beginning social work qualifying programmes in England between 2001-2006 to examine the impact of the degree on the numbers of enrolments and students’ demographic characteristics. It shows a steady increase in the number of enrolments, with enrolments now higher than they have been for a decade. Social work students have also become more diverse in terms of their age and ethnicity but the proportion of men and students with disabilities enrolling on programmes remains unchanged. The evidence on the overall provision of flexible study routes such as employment-based or part time programmes when compared with the DipSW appears to be equivocal and further work is required to see if the changes represent an anomaly during the transitional stages of the implementation of the degree or if they are part of a longer term trend.

**Key findings**

- In 2005-2006, 5676 students enrolled on degree programmes compared with a decade ago when there were just 4114 DipSW enrolments (an increase of 38 per cent), showing that the policy aim of achieving an increase in the number of social work students has been achieved.

- A further policy objective aimed at removing the age barriers to qualifying as a social worker so as to increase the number of younger students would also appear to have been achieved. However, the gender balance of social work students remains heavily skewed in favour of women.

- Future work will be needed to identify the availability of flexible approaches to qualifying as a social worker, such as employment-based and part time routes. These have been an important source of recruitment in the past and have operated as a skills escalator to attract a range of people into the profession.
Scope of chapter

In this chapter, GSCC data are used to provide partial answers to two of the key questions for the evaluation:

1. Has the new social work degree increased the quantity and quality of qualified social workers entering the workforce?

2. What are the main outcomes of the change from diploma to degree level study?

It also sets the context for later chapters using data from students participating in the online survey and focus groups in the case study sites, and from students completing vignettes in the case study sites by presenting the population baseline against which their demographic characteristics can be compared. This forms a reference point for future research on social work education by presenting the demographic backgrounds of students enrolling on the first three years of the degree.

Numbers of students enrolling on DipSW and degree programmes

An important aim behind the introduction of the new degree was to increase the number of applicants to social work programmes. This was because of widespread concerns about the number of vacancies (Eborall, 2003, 2005), the so-called ‘greying’ of the workforce in that a high proportion of social workers were aged 40 years old and over (Smyth, 1996; Huxley and Evans, 2005; Manthorpe and Moriarty, Forthcoming), and increasing competition from new roles likely to attract people with a social work background, such as working in Connexions or a Youth Offending Team (School of Human and Health Sciences: University of Huddersfield, 2003). Figure 3.1 shows that a key policy objective to increase the number of social work students would broadly seem to have been achieved.

Figure 3.1: Distribution of DipSW and degree students by type of programme (GSCC data)

Figures for 1993-2001 taken from the CCETSW/GSCC Data Packs. Data for years 2003-2006 obtained directly from GSCC.
Figure 3.1 shows the decline in student numbers from 1994-1999 and the increase from 2001-2002, the year in which the previous highest total of 4531 in 1993-1994 was surpassed. From 2001-2002 to 2005-2006, there was a steady increase in student numbers. The peak of 5819 in 2003-2004 was exceptional in that it was the only year in which DipSW and degree students enrolled concurrently. That year, 3255 DipSW and 2564 degree students began social work qualifying programmes. Several participants in the 2004-2005 Fact Find suggested that once the new degree had been announced some students rushed to apply for the last DipSW programmes because of the shorter length of time that it would take to qualify, particularly for part time routes. The decline in the number of enrolments the following year, 2004-2005, is largely explained by the fact that Open University students beginning in February 2005 were enrolled on the K100 course *Understanding Health and Social Care* and were not registered with the GSCC as social work degree students that year.

**Type of programme**

The option of studying for a professional qualifying programme at postgraduate level is generally thought to be an important way of widening the ‘pool’ of potential students, especially if it is possible to offer options for accelerated learning and financial support (Scottish Institute for Excellence in Social Work Education, 2006). Chapter One explained that the DipSW could be obtained through studying at non-graduate (Diploma of Higher Education), undergraduate, or postgraduate level. Under the degree, undergraduate and postgraduate options continued. Table 3.1 shows the distribution of DipSW and degree students by type of programme.

**Table 3.1: Distribution of DipSW and degree students by type of programme (GSCC data)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>01-02</th>
<th>02-03</th>
<th>03-04</th>
<th>04-05</th>
<th>05-06</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N %</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-graduate</td>
<td>2637</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>2993</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>1909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>854</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>951</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>877</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>962</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total n</td>
<td>4404</td>
<td></td>
<td>4906</td>
<td></td>
<td>3255</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>03-04</th>
<th>04-05</th>
<th>05-06</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DipSW</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>2446</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>3796</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>81</td>
<td>4525</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>889</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1151</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total n</td>
<td>2564</td>
<td>4685</td>
<td>5676</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although there was a decline in the proportion of postgraduate students in 2003-2004, this was explained by the fact that most HEIs did not offer postgraduate social work degree programmes until 2004-2005. Table 3.1 suggests that at this stage there is no evidence that the advent of the degree has altered the proportion of students studying at postgraduate level.

**Employment-based routes**

Employment-based routes to a qualification in social work, whereby employers assist students in various ways through help with fees and/or paid
study time, are one of the steps taken to deal with local recruitment shortages (Dunworth, 2007). Although employment-based routes to gaining a social work qualification have existed for some considerable time (Balloch, 1999; Payne, 2005), their availability has varied. For example, the 1999 University of East London survey of newly qualified social workers (Wallis-Jones and Lyons, 2001) found a dramatic reduction in the use of secondment when compared with their results for 1995 (Wallis-Jones and Lyons, 1996). Strikingly, remembering that the overwhelming majority of 1999 qualifiers would have enrolled in the 1997-1998 academic year, this decline coincided with an overall reduction in social work enrolments in the mid-1990s, shown in Figure 3.1. However, more recently, interest has revived in expanding the social work workforce by increasing the opportunities for unqualified staff to gain a professional qualification. Every Child Matters called for more:

Options for flexible and attractive training routes into social work, including work-based training.

(Para 1.1, HM Treasury, 2003)

This accords with wider government policy objectives of widening participation in higher education and of supporting lifelong learning. The government’s response to the Langlands report on access to the professions (2005) called on HEIs and employers to work more closely together in developing ‘flexible learning pathways’ and more ‘co-financed provision’ (Department for Education and Skills, 2005) and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills has funded the GSCC to undertake a study of ‘grow your own’ schemes in social work which is due to report in 2008. This will provide new information on current practices in terms of providing employment-based routes to a social work qualification.

Table 3.2 shows the proportion of DipSW and degree students who were college-based or employment-based. Overall, Table 3.2 suggests that the proportion of students reporting that they were college-based is higher among the new degree students. However, there are reasons why this difference may be less stark than it appears.

Table 3.2: Distribution of DipSW and degree students by employment status (GSCC data)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>DipSW N</th>
<th>DipSW %</th>
<th>Degree N</th>
<th>Degree %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>01-02</td>
<td>02-03</td>
<td>03-04</td>
<td>04-05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College-based</td>
<td>3271</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>3569</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment-based</td>
<td>1133</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1337</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid n*</td>
<td>4404</td>
<td>4906</td>
<td>3255</td>
<td>2548</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The totals differ from those presented in Table 3.1 because of missing values.
Typically, most employment-based DipSW students were seconded onto part-time non-graduate programmes (Moriarty et al., Submitted). Strikingly, the proportion of students on employment routes was highest (41 per cent, n=1303) in 2003-2004, possibly because employers preferred to second employees onto the shorter (and thus cheaper) DipSW programmes before they ended. There were also fewest employment-based degree students that year. As explained earlier, part of the explanation for this is that the Open University did not enrol students onto a new degree programme in 2003-2004. Furthermore, employers increasingly appear to prefer to use traineeships, whereby they recruit students to study full time on college-based programmes, meeting the costs of their fees and paying them at the level equivalent or slightly higher than the bursary but not providing a salary. This contrasts with the traditional model of secondment in which staff already in post continue in their usual employment but are given paid study time. Students on traineeships may be more likely to define themselves as college-based. Moreover, it should also be acknowledged that the GSCC derive this information from students and some of them are not always clear about their precise status (Wallis-Jones and Lyons, 2003). Further support for the suggestion that this data may slightly under-count students supported by an employer would seem to be indicated in the subsequent section on students’ financial support.

Students’ financial support

One of the most important policy decisions accompanying the new degree was the introduction of the bursary. Although bursaries were available to DipSW students, except for the postgraduate student bursary they were means tested. Once local authority maintenance grants were phased out, non-graduate and undergraduate DipSW students not supported by an employer had to support themselves through student loans or other means of support. This was identified as a major reason for the decline in the number of social work students (Wallis-Jones and Lyons, 2003). Table 3.3 compares students enrolling on the DipSW and the new degree between 2001-2006 according to the type of financial support that they reported receiving. The categories used in the table are those collected by the GSCC and so it is not possible to provide more precise definitions than these.

Table 3.3: Distribution of DipSW and degree students by financial support (GSCC data)

<table>
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<td>N</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Bursary</strong> *</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>948</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1078</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1249</td>
<td>40</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1299</td>
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<td>2369</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Discretionary grant</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>299</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>57</td>
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<td>78</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mandatory grant</strong> **</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1193</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1278</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>660</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1009</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1339</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
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<td><strong>Secondment</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>609</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>734</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>622</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>189</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>584</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

39
Table 3.3 shows that in 2001-2002 and 2002-2003, the proportions of DipSW students receiving a bursary or mandatory grant were quite similar, at around a fifth for the former and a quarter for the latter. In the last year of the DipSW (2003-2004), 40 per cent of DipSW students (n=1249) reported that they received a bursary and around 10 per cent (n=306) reported having a mandatory grant. As the majority of postgraduate degree programmes began in 2004-2004, it may be that postgraduate students comprised a higher proportion of students not supported by an employer in 2003-2004. Since the introduction of the degree, the bursary has proved to be the most frequent form of financial support for students, although this has fallen from about half of those enrolling in 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 to 39 per cent (n=2101) in 2005-2006. At 11 and nine per cent respectively, the proportion of students paying their own tuition fees in 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 was higher than that found in subsequent cohorts.

The number of seconded students was higher both absolutely and proportionally among DipSW students. However, in 2005-2006 when the first Open University students were enrolled with the GSCC on degree programmes, the combined proportion of students reporting being seconded or sponsored increased to 24 per cent (n=1294). This figure is higher than the figure for employment-based students shown in Table 3.2 (n=1027), suggesting some students on college-based programmes are being supported by an employer. Nevertheless, Table 3.3 indicates an overall reduction in the number of students supported by an employer. There may also be issues about the reduction in secondments since this may disadvantage those who have held posts in social care and who wish to acquire a professional qualification (Higham et al., 2001) but whose circumstances would not permit them to give up paid employment.

Mode of study

The availability of flexible study routes is thought to be an important way of attracting students who may not have had an opportunity to enter higher education.
education earlier in their lives (Bowl, 2001; Reay et al., 2002) but whose employment or family commitments prevent them from studying full time (Callender et al., 2006). Table 3.4 shows the proportion of full time, part time and distance students enrolling on the new degree between 2003-2006.

**Table 3.4:** Distribution of DipSW and degree students by mode of study (GSCC data)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>01-02</th>
<th></th>
<th>02-03</th>
<th></th>
<th>03-04</th>
<th></th>
<th>03-04</th>
<th></th>
<th>04-05</th>
<th></th>
<th>05-06</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full time</td>
<td>3100</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>3516</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>1811</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>2256</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>4211</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>4702</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time</td>
<td>917</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>941</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>467</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>952</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>387</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>449</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>977</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total n</td>
<td>4404</td>
<td></td>
<td>4906</td>
<td></td>
<td>3255</td>
<td></td>
<td>2564</td>
<td></td>
<td>4685</td>
<td></td>
<td>5676</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The decline in part time and distance students shown in Table 3.4 may partly be attributed to changes in the way the GSCC record data. The term ‘distance’ really describes the mode of delivery and students on distance programmes study either full time or part time. Thus, the change between the DipSW and the degree in terms of the number of distance students partly reflects the fact that Open University students were included within the ‘distance’ category under the DipSW but degree students are recorded as part time (Helen Wenman, personal communication). While Table 3.4 clearly shows that full time routes now predominate, the increasing popularity of ‘blended learning’ approaches in which teaching is provided both through online and face-to-face delivery may mean that these distinctions will become increasingly blurred. However, this will only become clearer with time.

**Recruitment by Region**

Unlike nursing where the NHS regions agree contracts with local HEIs for running nurse qualifying programmes, social work programmes are not commissioned this way. However, it is very important to have a sense of social work student recruitment by Government Office Region (GOR) because evidence from the last University of East London DipSW survey showed that around 90 per cent of social workers went on to take up paid employment in the region in which they studied, with only London and the South East ‘importing’ more social workers than they trained (Wallis-Jones and Lyons, 2003). Furthermore, vacancy rates for qualified social workers also vary by region, with London tending to have higher vacancy rates (Eborall, 2003, 2005). Table 3.5 presents the distribution of students recruited for the DipSW and the new degree by the region in which they studied and by different academic cohorts.
Table 3.5: Distribution of students recruited for the DipSW and new degree by HEI region (GSCC data)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>DipSW</th>
<th>New Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Mids.</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>629</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>652</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>613</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Mids.</td>
<td>454</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire &amp; Humberside</td>
<td>535</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total n</strong></td>
<td><strong>4052</strong></td>
<td><strong>4482</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The population in millions living in each region is as follows: Eastern, 5.4; East Midlands, 4.2; London, 7.4; North East, 2.5; North West, 6.8; South East, 8.0; South West, 5.0; West Midlands, 5.3; Yorkshire & Humberside, 5.0 (Office for National Statistics, 2002).

As we were using anonymised data, we did not know students’ addresses. Technically, students living in localities bordering two regions might live in one and study in another so Table 4.5 should only be taken as giving a broad perspective on recruitment by region. The table also excludes Open University students because they study through distance learning and it would not have been possible to identify the region in which they lived without knowing their addresses.

Table 3.5 shows that the largest proportion of social work students are studying in the North West and that this remains true both of the DipSW and the degree. There has been a rise in the proportion of students studying in London since the degree began but given that adults and children’s services are together providing a service to over 15 million people living in London and the South East (Office for National Statistics, 2002), it is likely that they will continue to be, in the word of Wallis Jones and Lyons (2003), ‘net importers’ of newly qualified social workers without a substantial increase in training places and the consequent investment in social work education staff, practice assessors, and practice placements that this would require.

Diversity and social work students

Although it is important to know the number of people enrolling on social work programmes, it is equally vital to understand whether any particular groups of people are under represented in relation to their proportions within the population as a whole. Table 3.6 summarises the demographic
characteristics of DipSW and degree students from data collected by the GSCC and each aspect is then discussed in more detail separately.

**Gender**

As is well known, social work is an occupationally gendered profession with women outnumbering men considerably, except in senior positions (Balloch et al., 1999; Christie, 2001, 2006). Both Figure 3.2, and Table 3.6 which follows, show that the gender distribution of social work students has barely changed since 2001.

**Figure 3.2:** Proportions of men and women enrolled on DipSW and degree programmes (GSCC data)

The figures shown in Figure 3.1 represent a continuing decline from the 1970s (Lyons et al., 1995) and onwards (Perry and Cree, 2003). The proportion of men is, on average, slightly lower among degree than among DipSW students. Figure 3.1 also shows that, consistent with earlier research (Lyons et al., 1995), proportionally more men are studying on postgraduate than on undergraduate programmes.

This gender imbalance is not unique to social work; other areas of social care, particularly early years services, have even lower proportions of men (Children’s Workforce Development Council, 2006) and specific campaigns to attract men to work in Children’s Services, such as *Working in Early Years. It’s not just child’s play* (Surestart, Undated) have been implemented. While men tend to experience better career progression than women once qualified (Davey et al., 2000; Davey, 2002), they tend to have poorer progression while students (Taylor, 1994; Cree, 2001; Hussein et al., BJSW Advance Access doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcl378). As the sections on motivations and gender and applications and gender in Chapters Four and Five respectively will show, it is possible that there are specific issues surrounding the recruitment of men to social work programmes.
Table 3.6: Distribution of DipSW and degree students by selected demographic characteristics (GSCC data)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>818</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>844</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>621</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>3583</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>4061</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>2634</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity (GSCC definitions) *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>British</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>2965</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>3346</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>2235</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European (UK)</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European (Other)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any other White background</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal White</td>
<td>3408</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>3813</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>2546</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed White &amp; Black Caribbean</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed White and Black African</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed White and Asian</td>
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<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Any other Mixed background</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal Mixed</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Indian</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>88</td>
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<td>Asian Pakistani</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Bangladeshi</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal Asian</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Caribbean</td>
<td>280</td>
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<td>277</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black African</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any other Black Background</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal Black</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>625</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>11</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
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<td>Other ethnic group</td>
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<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>Any other ethnic background</td>
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<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal Chinese &amp; any other ethnic group</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;20</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>107</td>
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<td>40</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>756</td>
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<td>824</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>586</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
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<td>1684</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1070</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
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<td>34</td>
<td>1651</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1041</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No disability</td>
<td>3582</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>3943</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>2694</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical disability/mobility</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensory impairment</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyslexia</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health difficulties</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other**</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total n†</td>
<td>4404</td>
<td></td>
<td>4906</td>
<td></td>
<td>3255</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Although broadly conforming to the 2001 Census categories, the way that the GSCC records ethnicity for white people is different from the 2001 Census question used in England. ** Includes unseen disabilities. † Subtotals may be different due to a small proportion of missing values.
Ethnicity

Table 3.6 suggests that although students defining themselves as white continue to comprise the majority of social work students, there are proportionately more students defining themselves as being from a Black and minority ethnic group (BME) enrolled on degree than on DipSW programmes. However, the three cohorts of degree students have an almost identical distribution of students by ethnicity so the proportion has not increased from cohort to cohort since the degree was introduced. The increase in the proportion of students from a BME background is almost entirely attributable to an increase in the proportion of students from Black African backgrounds, who have risen from five per cent (n=231) in 2001-2002 to 11 per cent (n=591) in 2005-2006.

Age

Table 3.6 also reflects the removal of the minimum age requirement at which students could qualify as a social worker, as mentioned earlier in Chapter One. In the past, only one or two per cent of students started DipSW programmes before the age of 20 whereas the proportion of students in this age group has risen steadily to 14 per cent (n=974) in 2005-2006. Students aged between 18-25 have risen from 18 per cent (n=815) in 2001-2002 to 34 per cent (n=1919) in 2005-2006, meaning that they now make up a third of social work students as a whole. By contrast, the proportion of students aged 35 or more has declined from 45 per cent (n=1999) in 2001-2002 to 34 per cent (n=1934) in 2005-2006.

Disability

A recent Formal Investigation undertaken by the former Disability Rights Commission into fitness standards in training, qualifying and working in nursing, teaching and social work concluded that current assessments and decision-making processes required greater professional guidance, although most education providers were addressing their obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 2005. Research commissioned to inform the Investigation (Stanley et al., 2007) concluded that barriers for students continued to exist but that there were positive accounts of the adjustments and accommodations made in social work education and in HEIs more generally. However, we currently know very little about the prevalence of disability among social workers and social work students and new social constructions of disability emphasise the importance of unseen disabilities, such as mental health difficulties, epilepsy or Crohn’s disease, in a way that was less appreciated in the past (Wray et al., 2005). Table 3.5 shows that around ten per cent of students across both DipSW and degree cohorts reported having some kind of disability. As with gender, but unlike age and ethnicity, the proportion of students reporting a disability has remained constant. Among the 92 per cent who chose to disclose their disability status, the most common type of recorded disability was dyslexia, which is similarly distributed across DipSW and degree students. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to compare these data with data on all students in higher education. HESA records how many students receive Disabled Students’ Allowance (DSA) but this under represents the proportion of students with a disability as not all students choose to disclose their disability status and not all students with disabilities will apply, or qualify, for DSA. Notwithstanding this constraint, HESA data show that currently just four per cent of full time undergraduate students receive DSA (Higher
Earlier research based upon data collected in the late 1990s (Riddell et al., 2005a, b) found that around four per cent of students had a disability. As with social work students, dyslexia was the most frequently occurring disability.

**Relationships between different demographic characteristics of social work students**

GSCC data were also used to examine the statistical associations between the different demographic characteristics of DipSW and degree students.

**Disability, ethnicity, and gender**

Riddell and colleagues (2005b) found that access to higher education was unequal among students with disabilities, with white students from higher socio-economic backgrounds reaching similar levels of participation to students as a whole. By contrast, Black students with disabilities and students from lower socio-economic backgrounds were particularly under represented. However, since then, the passage of the *Disability Discrimination Act 2005* has heightened awareness within the HEI sector of the need to support students with disabilities so it is possible that there have been some improvements since then. However, it is also worth emphasising that the proportion of the working-age population with a disability ranges from 12-16 per cent (Burchardt, 2000) so even though it would appear that there are proportionally more social work students with disabilities than there are students with disabilities in higher education as a whole, people with disabilities are still under represented among social work students.

The GSCC does not record students’ socio-economic backgrounds so it is not possible to see whether Riddell and colleagues’ (2005a, b) findings on socio-economic status also applied to social work students but it was possible to look at their ethnicity and gender. As Table 3.6 showed, there was such a variation in the number of students represented in each ethnic group as defined by the GSCC that categories had to be collapsed into White (all While UK and European ethnic groups), Black (all Black ethnic groups) and Other (all Asian, Chinese, Mixed and other ethnic groups) to enable valid comparisons to be made. Using these groupings, we found that there were no statistically significant associations between ethnicity and gender among either degree or DipSW students, meaning that there was no specific ethnic group that was any more likely to report having a disability. However, Table 3.7 shows the distribution of students by their gender, reported disability, and type of qualification. The results show that men were significantly more likely to report having any form of disability. Interestingly, while Riddell and colleagues attributed the gender difference in the prevalence of disability among all students to the higher proportions of men with dyslexia, among social work students the proportion of men and women with dyslexia was, at four per cent, identical. However, among those with a physical disability and those with a sensory impairment, there were proportionally more men than women. Table 3.7 shows that although there were statistically significant associations between gender and disability among both DipSW and degree students, the level of significance was slightly weaker among the latter.
Table 3.7: Per cent distribution of students by reporting any disability, gender, and type of qualification (GSCC data)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>DipSW 2001-2004</th>
<th>Degree 2003-2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% No disability</td>
<td>% Any disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>90.2</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value $\chi^2$</td>
<td>36.48</td>
<td>9.368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p-value</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>&lt;0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Valid n)</td>
<td>(10,219)</td>
<td>(1214)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>DipSW 2001-2004</th>
<th>Degree 2003-2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% No disability</td>
<td>% Any disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>90.1</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>87.8</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value $\chi^2$</td>
<td>36.48</td>
<td>9.368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p-value</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>&lt;0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Valid n)</td>
<td>(10,659)</td>
<td>(1222)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gender and ethnicity

Table 3.8 presents the relationship between ethnicity and gender among DipSW and degree students. It indicates that there was a statistically significant correlation between gender and ethnicity. Men were more likely than women to come from a Black background among both DipSW and new degree students. Moreover, this difference is even more evident among new degree than among DipSW students, shown in the table by the increase in the value of Pearson Chi-square ($\chi^2$) from 14 to 39.5. In other words, the gender imbalance between women and men students is now even greater among White than among Black students since the introduction of the new degree.

Table 3.8: Per cent distribution of students by gender, ethnicity, and type of qualification (GSCC data)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>DipSW 2001-2004</th>
<th>Degree 2003-2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% Women % Men</td>
<td>% Women % Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>11.5 14.3</td>
<td>16.7 20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8.0   8.2</td>
<td>8.3 11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>80.6 77.5</td>
<td>75.0 68.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value $\chi^2$</td>
<td>14.01</td>
<td>39.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p-value</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Valid n)</td>
<td>(9761) (2175)</td>
<td>(10434) (2048)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gender and age

As with ethnicity, so too were there gender differences in terms of age. Table 3.9 compares the age distribution between men and women among DipSW and degree students. It indicates that the age distribution among women was significantly different from that among men students both for the DipSW and the new degree. It shows that women were significantly younger than men. Such differences are particularly evident among the younger age groups; for example, 21 per cent (n=1923) of DipSW women students were younger than 25 years while the corresponding proportion was only 12 per cent (n=258) among men. While the
popularity of social work among men seeking a career change has been observed for some years (Balloch et al., 1999), it is striking that these differences are even more evident among the new degree students, where the proportion of women younger than 25 is 36 per cent (n=3874) compared to 20 per cent (n=428) among men. The significance of the difference is also indicated by a larger value of the Pearson $\chi^2$ for the new degree.

Table 3.9: Per cent distribution of students by gender, age, and type of qualification (GSCC data)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>% Women</th>
<th>% Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;20</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>37.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>37.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45+</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value $\chi^2$</td>
<td>106.06</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p-value</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Valid n)</td>
<td>(10212)</td>
<td>(2260)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.10 compares the age distribution of students from different ethnic backgrounds.

Table 3.10: Per cent distribution of students by ethnicity, age, and type of qualification (GSCC data)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>% Black</th>
<th>% Other</th>
<th>% White</th>
<th>% Black</th>
<th>% Other</th>
<th>% White</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;20</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>31.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45+</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value $\chi^2$</td>
<td>324.68</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>426.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p-value</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Valid n)</td>
<td>(1426)</td>
<td>(951)</td>
<td>(9526)</td>
<td>(2116)</td>
<td>(1061)</td>
<td>(9179)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The proportion of students identifying themselves as Black was significantly different from White students or students from Other ethnic backgrounds across both the last three cohorts of the DipSW and the first three cohorts of the degree. Table 3.10 shows that among students who enrolled on the DipSW between 2001-2004, only eight per cent (n=119) of Black students were younger than 25 years compared to 20 per cent (n=1883) of white students and 31 per cent (n=296) of students from ‘Other’
ethnic backgrounds. With the advent of the new degree, the proportion of young (<25 years) Black students has increased to 18 per cent (n=389) but remains much lower than that among white students (36 per cent, n=3299) and students from other ethnicities (44 per cent, (n=476).

**The representativeness of online survey data**

Before moving on to discuss some of the findings from the online survey in the following chapter, GSCC data are used to compare the characteristics of students responding to the online survey with the population of all social work student enrolments. Table 3.11 shows that while respondents were broadly similar to the population baseline, men, people from minority ethnic groups, older students, and part time students were under represented. Employment-based students were defined slightly differently in the survey to the GSCC definitions because the question asked ‘whether they received all or part of their salary from their employer’. This probably explains why there are proportionally more employment-based students among the online survey respondents. The low proportion of part time students probably reflects the difficulties in ensuring that they knew about the survey, as many part time students are only in college one day a week. Interestingly, while men were more likely to discontinue participating in the online survey, employment-based students were more likely to continue. The higher proportion of younger students may partly reflect the difficulties in accessing part time students, who tend to be in the older age groups, but may also indicate that younger students are more willing to complete surveys online.

**Sexuality**

Although not included in Table 3.11 because the GSCC does not collect this data, around four per cent (n=117) of respondents across all the phases of the online survey answered affirmatively to the question ‘Are you gay, lesbian or bisexual?’ developed for the National Institute for Social Work (NISW) workforce studies (McLean, 1998a) which offers respondents the option of replying yes, no or prefer not to answer. Similar numbers of respondents chose the latter option. The proportion of respondents self-defining as gay, lesbian or bisexual is slightly lower than that found in the social care workforce as a whole (McLean, 1998a, b). Although the number of respondents defining themselves as lesbian, gay, or bisexual was generally too small to permit separate analyses, it is intended that information from the online survey on sexuality will help inform a project funded under the Department of Health Social Care Workforce Research Initiative, *Diversity and Progression among Social Work Students in England: An Explanatory Study*.

**Discussion**

Recent years have seen a much greater interest in improving workforce development strategies (for example, HM Government, 2005, 2007; Skills for Care, 2007). The data presented in this chapter demonstrate how information on the number of students beginning social work programmes each year and their demographic characteristics can be used to provide valuable information for planning the social work workforce of the future. The data presented in this chapter can be summarised under three main messages.
### Table 3.11: Comparisons of online survey respondents with GSCC data (GSCC and online survey data)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>GSCC</th>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>Phase 2</th>
<th>Phase 3</th>
<th>Phase 4</th>
<th>Phase 5</th>
<th>Phase 6</th>
<th>Phase 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>2118</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>10799</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>1172</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>9384</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>934</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black &amp; minority ethnic group</td>
<td>3336</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td>18-24</td>
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<td>126</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>482</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>2201</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-44</td>
<td>5282</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>39</td>
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<tr>
<td>45+</td>
<td>1123</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Disability</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self reported disability</td>
<td>1222</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>No self reported disability</td>
<td>10665</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>1006</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>90</td>
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<td><strong>Programme type</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
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<td>78</td>
<td>1070</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>62</td>
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<td>Postgraduate</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>38</td>
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<td><strong>Route</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College-based</td>
<td>11144</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>1129</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>85</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employment-based</td>
<td>1720</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Study mode</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full time</td>
<td>11169</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>1228</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time*</td>
<td>1756</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total n</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>437</td>
<td>1362</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>443</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>534</td>
<td>807</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*GSCC figures for part time students include 61 ‘distance learning’ students (see Table 3.3). **Subtotals may not equal total n because of missing values.
Firstly, although there were signs of an increase in DipSW enrolments towards the end of the 1990s, the announcement of the change to the degree appears to have produced an increase in enrolments on the degree but also for the penultimate and final DipSW programmes. This shows how central government investment in social work qualifying training has produced clear results in terms of increasing the potential social work workforce of the future and beginning to address longstanding concerns about shortages in the numbers of social workers.

Secondly, the chapter also suggests that there is potential for employers and HEIs to work together to identify whether social work education might be commissioned in a more strategic way by considering the balance of full time to part time routes, regional workforce issues and so on. The Leitch (2006) review of skills in the UK concluded that some of the focus on meeting the target of 50 per cent of young people entering higher education outlined in the Education White Paper (Secretary of State for Education and Skills, 2003) had been at the:

\[\text{expense of engaging with employers and increasing workforce development. Moreover, the target tends to prioritise first full degrees and traditional undergraduate study, where funding levels are higher, ahead of part-time opportunities for employees and more focused high skills courses that reflect the needs of employers.}\]

(p.69)

Since the implementation of the new degree, it does appear that the provision of part time and employment-based routes has declined. It may be that this is a transitional phase in which HEIs prioritised developing full time programmes and that the way full time programmes are now being delivered offers more flexibility for students in terms of attendance but there is scope for monitoring the balance between the availability of full time college-based programmes and other more flexible routes to a social work qualification.

Finally, the chapter presents clear evidence of an increase in the diversity of social work students in terms of their age and ethnicity, albeit less pronounced than it is sometimes portrayed anecdotally. However, men and certain ethnic groups such as Asians continue to be under represented. The proportion of students with disabilities would also appear to have remained broadly static. This poses considerable challenges if the aim of achieving a workforce that reflects the population it serves is to be achieved. The task of understanding why some groups are over and under represented among social work students will be made easier if we understand more about the differing reasons why students are attracted to social work. This is the subject of the following chapter which discusses the motivations of student social workers and the experiences that they brought to their studies.
Chapter Four:
Motivations and Experience

The decision to...work toward obtaining a professional qualification in social work, and becoming socialized into the profession, is in most cases a highly complex yet little understood process.

(Christie and Kruk, 1998, p.21)

Summary
This chapter uses evidence from the online survey and from focus groups undertaken with students in the case study sites to discuss students’ motivations for training as social workers. It shows that students have a number of reasons for wanting to study social work but that idealistic motivations predominate and persist over time. The majority of social work students continue to bring considerable levels of occupational and personal experiences to their studies. However, many students are combining their studies with parenting or other caring responsibilities. The chapter suggests that we need to understand more about students' motivations and what influences them if we are to attract groups that are currently under represented in social work education, and if we are to improve retention once students enter the workforce.

Key findings
- The overwhelming majority of students feel that social work offers a worthwhile and interesting career.
- Most students bring considerable relevant personal experience to their studies.
- There appear to be gender and ethnic differences in the extent to which students are primarily motivated by career factors in social work.
- Many students combine their studies with parenting and other caring responsibilities.

Scope of chapter
Student recruitment was one of the areas outlined in the tender document on which the Department of Health wanted more information. In order to do this, it is necessary to understand students’ motivations for studying social work. This chapter discusses student motivations in order to partly answer two of the four research questions, namely:

1. What are the main outcomes of the change from diploma to degree level study?

2. How far has the new degree met the expectations of those entering the profession and other stakeholders?
The evidence presented here suggests that it is necessary to understand the complex nature of differing motivations among different groups of students if efforts to make the demographic profile of social work students more representative of the population as a whole are to be successful (Department of Health/Department for Education and Skills, 2006). It also suggests that it is important to consider student motivations and expectations about what the social work role involves if wider strategies to improve retention in the social work workforce are to be successful. The extent of students’ parenting and caring commitments may help contextualise some of the concerns raised by students that are reported in later chapters.

**Existing research on motivations**

We have already reported on existing research into the motivations of DipSW students in Chapter One. Marsh and Triseliotis (1996) found that about half of their sample was driven by career considerations, around a third wished to offer a ‘service’ to people and the remainder had ‘idealistic’ notions, such as a wish to tackle injustice. These impetuses co-existed, so social work was thought to offer the double attraction of a meaningful career that could also contribute to society’s wellbeing. Other work (Christie, 1998a; Parker and Merrylees, 2002) has also emphasised the importance of personal experiences in shaping students’ desires to become a social worker.

Research carried out among social work degree students in Scotland (BRMB Social Research, 2005) concluded that students chose social work primarily because it was a ‘rewarding job that helps those in need’ (sic, p.20). Other less important motivators included the way social work is structured as a career and the variety of jobs available. Strikingly, in view of the debate about specialist versus generic social work education, 43 per cent of students taking part in this Scottish study reported that they had selected it because of the ability to switch jobs within social work.

Data derived from applicants selected for interview for social work degree programmes in one English university were used to identify the following themes in terms of students’ motivations. This table has been reproduced in full because it accords strongly with the reasons given by respondents to the online survey (shown later in Table 4.2) even though the two pieces of research were conducted entirely independently.

### Table 4.1: Reasons for applying for social work (Furness, 2007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>N responses</th>
<th>% Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To help others/improve quality of life of others</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging/rewarding career</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality/aptitude for job</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with people</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To make a difference</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop skills and knowledge</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Motivations for choosing a social work career

Focus groups held with students in the case study sites emphasised both the importance of their desire to help others and, consistent with Christie’s (1998a) and Parker and Merrylees’ (2002) research, the influence of their life experiences:

I grew up in foster care and so had direct experience of social work and stuff, and the impact that good and bad social workers can have on your life. So I thought, you know, typical ‘wanting to make a difference’ thing, to have an effect on someone else’s life, or help them if I could.

(Case studies, Student Focus Group, Time One)

Towards the end of their programmes, many had tempered their initial ambitions but their original aspirations remained unchanged:

I wasn’t going to change the world. I knew that but I was hoping to be able to make a difference. And although I still think I will come across huge barriers in trying to change, I still think my own personal practice will be able to support some people in...giving them social inclusion and to make them feel valued members of society. And if I can just do that for one or two people during my career, I’ll feel that I’ve achieved something.

(Case studies, Student Focus Group, Time Two)

This sense of idealism was also reflected in the results from the online survey. Table 4.2 summarises respondents’ answers to the question, ‘What motivated or attracted you to choose social work as a career?’ in which they were given a list a predefined options from which to choose. Table 4.2 shows that the two options chosen most often across each of the three cohorts of first year students surveyed were ‘Helping individuals to improve the quality of their own lives’ and ‘Interesting, stimulating work’ and demonstrates continuities with the
picture presented in earlier research (Marsh and Triseliotis, 1996; Parker and Merrylees, 2002). As can be seen by comparing the base number with the number of total responses, most respondents gave more than one reason for choosing a career in social work. This is also in accordance with earlier research (Christie and Kruk, 1998) that has also drawn attention to the complexity of students' motivations.

Table 4.2: ‘All’ motivations for choosing social work as a career (online survey, first year respondents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping individuals to improve the quality of their own lives</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>1235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interesting, stimulating work</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>1051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal ability to get on with people</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>1008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wish to tackle injustice and inequalities in society</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety of work day-to-day</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good career prospects</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>784</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working in a team</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High job satisfaction</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Especially suitable career for someone with life experiences like mine</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being able to exercise individual responsibility for making my own decisions</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouragement from family or friends</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>409</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for flexible working patterns</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well paid jobs</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid n</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>1362</td>
<td>807</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentages total more than 100 because respondents could choose multiple options.

It would be interesting to know the extent to which the social work recruitment campaign and other attempts to raise the status of social work and social care (for example, Platt, 2007) account for the rising perceptions of ‘good career prospects’ and ‘well paid jobs’, and to a lesser extent ‘high job satisfaction’ and ‘exercising responsibility for own decisions’. This may be a coincidence and the lack of comparable data from DipSW students prevents any firm conclusions from being drawn. However, Eborall and Garmeson’s (2001) review concluded that poor pay was seen as one of the reasons for a decline in applications for social work in the late 1990s.

Respondents were then asked to indicate the ‘most important’ motivation for choosing to study social work from the options they had chosen. In order to reduce the 12-item motivation data into a smaller number of dimensions suitable for more detailed analysis than a simple frequency count, as shown in
Table 4.2, a Principal Components Analysis (PCA) was undertaken. This is explained more fully in the Technical Appendix. This suggested that responses could be grouped into three factors:

- Career aspects
- Altruistic and personal qualities of students
- Day to day nature of social work

The Technical Appendix also explains how, by combining data from the phases at which there was data from more than one point in time (Phases One, Two, Four, Five and Six) it was possible to create two synthetic cohorts (Hakim, 2000), or pseudo-panels, one consisting of students enrolling in 2004-2005 (Phases One, Four and Five) and the other made up of those enrolling in 2005-2006 (Phases Two and Six).

Table 4.3 uses the synthetic cohorts of students created by combining data from students at the same stage from different phases to see if motivations appeared to change over time. It shows that ‘altruistic/personal qualities’ factors were by far the most frequent option selected by respondents to the online survey. Furthermore, the proportion of respondents choosing these options remained consistent over time, indicated by the non-significant \( p \)-value in the final column.

Table 4.3: ‘Most important’ motivation to be a social worker by time (online survey, all years, cross sectional data)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>First years (UG/PG)</th>
<th>Second years (UG)</th>
<th>Final Year (UG/PG)</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Cramer’s V</th>
<th>( p )-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altruistic/personal</td>
<td>1220</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>508</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career aspects</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day to day nature of social work</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Valid n</strong></td>
<td><strong>1799</strong></td>
<td><strong>761</strong></td>
<td><strong>373</strong></td>
<td><strong>2933</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3 also shows that career aspects were the most important motivator for the smallest proportion of respondents. These also did not vary significantly over time. However, the final row, day to day nature of social work, differs slightly from the other two factors in that it appears to increase over time. The \( p \)-value of 0.057, while not statistically significant at the 95 per cent level, suggests that students may become more socialised to the professional role of social work and be attracted by aspects such as the variety of the work and potential levels of job satisfaction. These results seem to chime in with the picture presented in Chapter Ten, which uses vignette data from the case study sites to suggest that students become more ‘professionalised’ over the course of a social work programme.
In order to test these associations in more detail, the ‘most important’ motivations (altruistic/personal, day to day nature of social work, and career factors) were entered into separate binary logistic regressions along with other variables looking at previous experience, programme type, educational attainment, and demographic characteristics. These analyses were designed to test whether different types of student had differing motivations. The results from these analyses are shown in the Technical Appendix.

Strikingly, the logistic regressions showed that students aged 35 and over were more significantly more likely to choose altruistic/personal factors when compared with the reference group of respondents aged 18-20. They were also significantly less likely to choose ‘day to day nature of social work’ when compared with the reference group of respondents aged 18-20. The most probable explanation for this is that, consistent with Marsh and Triseliotis’s (1996) and Dunworth’s (2007) research, older students are likely to have had a longstanding interest in qualifying as a social worker but that the timing of their training has been influenced by other factors such as the availability of secondment or other family commitments.

Men and respondents defining themselves as Black were more likely to choose career factors than other students. This may reflect the reality that men in social work expect to experience better career progression than women (Taylor, 1994; Davey, 2002). It may also be that because of stereotyped assumptions about men’s and women’s work: men who decide to study social work will already have had to counter assumptions about their motivations in a way that women do not (Christie, 2001; McLean, 2003; Christie, 2006). Thus, they may enter social work education having already developed ideas about what their role will entail. Black workers, and Black women in particular, are over-represented within the public sector (Spence, 2003; Trades Union Congress, 2006). One explanation for this is that while this is no protection against the experience of racism in social work and social care (Brockmann et al., 2001; Harris and Dutt, 2005), it may be that social work, as a profession in which the public sector still provides the majority of paid employment, is perceived as offering an environment in which there are better chances of career progression and better structural protection against discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity.

‘Triggers’ for undertaking social work training

Marsh and Triseliotis (1996) made a distinction between underlying motivations to become a social worker and taking the decision to enrol on a social work programme. In the focus group discussions undertaken in the case study sites, students spoke about the circumstances that had prompted them to take this step. To illustrate this, the following examples relate how the choice of social work as a career was triggered by previous work experiences:

*Well, I worked in different fields like teaching, personnel, public administration, and also with the voluntary sector...and I have realised the best way to work with different age groups, and different categories of people, is to do social work. That is why I decided to do social work.*

(Case studies, Student Focus Group, Time One)
Others drew on personal experiences as their reason for wanting to take up a career in social work:

The experience that I have had is mainly informal: the care of my father and my grandmother. And I have also done some work with families who have autistic children. And I have noticed in our family the impact of social workers on certain aspects of our family, so that’s one of the reasons why I wanted to be a social worker. And also, I was actually in a recruitment agency, dealing with social workers so I had an idea what the role was and was a bit jealous when they used to come in. So I decided that was what I wanted to do!

(Case studies, Student Focus group, Time One)

For the following two students a realisation of the limitations of their current role and the opportunities offered by social work to develop professionally were important factors in the decision to choose social work as a career:

I’ve worked in the voluntary sector, and having some contact with a lot of social workers made me just want to get a professional qualification to go into a statutory kind of environment. Without a qualification, you can only go so far.

(Case studies, Student Focus Group, Time One)

What I didn’t like was sitting in the office, nine to five, just doing the same dead end job. I wanted to help people; I wanted to go out in the community and stuff like that.

(Case studies, Student Focus Group, Time One)

Finally, the bursary appeared to be the ultimate triggering factor for this student to choose social work over other professional qualifications:

My motivation was to top up my degree and get a related qualification to my first subject, with a view of getting a career in the area. I looked at the probation service and social work and sort of other various things. But primarily the funding was the main reason I went into social work, because it was all paid for, the government are crying out for us. If I get a qualification, that will lead me into a profession for the rest of my life. And that was it really.

(Case studies, Student Focus Group, Time One)

**Age at which first considered becoming a social worker**

Table 4.4 demonstrates the wide age range at which respondents to the online survey reported that they became interested in social work. Consistent with the examples given above from the case study data, answers ranged from respondents who had made this decision in their formative years to those looking for a career change in later life.

Although gender differences are not shown in this table, men tended to report that they considered social work as a career at an older age than women.
This is consistent with the data reported in Chapter Three which suggested that men tend to enter social work education at an older age than women.

Table 4.4: Age at which students first considered a career in social work (online survey, first year respondents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Childhood (0-12)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teenager</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early 20s</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late 20s</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30s</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40s or later</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid n</td>
<td>415</td>
<td></td>
<td>1317</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question not asked in shortened survey administered to 2006-2007 entrants.

Previous educational attainment

The online survey collected information on students’ levels of previous educational attainment. Figure 4.1 shows the highest qualifications achieved by respondents. While the level of non-response for the second first year (2005-2006) cohort makes it difficult to be certain of trends, the difference between the first and third cohorts appears to indicate an overall increase in the average level of students’ prior qualifications, and is consistent with the UCAS data presented in the following chapter. As would be expected, almost all postgraduate students had a degree already, but it is noteworthy that over a third of the graduates responding to the online survey in their first year were undertaking a social work degree at undergraduate level.

The gender difference between men and women in terms of educational qualifications is also worth highlighting. Forty per cent of men responding to the online survey (n=146/366) had a degree compared with only 30 per cent of women (n=670/2208). This is partly explained by the fact that 25 per cent (n=90/366) of men responding to the online survey were on postgraduate programmes, compared with around 20 per cent nationally, as reported earlier in Table 3.11. Taken in conjunction with the evidence on men’s under representation on undergraduate programmes in Chapter Three and the discussion to follow in Chapter Five on gender and access programmes, it raises the possibility that men with higher levels of educational qualifications are more willing to consider studying social work than other men who may not share their levels of previous educational attainment.

The effect of respondents’ prior educational qualifications on their opinions and attitudes towards aspects of their programme was generally quite small. Degree-educated respondents were sometimes more critical, but this may be related to the fact that many were studying at postgraduate level, where the sense of overload seemed to be felt most keenly. As Chapter Six reports, key
informants responsible for postgraduate programmes considered that completing the required classroom based and practice learning within this space of time demanded considerable levels of commitment on the part of students and it is possible that these programmes were more pressurised in terms of meeting the prescribed curriculum within a two-year period.

**Figure 4.1:** Levels of previous educational attainment (online survey, first year respondents)

![Bar chart showing levels of previous educational attainment](chart)

**Previous social care experience**

Many of the students participating in the evaluation claimed some level of familiarity with social workers and social work. Figure 4.2 uses responses from the online survey to summarise students’ previous experience in a wide range of predefined areas of paid work, voluntary and personal experiences, including, for example, work in childcare, with refugees and asylum seekers, substance misuse, domestic violence. Online survey respondents were encouraged to choose as many options as applied to them, and asked to say whether this was for a short time (up to two years), or longer.

Figure 4.2 shows that many students were already familiar with social work tasks and responsibilities before they entered social work education. Around a third of respondents to the online survey had experience of working for a social work employer as an unqualified worker or in an administrative capacity. It also shows that proportionally even more of the online respondents had experience in a related field (such as working as a foster carer) or had personal experience (self or close family) of using social care services and that the majority of students had more than one type of experience. Students without any previous experience of social work appear to be the exception, as Chapter Five, which discusses applications and recruitment, also suggests.

The lower figures for 2006-2007 entry students in Figure 4.2 may possibly be explained by the reduction in the number of prompts in the shortened survey completed by these respondents. Alternatively, they may reflect a real
change in HEIs’ stance towards applicants’ previous experience. This will only become clearer with time.

Figure 4.2: Students’ types of previous experience (online survey, first year respondents)

Unsurprisingly, employment-based students across all three cohorts were much more likely to have experienced paid employment with a social work employer. Table 4.5 shows that they were also slightly more likely to have undertaken paid employment in a related field but less likely to have had voluntary experience when compared with respondents to the online survey as a whole, as shown in Figure 4.2.

Table 4.5: Types of previous experience reported by employment-based students (online survey, first year students)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paid employment with social work employer</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid employment in related field</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpaid voluntary work</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal experience – self or close family</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No previous experience</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid n</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentages total more than 100 because students could select more than one type of previous experience.

Results from the online survey also suggested that age influenced the type of experiences that students brought to their studies. Students aged 18-24 were less likely to have worked for a social work employer. However, they appeared just as likely to report relevant voluntary or personal experience as older students, although this was generally for a shorter time.
It will become clear in later chapters of this report that the main discriminator between respondents in terms of their previous experience is between those with any, and those with none. Whether they had worked in a social care setting, or in what capacity, made little difference. Those with no previous social care experience of whatever type tended to be more content, as subsequent chapters will show. This may indicate youth or naïveté, hence an apparent enthusiasm for new knowledge and exposure to a wider world, but it does not suggest that they have chosen to study social work unthinkingly.

Caring responsibilities

Table 4.6 shows the proportion of students responding to the online survey who stated that they currently had family or other unpaid caring responsibilities. The most striking finding is that, unlike the majority of full time students in higher education, almost half of all the first year students responding to the online survey were in this position. Furthermore, as can be seen from the fact that the percentages in the columns below total more than 100, some respondents were combining childcare and responsibilities for caring for a person with a disability or an older person. This is shown in more detail in the following table, Table 4.7, which compares students' parenting and caring responsibilities by ethnicity.

Table 4.6: Caring responsibilities reported by students (online survey, first year respondents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caring responsibilities</th>
<th>Women 04-05</th>
<th>Women 05-06</th>
<th>Women 06-07</th>
<th>Men 04-05</th>
<th>Men 05-06</th>
<th>Men 06-07</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N %</td>
<td>N %</td>
<td>N %</td>
<td>N %</td>
<td>N %</td>
<td>N %</td>
<td>N %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No caring responsibilities</td>
<td>143 38</td>
<td>518 44</td>
<td>333 51</td>
<td>27 45</td>
<td>85 46</td>
<td>69 58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-school children</td>
<td>45 12</td>
<td>133 12</td>
<td>83 13</td>
<td>9 15</td>
<td>35 19</td>
<td>17 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School age children</td>
<td>152 40</td>
<td>356 30</td>
<td>230 35</td>
<td>15 25</td>
<td>45 24</td>
<td>33 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults/children with long term disability</td>
<td>31 8</td>
<td>56 5</td>
<td>51 8</td>
<td>4 7</td>
<td>10 5</td>
<td>6 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older people</td>
<td>34 9</td>
<td>83 7</td>
<td>75 11</td>
<td>5 8</td>
<td>12 6</td>
<td>8 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid n</td>
<td>377 1172</td>
<td>659 60</td>
<td>186 120</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentages total more than 100 per cent because students were able to choose more than one option.

The proportion of men and women respondents with school age children is unsurprising given the age profile of respondents shown in the previous chapter in Table 3.6. The similarities in the proportions of men and women with family or caring responsibilities reported in this table require a caveat. The question only asked respondents whether they had any childcare or caring responsibilities, not how much time they spent on these activities. As is well known, there are differences both in the time men and women spend caring for children and in the tasks they do (Office for National Statistics, 2004; Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, 2007). Equally, research on caring (Parker and Lawton, 1994; Hirst, 2002; Maher and Green,
has consistently shown that the prevalence of unpaid care is similar among men and women; what differs is its intensity and type; only men caring for a spouse or partner tend to care for similar hours per week to women, and undertake similar tasks.

**Variation in parenting and caring responsibilities**

This evaluation is one of the few studies of social work students to have been able to look at students’ views over time. Using the synthetic cohort data for first year students starting between 2004-2005 and 2005-2006, we looked at the associations between gender, ethnicity, and parenting or caring responsibilities. The association between gender and caring or parenting responsibilities was not statistically significant. However, Table 4.7 shows that ethnicity was associated with caring responsibilities (Cramer’s V = 0.074; p-value = 0.011), although this was not a large association. Almost half (46 per cent, n=66) of Black students were caring for school age children compared to just over one third (36 percent, n=539) of all students. This is consistent with the data presented earlier in Table 3.10 which showed that Black students, especially men, tended to be older. This is an important finding as it suggests that proportionally more Black students may have to combine their studies with other family responsibilities. Table 4.7 also shows that a substantial minority of students have dual parenting and caring responsibilities.

**Table 4.7: Students’ parenting and caring responsibilities by ethnicity**

(online survey, first year students 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 combined cohorts)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of caring responsibility</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Parenting only</th>
<th>Caring only</th>
<th>Both</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>N%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N%</td>
<td>N%</td>
<td>N%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>668</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid n</td>
<td>768</td>
<td>539</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>123</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

**Discussion**

The evidence presented in this chapter is consistent with earlier work undertaken with DipSW students which suggested that students were primarily motivated by idealistic reasons but that these co-existed with other motivators, such as a feeling that social work could provide an interesting career. In this sense, the data highlight continuities with the DipSW and suggest that the degree has not changed the underlying motivations for social work students.

Social work has always attracted students from a broad age range, including those seeking a career change and those starting out in their working lives.
The information on the age at which respondents to the online survey first considered a career in social work is illuminating as it is consistent with existing research (Balloch et al., 1999) showing that social work is often a second career for many people, but also shows that a relatively high proportion of first year students responding to the online survey first considered social work as a career before leaving school. This suggests that the policy decision to remove the minimum age at which people could qualify as social workers may have attracted applicants at an earlier age who might otherwise have chosen to study for professions such as teaching or nursing. In the same way, the data on ethnicity and on gender and educational qualifications highlight the possibilities for more targeted recruitment of social work students aimed at attracting students who are currently under represented.

Strikingly, despite the rise in the proportion of younger students, the majority of respondents to the online survey did have considerable levels of previous experience, either as paid employees, as volunteers, or through personal histories. To highlight the importance of students' past experiences is not unique (Shaw, 1985; Christie, 1998; Parker and Merrylees, 2002). Where this study provides new information is on the prevalence of parenting and caring responsibilities among social work students. This suggests that a high proportion of students may have other commitments affecting their studies; this is something that may need to be considered in terms of programme timetabling. It highlights the multiple commitments (Brockmann, 2002) that people bring both to their studies and ultimately the workplace, and the need to provide flexibility in order to support them.

Unlike earlier research that has looked at social work students' motivations at a 'snapshot' or single point in time, the other new evidence arising from the evaluation is the extent to which student motivations change very little over time. Perhaps counter intuitively, students' altruistic motivations appear to remain unchanged throughout the course of their studies. The key question that arises from this finding is the extent to which this might alter once students have entered the workforce. Earlier work (McLean, 1999, 2002) suggested that social workers, unlike their counterparts without a qualification tended to show higher levels of commitment to their profession than to their employer, suggesting that they made a distinction between their wider professional values and their role as an employee. The data on motivations highlight the potential for social work educators to help students build on these through teaching and learning (Gilligan, 2007). They also suggest that expectations at the beginning of students' studies about social work as a career and day to day working life may differ from those at the end. This highlights the importance of addressing areas where there is a possible mismatch between students' expectations and their actual experiences.

An important consideration for the data presented in this chapter is that they are derived from students who have actually chosen to study social work. There is no comparable study, such as that undertaken for nursing (Hemsley-Brown and Foskett, 1999), which looks at how people perceive social work as a career aimed at identifying the specific appeals and barriers to recruitment.
among certain groups. Nevertheless, an understanding of students’ motivations is important for the next chapter on applications and recruitment but also for subsequent chapters on teaching and learning both in the classroom and while on practice placement, as they help contextualise students’ experiences.
Chapter Five: Applications and Recruitment

All providers must satisfy themselves that all entrants have the capability to meet the required standards by the end of their training and that they possess appropriate personal and intellectual qualities to be social workers.

(Department of Health, 2002, p.2)

[It is] important that admissions work is valued, recognised, resourced and understood more than it usually is.

(Social Work Admissions Tutors Conference, 2006)

Summary

This chapter uses data from the HEI Fact Find, interviews with social work educators and students in the case study sites and the online survey to show that one of the clearest impacts of the new degree has been to increase the number of students applying for social work. There is some evidence that the educational qualifications of applicants for social work programmes appears to have risen as a result of this, and some programmes feel that it has led to an overall increase in the quality of applicants overall. The Requirements for Social Work Training (Department of Health 2002) set out detailed criteria for the recruitment and selection of students. The way in which programmes have implemented these Requirements has varied but additional procedures such as group exercises and written tests are commonplace. Stakeholders and service users and carers play an important role in the selection of applicants. Students use a range of sources to help them find out about studying social work, and although the majority continue to use convenience of location as the chief reason for selecting a particular HEI, academic reputation is increasing in importance. The majority of students responding to the online survey reported that the bursary had been an important factor in their being able to take up a place on a social work programme.

Key points

- There is strong evidence that the policy objective of increasing the number of applications to social work programmes has been achieved.
- Having a larger pool of potential students from which to select appears to have resulted in an increase in the educational qualifications and, to a lesser extent, the overall quality of applicants.
- The selection process is detailed and rigorous, involving stakeholders and service users and carers as well as social work educators, and designed to test applicants’ motivations for studying social work and often consisting of procedures such as written or group exercises in addition to interviews.
Scope of chapter

This chapter presents evidence on applications and recruitment, one of the areas in the tender document on which the Department of Health sought information, and, in the process, helps answer three of the four research questions, namely:

1. What are the main outcomes of the change from diploma to degree level study?

2. Has the new social work degree increased the quantity and quality of qualified social workers entering the workforce?

3. How has the move to degree level professional social work education and training been implemented?

The chapter discusses changes in the number of applicants to social work programmes, the factors used by students in deciding on where to apply, and the process by which they were selected.

Existing research on applications and recruitment

Although recruitment and selection take up a considerable amount of time on social work programmes but, as commentators have noted (Holmström & Taylor, 2008; Taylor & Balen, 1995), there have been surprisingly few studies of admissions in social work. Of those that exist, most have been small scale or have been undertaken outside the UK.

Taylor and Balen observed that the social work literature on applications and recruitment has tended to centre, firstly, upon the quality of applicants and the role of admissions staff as ‘gatekeepers’ to the profession. Here, one of the longstanding difficulties faced by social work as a profession is its depiction as a subject that is only able to attract candidates with comparatively weak records of previous educational attainment (Green, 2006). This has not been helped by comparisons of social work students and other undergraduates, such as that undertaken by Leslie (2003), which have not acknowledged that a high proportion of social work students are on postgraduate courses and that others may have obtained equivalent vocational qualifications. Another aspect of this gatekeeping role has been in the identification of people’s ‘suitability’ for the profession. For example, the need both for DipSW and degree students to pre-disclose criminal convictions has led, over time, to a decrease in the number of students with criminal convictions applying for social work training, even when the offence is not one that would have prohibited them from making an application (Perry, 2004). This has highlighted the dilemmas faced by admissions staff in terms of their twin commitments to the principles of rehabilitation and the need to protect the public (Perry, 2004; Madoc-Jones et al., BJSW advance access doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcl028). Taylor and Balen (1995) also identified a second tradition, looking at the experiences of different types of applicants, such as applicants from black and minority ethnic groups (for example, Pink, 1991) or applicants with disabilities (for example, Crawshaw, 2002) and the institutional
barriers to acceptance on social work programmes that they may face. Since the advent of the new degree, as Holmström and Taylor have identified (2008), the complexity of the process has increased, given the prominence in the Requirements for Social Work Training to the recruitment and selection process. They also point out that there are considerable challenges to establishing relationships between the selection process and applicants’ subsequent performance on programmes (Holmström & Taylor, 2007 Advance access).

Applications

We have already highlighted that an important aim behind the introduction of the new degree was to increase the number of applicants to social work programmes. Figure 5.1 shows that there has been a rise in the number of applicants through UCAS for places on full time college-based social work programmes in the years since the new degree was introduced. It is worth making the point here that comparisons cannot be made with DipSW programmes, because in the past UCAS data included applicants for other programmes related to social work but which did not lead to a social work qualification, and they excluded most postgraduate and non-graduate applicants who used the former Social Work Admissions Service (SWAS) or applied directly to HEIs (Moriarty and Murray, 2007). Since the new degree, all applicants for full time college-based programmes apply through UCAS. This has made it easier to identify trends, although it has had some implications in terms of the quality of information that HEIs receive on applicants, as we shall show later. It is also important to highlight that acceptances and enrolment data are not synonymous, partly because some applicants receive more than one offer and partly because, as mentioned in Chapter Two, applications for part time and most employment-based programmes are not made through UCAS.

Figure 5.1: UCAS applicants and acceptances for full time college-based social work degree programmes starting between 2003-2006 in England
In addition, Figure 5.1 shows that the ratio of applicants to acceptances through UCAS has risen from around four applicants for every three acceptances to five applicants for every three acceptances. Within the higher education sector, this is generally viewed as a positive indicator in that the larger ‘pool’ from which applicants can be selected means that stricter entry requirements can be applied. The chart also shows that only around 20 per cent of acceptances are made through clearing. Clearing is the system used to match students who have not yet managed to secure a place at university or college for the current year on undergraduate courses with vacant places. The higher education sector tends to regard low numbers of clearing acceptances positively because it is thought to show that a subject is both popular and attracts students who are better qualified. One tutor identified another benefit:

We’ve had 200 applications and made 50 definite offers with a reserve list. We won’t have to go through clearing and we’re all really pleased because it means we can go on holiday in August!

(HEI Fact Find 04-05, 005)

Both the case study data and HEI Fact Find confirmed the picture presented in Figure 5.1. All the admissions tutors in the case study sites identified an increase in the number of applications. For example, at one site they had been, in the words of the admissions tutor, ‘inundated’ by over 800 applications for a programme on which there were only 30 places. At another, there were 308 applications for only 55 places. Seventy four per cent (n=37) of HEIs responding to the 2006-2007 Fact Find also reported an increase in applications, 18 per cent (n=9) stated that they had remained the same, and just eight per cent (n=4) had experienced a decrease. It is perhaps coincidental but these four HEIs had high proportions of employment-based students in the past. Overall, 85 per cent (n=45) of respondents to the 2006-2007 Fact Find expected to fill all the places on their social work programmes in 2006-2007 and 68 per cent (n=36) of the programmes on which information was available had not needed to use the UCAS clearing system.

Based on the number of applications that respondents to the 2006-2007 Fact Find reported receiving, the mean number of applications per place on full time college based undergraduate programmes was 8 (SD 6), while the equivalent for postgraduate programmes was 17 (SD 14). As there were almost twice as many undergraduate programmes (n=49) as postgraduate ones (n=24) and because the mean number of places on undergraduate programmes was 53 (SD 21) compared with 33 (SD 11) on postgraduate ones, it may be that this difference simply reflects the fact that there are fewer postgraduate places overall. The reason why these ratios are larger than those shown in Figure 5.1 is because one UCAS applicant can make up to a maximum of five applications so the ratio of applications to acceptances will always be higher than the ratio of applicants to acceptances.

Demographic characteristics of applicants

Respondents to the 2006-2007 Fact Find were also asked if they had experienced any changes to the demographic profile of their applicants.
Consistent with the GSCC data presented earlier in Table 3.5 (p.45), Table 5.1 shows that the overwhelming majority of HEIs on which data were obtained reported increases in the number of younger applicants. Nevertheless, none accepted applications from people who would have been younger than 18 when they started the programme. A smaller proportion had experienced increases in applicants from Black and minority ethnic groups. By contrast, the introduction of the degree does not seem to have resulted in increases in applications from men or from people who have a disability. Indeed, eight programmes actually reported a continuing decrease in applications from men, perpetuating the trend presented in a study analysing DipSW applications which identified a long term decline in the proportion of men applying for social work programmes (Perry and Cree, 2003).

As has already been noted, most DipSW students studied locally (Wallis-Jones and Lyons, 2003). We had hypothesised that the advent of larger numbers of younger applicants might have led to increases in the number of students moving away from home to study. Based on the Fact Find data, this does not appear to be the case. In addition to the changes presented above, one admissions tutor participating in the Fact Find expressed the viewpoint that the undergraduate social work degree programme in her HEI seemed to be attracting more applications from people who had already studied another subject at degree level and from people who were seeking a career change. This accords with the data from the online survey presented earlier in Figure 4.1, which showed that between 13-18 per cent of undergraduate students responding to the online survey already possessed a degree.

**Table 5.1: Changes in the demographic profile of applicants (Fact Find 2006-2007)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Per cent of responses</th>
<th>Per cent of cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More younger applicants</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More applicants from a Black and minority background</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More men applicants</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More applicants with disabilities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More applicants from outside locality</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table is based upon multiple responses so the total per cent of cases in the final column exceeds 100 per cent. The count (N) column represents the total number of respondents reporting any changes. The ‘per cent of cases’ is the percentage of interest, since it shows which percentage of the respondents reporting at least one difference had experienced that particular change. The total (n=46) of changes reported is less than the number of HEIs taking part in the 2006-2007 Fact Find (n=53), meaning that there are only moderate changes in the demographic profile of applicants among the HEIs participating in the Fact Find. Altogether, 25 per cent (n=13) of HEIs reported no changes in the demographic profile of their applicants and 45 per cent (n=24) reported only one change.
Some of the trends presented in Table 5.1 also emerged from interviews in the case study sites. Here, a minority of informants had mixed views about the increase in the number of younger students:

It’s just the expectation that we should take on younger students which…I find extremely difficult because they have limited life experience and…they may have some better educational qualifications but they’re just children.

(Case studies, Admissions Tutor, Time Two)

However, the majority disagreed with this viewpoint. Indeed, they suggested that older students may also have support needs, albeit different ones:

Mature students can present...in fact, much more complicated problems...And I...anecdotally, I would argue with...there’s a reasonable balance between difficulties where the difficulty is where the students [are] young or [where they are] more mature.

(Case studies, Programme Leader, Time Two)

It was also pointed out that youth did not preclude applicants from having relevant previous experience and that younger applicants might also possess some qualities not shared by their older counterparts:

We probably have seen a slight shift to younger students...probably not as dramatic as some programmes because obviously [we are] taking...postgraduates and...we get...a small number of people who’ve come in pretty much straight from University, from a degree...we...still have an employment requirement, but… they’ve used their time well in terms of gaining voluntary experience. More typically... we’ve students who have spent a couple of years in the employment market doing various social care type jobs.

(Case studies, Programme Leader, Time Two)

[It is good to have] more younger people, they’re more confident.

(Case studies, Student Focus Group, Time One)

In addition to the age profile of applicants, students also commented on the small minority of Asian students in social work programmes. A young Asian student explained her perception of the reasons behind this:

I don’t know. It’s motivating because I know that a lot of women are not encouraged, coming from an Asian background, to go to university, so it’s motivating me to achieve my goal and to set an example.’

(Case studies, Student Focus Group, Time One)

In another site, a social work educator also observed that social work seemed to be becoming more popular among younger Asians, while acknowledging that this might be a local phenomenon:

I think I noted too that this might be something internal to some of the community, but there seems to be a...larger number from the Asian
communities coming through the social work. Particularly...it’s beginning to be seen as an OK profession for ... a bit gender related, for largely the young women in those communities.

(Case studies, Programme leader, Time One)

The existence of local variations was also suggested by the experiences of another informant who suggested that there was now greater uniformity among students on their programme:

As a result of starting the new degree, we were expecting some changes in our student intake...and one notable thing is we had fewer disabled students. We’ve got some students with disabilities...we have a dyslexia, learning difficulties...specific learning needs. We haven't had students with....a major mobility...We feel some losses I think around that...you know, the group being less...heterogeneous than it was.

(Case Studies, Programme leader, Time Two)

However, others were less convinced that the degree meant that it was no longer possible to achieve, in the words of one respondent to the HEI 2006-2007 Fact Find, ‘a good spread of age and educational backgrounds’. An admissions tutor in a different case study site argued:

It is the government’s widening participation strategy, that’s been massive. It’s had massive implications in terms of resources. If we think about when it started five years ago, overall we had about 500 applications. We’ve had more than a threefold increase in applications...and in terms of the widening participation as well, we wouldn’t just take the academic high flyers. We would try and get a balance in terms of all aspects of diversity, culture, gender, age.

(Case studies, Admissions Tutor, Time One)

As the next section will show, there was more evidence supporting this second viewpoint in that many programmes appear to have taken considerable care in simultaneously ensuring that the Department of Health numeracy and literacy entry requirements are met while continuing to support students whose previous levels of educational attainment did not reflect their actual ability to become an effective social worker.

Applicants’ previous educational attainment

Figure 5.2 uses data from UCAS to compare the UCAS tariff scores of social work degree acceptances with those of all students accepted through UCAS. The tariff system is a points system used to report achievement for entry into higher education in a numerical format. It establishes agreed comparability between different types of qualifications and provides comparisons between applicants with different types and volumes of achievement (UCAS, Undated). Thus, a student with four grade A GCE ‘A’ levels would have a tariff score of 480, while a student with one grade E ‘A’ level or a pass in a BTEC National Award would have a score of 40.
Figure 5.2 shows that in accordance with the government’s aim that the ‘opportunities that higher education brings are available to all those who have the potential to benefit from them, regardless of their background’ (Secretary of State for Education and Skills, 2003, p.67), UCAS and social work acceptances span the full range of tariff scores. However, in 2003 only a third of social work acceptances for whom a tariff score was available had a score of more than 240 points (the equivalent of three grade C ‘A’ levels) compared with over two thirds of all UCAS acceptances. By 2006, the proportion of social work degree acceptances with a score of more than 240 points had risen to nearly 50 per cent. This was reflected in the Fact Find data:

*We now ask for B, B, C [grades] or above at ‘A’ level because we have so many applicants.*

(HEI Fact Find, 2006-2007, 013)

**Figure 5.2:** Comparison of tariff scores between social work degree acceptances and all UCAS acceptances 2003-2006 entry (UCAS data)

Figure 5.2 excludes all applicants for whom no tariff score was reported. The proportion of social work students without a tariff score is proportionally greater than that found among UCAS students as a whole. It is possible that postgraduate applicants do not have a tariff score or that more social work applicants have vocational qualifications for which there is no tariff equivalent. Previous work (Hussein et al., BJSW Advance Access doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcl378) has shown that very few social work students have no educational qualifications whatsoever. However, because there is no explanation for the absence of a tariff score, in order to achieve comparability, all UCAS and social work applicants without a tariff score have been excluded from the bar chart.

At the same time, efforts were also made to support applicants whose educational qualifications did not reflect their potential:
On occasions, we do have an application from a mature candidate who possesses significant social care experience underpinned by a vocational qualification such as NVQ3. In these instances, if they otherwise meet the requirements for a place on the programme, we make an offer conditional on the attainment of Key Skills Level 2 literacy and/or numeracy and advise them to contact Learndirect.

(HEI Fact Find, 2006-2007, 019)

Access students

Only two of the 50 programmes on which information was available from the 2006-2007 Fact Find said that they would not accept students who had been on access courses, programmes designed to afford to people who do not have the required educational qualifications the opportunity to study at degree level. Twenty six per cent of students taking part in Phases One and Two of the online survey reported that they had undertaken an access course. Of these, almost eighty per cent (n=91 in 2004-2005 and n=284 in 2005-2006) had taken it the preceding year. Table 5.2 summarises the demographic characteristics of these students.

Table 5.2: Characteristics of students undertaking access courses (online survey, first-year respondents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 24 years</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24-29 years</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-44 years</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45+ years</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black and minority ethnic group</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has self-reported disability</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No self-reported disability</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode of study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Route</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment-based</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College-based</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid n</td>
<td>113</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sub totals in each category may not add up to 113 and 350 respectively because of missing data. Question omitted from the survey completed by the third cohort of first year students, Phase Seven, because these students completed a shortened version.
Table 5.2 suggests that access courses are used particularly by women in their thirties and over who are aiming to find a place on a full-time college based programme. One tutor commented that:

\[\text{Access courses are good for more mature women who have had children. If men are the main breadwinner looking for a change in career, it is more challenging to find courses that will fit in with paid employment commitments}.\]

(HEI Fact Find, 2004-2005, 023)

Another admissions tutor also linked gender and studying on an access course with making a successful application to a social work programme:

\[\text{We seem to offer very few places to male applicants. A brief survey I made of UCAS forms indicated that this was not only due to the small number of applications but that men did not appear in general to have put the same planning into their applications. Most did not meet the [mathematics and English] educational requirements, ... had not studied on access courses and had little social care experience in a paid or voluntary capacity.}\]

(HEI Fact Find, 2006-2007, 033)

Experience of social work and social care

Consistent with the data presented in Chapter Four on the levels of experience among respondents to the online survey, 72 per cent of undergraduate (n=36) and all (n=23) postgraduate programmes on which data were obtained in the Fact Find expected applicants to have had some experience in social care. In the past, social work has been described as a ‘closed profession’ (Shaw, 1985) because of the expectation that applicants would have experience of paid employment in social care. However, respondents to the Fact Find suggested that while previous experience continued to be important, the way in which it was defined had broadened; now voluntary work and personal experiences of using services or caring for another person were also viewed as being both relevant and valuable:

\[\text{We interpret this quite loosely – it can be voluntary work or time as a carer. It’s more about how they recognise their previous experience.}\]

(HEI Fact Find 2004-2005, 005)

Selection process

Entry requirements

The Requirements for Social Work Training set out five entry requirements that must be met before a person can be offered a place on a social work programme. HEIs have to:

- Satisfy themselves that all entrants have the capability to meet the required standards by the end of their training and that they possess appropriate personal and intellectual qualities to be social workers.
Ensure that, in addition to the university’s own admission requirements for the degree, all entrants have achieved at least Key Skills level 2 in English and mathematics. This would normally be equivalent to grade C in the GCSE examination in English and mathematics.

Satisfy themselves that all entrants can understand and make use of written material and are able to communicate clearly and accurately in spoken and written English.

Ensure that, as part of the selection procedures, all candidates admitted for training have taken part in an individual or group interview.

Ensure that representatives of stakeholders, particularly service users and employers, are involved in the selection process.

(Department of Health, 2002a, p.2)

Box 5.1 uses extracts from the programme specification document from one of the case study sites to give a direct example of how HEIs operationalise these requirements in practice. It is then followed by descriptions of how other HEIs met different aspects of the DH entry requirements.

**Box 5.1: Programme specification document A (case studies)**

- All applicants at least 18 years on 1\textsuperscript{st} July in year of entry
- Selected through interview
- Show an ability to communicate well in spoken English
- At least Key Skills Level 2 in English and mathematics, normally equivalent to GSCE grade C. Mathematics test held on day of interview for those who don’t have equivalent
- Service users and carers’ involvement
- Agency partners’ involvement
- Shortlisted based on written application
- Must show how used previous experience to understand social work role and task
- Attributes - ability to work alongside others with sensitivity and understanding/preparedness for study
- Physically and mentally fit to work in social work, if health issues request to sign consent form so can contact GP
- Current disciplinary and Criminal Records Bureau check

Although two of the six case study sites ran alternative tests for candidates (see Box 5.3 for an example of what was involved in these tests) without the required Key Skills Level 2 qualifications in mathematics and English, a practice that was shared in just over a quarter (n=13) of HEIs responding to...
the 2006-2007 Fact Find. Of those HEIs on which we had information, almost a third (n=15) simply did not accept applicants without these qualifications already. An identical proportion (n=15) directed potential applicants to alternative sources of help, such as Learndirect. The remainder (n=5) used other ways of ensuring that applicants met the literacy and numeracy requirements, such as making the offer of a place conditional upon achieving mathematics and/or English qualifications before they could begin the programme.

Box 5.1 also highlights the importance given to applicants’ ability to demonstrate how their personal experiences could be used to demonstrate their suitability for entry to a social work programme, as mentioned earlier.

In the context of later comments in this chapter about the increased time and resources that needed to be given to the admissions process, it is important to note that that the Criminal Records Bureau check was not a new requirement associated with the degree, in that it was also undertaken with DipSW students (Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work, 1995, p.58). Thus, it is not so much that form checking and administration has changed because of the degree, rather that the increase in applications may have had consequences for the time and resources that needed to be allocated to these procedures.

Earlier in this chapter, we highlighted the tensions for social work programmes, between the pressure to demonstrate improved academic standards as a result of moving to a degree level qualification, and the government’s widening participation agenda in terms of attracting people who may not have held traditional educational qualifications. The example of the criminal records check is another striking example of another competing policy tension facing admissions staff. On the one hand, increased regulation is seen as a way of affording greater protection for the public; on the other, there is increased concern about risk aversion (Better Regulation Commission, 2006). The need to protect the public was typified in the following statement:

First and foremost my responsibility is to the public, the service users and carers, and I think we have to do our utmost to ensure that we have enough resources to resource the admissions process and ensure that we get students that are fit to practise, or have the potential.

(Case studies, Admissions Tutor, Time Two)

Just one tutor taking part in the Fact Find suggested that, given that almost a third of men under the age of 30 have a criminal conviction (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2002), this was one reason why many younger men were reluctant to apply for social work programmes, thus highlighting the comparative absence of a public debate on the proper balance between the rights of staff and the protection of vulnerable people (Stevens and Manthorpe, 2007). Boxes 5.2 and 5.3 show extracts from two of the case study sites to summarise the material used in the selection of applicants. They are followed by Table 5.3, which summarises the selection procedures used in the HEIs responding to the 2004-2005 Fact Find.
Box 5.2: Summary of selection material B (case studies)

- **Selection form** in which documentation checked
- **Application form** in which candidate asked about understanding of social work; how candidate’s life experiences and values would lead him or her to believe he or she could be an effective social worker
- **Shortlisting form** in which DH requirements clearly shown. Criteria graded: Education; literacy; knowledge of social work; relevant experience, attitudes and values; evidence of learning potential
- **Interview schedule** in which candidates asked why decided to become a social worker; what do social workers do; previous experiences; imagine meeting someone for the first time who was upset - what would help and hinder; what form of discrimination has he/she come across - what happened and how did he/she respond to it; how deals with stress; positive helping experience; experience that did not go so well; example of book, article, TV programme, internet site that is relevant to social work
- **Admissions written exercise**: Case studies with questions
- **Referee tracing form**
- **Disclosure form**
- **Self-declaration of health form**

Box 5.3: Summary of selection material C (case studies)

- **Application form** screened for basic requirements, for example academic, appropriate grade access credits
- All candidates to have GCSE English and Maths at grade C
- Includes declaration of motivation for studying social work
- An initial screening form is completed by academic staff at this stage
- Those who pass this screening undertake written test and group interview
- Aim of **written test** is to assess ability to demonstrate understanding of social work values and relate to life/work experience
- **Group interview** designed to assess abilities to show understanding of service users and carer perspective, to listen and respond and to assert ideas and feelings in a group setting
- For mature candidates without required qualification levels in English, the written test and group interview provide evidence of abilities to communicate. For mature candidates without the required qualification in Maths, a test involving calculations of costing care packages and planning budgets as well as staffing ratios is set to assess numeracy and reasoning abilities at the required level
- Applicants have to pass all parts of the selection process to be offered a place together with satisfactory health and Criminal Records Bureau
checks. The health check involves completion of a standard form and where necessary provision of further requested information

- Service users and carers are involved in the group interview stage as part of a panel with agency practitioners and academic tutors to assess values and communication abilities
- Those who are rejected are given brief feedback on the reasons for the decision

Taken together, Boxes 5.2 and 5.3 and Table 5.3 (see later) indicate that around three-quarters of HEIs participating in the Fact Find went beyond the minimum requirement to interview applicants, suggesting that selection interviews were a rigorous process designed to assess a broad range of applicants’ abilities, including their written and communication skills.

**Interviews**

Table 5.3 shows that 91 per cent of HEIs (n=41) on whom information was available asked candidates to take part in an individual interview. Just four HEIs used group but not individual interviews, meaning that 33 per cent (n=15) HEIs expected applicants to take part in both an individual and group interview. This was because group interviews were used not just to test an individual’s suitability for the programme but also to consider his or her ability to work with others.

**Service user and stakeholder involvement**

Before the new degree began, HEIs were at different starting points in terms of service user and carer involvement (General Social Care Council, 2005). Around three quarters of HEIs taking part in the 2004-2005 Fact Find reported that service users and carers were involved in the interview process. More than half (n=24) asked service users to help interview applicants. Around a fifth (n=9) asked service users and carers to help draw up the interview questions or help with shortlisting, and just one asked them to ‘meet and greet’ candidates. Most commonly, a selection panel consisted of one of the social work teaching staff, a service user or carer, and a practitioner from a partner agency. These figures possibly underestimate the current state of service user and carer involvement because they are based on data collected three years ago. At Time Two, one of the informants in the case study sites looked back to the situation that existed before, compared with what had happened since:

*Things were only just starting at that point [in 2005] and we have increased the involvement of service users. So there has been an increase in the amount of involvement of service users in the delivery of the programme, and for the first time we have had service users involved in the interviewing of candidates*

(Case studies, Programme Leader, Time Two)

However, involving service users and carers in interviews is resource intensive. It has been pointed out that even on a comparatively small
programme with 30 places and just three applicants for every place, stakeholders and service users and carers might be asked to take part in up to 90 interviews over a six month period (Levin, 2004, p.35). Unsurprisingly, as one respondent to the 2004-2005 Fact Find pointed out, it took time to build up enough capacity among service users and other stakeholders to involve them in this way:

As our service user and carer involvement has increased [there is] more emphasis on [applicants’] skill base through direct observation at interview, as well as academic test and individual interview. [Our] strong partnership with local employers provides practitioners as interviewers as well as service users, carers and academic staff.

(HEI Fact Find 2004-2005, 017)

Table 5.3: HEI reports on selection procedures (Fact Find 2004-2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Per cent of responses</th>
<th>Per cent of cases*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual interview</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group interview</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service user and carer involvement</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written statement or test</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other procedure</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total responses</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table is based upon multiple responses so the total per cent of cases in the final column exceeds 100 per cent. The count (N) column represents the total number of respondents reporting that change. The ‘per cent of cases’ is the percentage of interest, since it indicates which percentage of the respondents reporting using at least one of these selection methods had used that particular change. The total (130) of procedures reported is greater than the number of HEIs taking part in the 2004-2005 Fact Find providing this information (n=42), meaning that only 24 per cent (n=10) of participating HEIs used only an interview from which to select applicants, and that another 34 per cent (n=14) used two of the three methods (interview, written test, other procedure) and another 34 per cent (n=14) used all three.

Nevertheless, although recruitment and selection are seen as one of the areas in which there is most evidence of service user and carer involvement (Duffy, 2006), it is important to note that this may conceal the under representation of certain service user groups. One of the case study sites had involved a person with a learning difficulty in curriculum planning and in planning and delivering workshops. However, she had yet to be involved in interviewing applicants, although she would ‘love to’ with help from a support worker who ‘just explains things more easily’. This suggests that it is important to ensure that service users who are unable to read written documents because of cognitive or sensory difficulties are not being unnecessarily excluded from the process of recruitment and selection.

The online survey also collected information on selection procedures, this time from the perspective of students. First year students were asked in Phases One, Two, and Seven if they had attended a selection interview at the university or college at which they were currently studying. The proportion of
students answering ‘yes’ ranged from 94-97 per cent over each phase. While some respondents reporting that they had not been interviewed may have been last minute applicants, possibly seconded by their employer, others may have taken part in a group interview without realising that it was part of the selection process. In addition, the possibility of recall bias cannot be discounted as students completed the online survey towards the end of their first year and so were recalling events that may have occurred as long as two years ago.

Table 5.4 uses the responses to the online survey to complement the Fact Find material presented in Table 5.3. It highlights how selection days may involve many other people (for example, student ambassadors) as well as those directly involved in the formal interview process.

**Table 5.4: Students’ reports on the selection process (online survey, first year respondents)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewed by:</th>
<th>04-05</th>
<th>05-06</th>
<th>06-07</th>
<th>04-05</th>
<th>05-06</th>
<th>06-07</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme leader*</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>719</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>471</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service users and/or carers</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employers and/or practitioners</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>761</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social work students</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Base n</strong></td>
<td>424</td>
<td>1308</td>
<td>755</td>
<td>428</td>
<td>1308</td>
<td>755</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentages total more than 100 because of multiple responses. *The question did not ask about the involvement of teaching staff other than programme leaders.

Although the involvement of service users and carers is less than that reported in the Fact Find, this may partly be explained by the fact that service users and carers may have agreed the selection criteria and interview questions but not taken part in the actual interviews. It is also important to recognise that service users may choose not to disclose their status to applicants and so students may not recognise or indeed recollect their role in the selection process.

**Interview content**

Box 5.2 shows the material that was required as part of the interview process from one of the case study sites to show how applicants were selected and the information that they were expected to provide on the application form and at the interview.

**Other selection procedures**

Box 5.2 notes the existence of an ‘admissions written exercise’. Forty four per cent (n=15), of HEIs taking part in the Fact Find also asked applicants to
provide a written example of their work. Written tests were used to assess literacy and communication skills, as well as candidates’ potential to benefit from a social work course:

*I mean one thing we loved about the Department of Health Requirement is the fact that we had to assess people’s literacy. We already did that here. That we already did that, but the fact that we’ve got the Department of Health backing on that is really helpful…We [even] make [postgraduate applicants] sit a literacy test.*

(Case studies, Programme leader, Time One)

The most frequent procedure in the ‘other’ category was asking students to comment on video footage, either through group discussion or as a written exercise.

Changes to selection procedures

Selection procedures were not seen as static but as something that might need to be adapted. Forty one per cent (n=21) of HEIs participating in the 2006-2007 Fact Find had changed their selection procedures since starting the social work degree, although it is important to recognise that the Rules and Requirements for the DipSW (Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work, 1995) already included detailed information on entry requirements and selection procedures. This comment encapsulated the types of change that they reported making:

*[We have] tightened up in what is asked in reference requests, asking directly for specific pieces of information like attendance, punctuality, reliability, health. Amended questions so as not to disadvantage new, younger applicants. Introduced lunches, student advisory/disability services available on interview day and optional tours of campus, as some candidates had not gone to an open day. Far more service users are involved in interviewing as more [are] trained each year. Criteria different from old DipSW in that health [check is] included and less pre-course experience [is] required.*

(HEI Fact Find 2006-2007, 038)

Quality of applicants

When the need to meet all the criteria outlined in Boxes 5.1-5.3 are considered together, it is perhaps unsurprising that 37 per cent (n=17) of HEIs responding to the 2006-2007 Fact Find considered that the quality of applicants had improved since the introduction of the new degree. The majority (46 per cent, n=21) considered that it had remained the same. A minority (15 per cent, n=8) thought that it had worsened because applicants with limited social care experience and those who were less prepared for what were seen as the realities of life as a social work student were now being offered places. This tension between the perception that applicants were thought to have improved educational qualifications but less social care experience is one that occurred in other areas on which the evaluation
collected information, particularly in practice learning, and will be discussed further in later chapters.

**Impact of selection process on the workload of admissions staff**

The admissions process was regarded by those staff involved as not only as increasingly important but also as increasingly complex and time consuming, as the following comment from an informant in one of the case study sites reveals:

*So the admissions process here is complex; it’s labour intensive, both for the applicants and for ourselves [staff members].*  
(Case studies, Admissions Tutor, Time One)

The admissions process was seen to be further complicated by the shift in the management of applications from the Social Work Admissions Service to UCAS and by having to deal with requests from the General Social Care Council, as the following informants observed:

*The application forms that we get are basically the forms that are used for undergraduate admissions…they aren’t really designed for the postgraduate social work application process.*  
(Case studies, Time One)

*We do have a lot more contact now with the GSCC because they wanted to keep chasing up the registration…They’re forever chasing up the registration of these student social workers. So we do have more…things to do for the GSCC than we did before.*  
(Case studies, Time One)

**Finding out about studying social work**

So far, this chapter has mainly looked at applications, recruitment, and selection from the perspective of social work staff. The final part of this chapter describes how students themselves found out about social work programmes and decided where to study.

Chapter One highlighted the importance of the first national recruitment campaign aimed at attracting more students into social work (Department of Health, 2001). Despite this increased publicity, some students in the discussion groups for the online survey in 2004 still spoke about their difficulties in obtaining information about social work careers. Table 5.5 shows that the use of all sources of information in deciding whether or where to study for a degree in social work increased between 2004-2005 and 2005-2006, suggesting that the effectiveness of publicity may have improved over this period.

University and college websites were the most commonly consulted source of information, though not always judged to be helpful. Friends or relatives working in social work or social care, and the socialworkcareers website and associated ‘Careers in social work’ booklet, were also used more than other
sources in 2004-05, but in 2005-06 much more use was made of ‘recruitment/other literature from social work employers’.

Table 5.5: Sources of information used by students to decide whether or where to study (online survey, first-year respondents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of information</th>
<th>2004-2005</th>
<th>2005-2006*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Website for University/College currently attending</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>1151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends or relatives working in social work or social care</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>socialworkcareers website</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Care magazine</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Careers in social work’ booklet</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other University/College Website/s</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>1251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Guardian weekly ‘Society’ supplement</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>577</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Careers staff at school/college previously attended</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>624</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University/College Open Day/s</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>753</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment/other literature from social work employer/s</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>1073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Valid n</strong></td>
<td><strong>437</strong></td>
<td><strong>1362</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Question not included in shortened survey completed by 2006-2007 first year students. Table based upon multiple responses so total percentages exceed 100 per cent.

Selecting where to study

Given that there are some 80 HEIs offering social work programmes and that students applying through UCAS can make as many as five choices about where they would like to study, applicants for social work programmes potentially can exercise considerable choice about where to study. However, as the literature on widening participation shows (Reay, 1998; Forsyth and Furlong, 2003; Christie et al., 2006; Gorard et al., 2006), the reality is that some students are better placed than others to make these decisions. In particular, students from families where they may be the first person to have studied in higher education tend to be less familiar with the consequences of choosing one HEI over another. This may place them at greater risk of leaving higher education without achieving their intended qualification if they subsequently regret their choice (Thomas, 2002; Davies and Elias, 2003; Yorke, 2004).

Strikingly, only 51 per cent of students (n=221) responding to the 2004-2005 online survey had applied to more than one university or college but this proportion rose to 58 per cent (n=793) in 2005-2006 and to 63 per cent (n=506) in 2006-2007. College-based students were much more likely to have applied to more than one HEI, likewise younger students, though the increase between the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 cohorts goes across the age
range. Of those applying to more than one HEI, 80 per cent of the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 cohorts and 85 per cent of the 2006-2007 cohort reported that they had been accepted by their first choice. A sizeable minority (10 per cent in the first two cohorts) felt they had made the wrong choice about the university or college at which they were studying but the corresponding proportion was only four per cent in 2006-2007, possibly because they were more likely to have applied to more than one HEI.

Irrespective of the number of HEIs to which they had applied, the online survey also asked students about the factors that had influenced their decisions. Respondents were able to pick as many options as they wanted. Table 5.6 shows that location and reputation were the most popular reasons given by online survey respondents for choosing a particular HEI. As Chapters Three and Four showed, the majority of social work students and online survey respondents were aged 25 and over and so more likely to have commitments that would discourage them from moving to a new location, but there are signs of an increase over time in the importance of reputation.

Table 5.6: Reasons for choosing HEI (online survey, first-year respondents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenient location nearby (close to home, work, etc)</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>847</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>471</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good reputation for social work teaching</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>716</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>489</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good academic reputation generally</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>613</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liked the people who interviewed me</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>524</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractive location</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>359</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealt efficiently with my application</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected to ‘fit in’ with other students like me</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommended by qualified social workers I know</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommended by friends/family</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large social work student group</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small social work student group</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No choice – selected by employer</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid n</td>
<td>437</td>
<td></td>
<td>1362</td>
<td></td>
<td>807</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table based upon multiple responses so total percentages exceed 100 per cent.

Students’ financial support

The way in which students support themselves financially while in higher education has become a source of widespread interest, with concerns that students from groups that are already under represented may be reluctant to enter higher education because of fears of debt (Callender, 2003; Callender
and Jackson, 2005) and the debate about the impact of paid employment upon students’ academic performance (Broadbridge and Swanson, 2005; Curtis, 2005). Table 5.7 presents students’ answers in the online survey to the question, ‘Which of the following sources of financial support apply to you for this current year?’

Table 5.7: Students’ sources of financial support (online survey, first year respondents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bursary</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>1048</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>638</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student loan</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>754</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>462</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other commercial loan</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credit card/s</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family support</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time paid employment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>social work or related</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unrelated to social work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time paid employment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social work or related</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unrelated to Social work</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drawing on your savings</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disabled Student Allowance</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other social security benefits</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Valid n</strong></td>
<td><strong>437</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>1362</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>807</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentages total more than 100 per cent because students were able to choose more than one option.

The first point to note is that the proportions reporting receiving bursaries and loans are much higher than those reported earlier in Table 3.3. This may be an artefact of the higher proportions of younger, college-based students completing the online survey. Secondly, Table 5.7 shows that respondents tended to use multiple ways of supporting themselves. Furthermore, the proportion of students reliant on social security benefits, credit cards, and commercial loans is also noteworthy as this would potentially make them vulnerable to financial difficulties during the course of the programme. Employment-based students (defined as those receiving all or part of their salary while a student) accounted for virtually all those reporting that they were in full time paid work. Among those student who were not employment-based, around forty per cent (n=141 students in 2004-2005, n=486 in 2005-2006, and n= 248 in 2006-07) were in paid employment. Almost all of these were working part time.

The difficulties of managing financially were also raised by students in the focus groups at the case study sites. While paid work was thought to be manageable while they were involved in classroom-based learning, there
were concerns about whether they would be able to continue doing paid work when on practice placements. Equally, sponsored or seconded students felt that they had more financial security but that they lost out on some of the non-academic benefits of higher education:

*It is very, very difficult being sponsored [by your employer], in that first year you can't really have fun in your first year, you have got to give absolutely all of your time...quite often you are working as a team, you're taking that work home with you in an evening, it is very, very difficult.*

(Case studies, Student Focus Group, Time One)

Social work education staff in case study sites were also aware of the financial issues faced by some students:

*I know there is the bursary and stuff but now with the introduction of student fees and the fact that the General Social Care Council (GSCC) are not going to meet all the fees... that does put I think a sizeable proportion of people off from applying, because, you know, if they're mature students in particular, they've got a mortgage and living costs to meet, then it prohibits them from applying.*

(Case Studies, Admissions Tutor, Time Two)

**Impact of the bursary**

One of the most important policy decisions accompanying the new degree was the introduction of the bursary. This was because the abolition of the local education authority maintenance grant in the late 1990s had been seen as a major reason for a decline in the number of social work students (Wallis-Jones and Lyons, 2003).

In the case studies sites, there was a perception amongst programme leaders and admissions tutors that the increase in applications might be explained by the introduction of the bursary for social work students. For example, one tutor said:

*But my suspicion, and I hope I am not too cynical here, is because there is a bursary associated with it and fees are paid [this may be attracting students].*

(Case studies, Programme leader, Time One)

Another programme leader commented:

*[In relation to the massive increase in applicants] so I don’t know, but I think one of the big, big factors was the introduction of bursaries.*

(Case studies, Programme leader, Time One)

Data from the student focus groups in the case study sites also suggested that the availability of the bursary was influential when choosing to study social work, although for the majority of students it was by no means the only or most significant factor. One student stated that:
‘That [the bursary] made me motivated to do the social work course. I thought if someone would pay for me, then why not?’

(Case studies, Student Focus Group, Time One)

Many respondents to the online survey felt that without the bursary, they would not have been able to study at all. Students reporting receiving the bursary were asked in the online survey, ‘If a bursary had not been available to you, do you think you would still have gone ahead with this social work degree programme at this time?’ Table 5.8 suggests that around half of the respondents to the online survey might not have enrolled on a social work programme had the bursary not been available.

Table 5.8: Would have gone ahead with social work degree had bursary not been available (online survey, first-year respondents reporting receipt of bursary)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, definitely gone ahead at this time</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possibly gone ahead at this time</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would have postponed doing the degree until personal finances permitted</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, definitely not gone ahead at this time</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Valid n</strong></td>
<td><strong>332</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>1030</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>624</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

**Discussion**

Given the time and attention social work programmes devote to the admissions process, surprisingly little has been written about the subject (Taylor, 2000). This absence makes it harder to compare the impact of the degree upon application and selection procedures. Notwithstanding, the evidence from admissions tutors taking part in the HEI Fact Find and the case studies is that the advent of the degree has led to a substantial increase in applications for social work programmes. This has given HEIs a wider pool of applicants from which to select. Social work educators, in common with their counterparts on all professional qualifying programmes, do not merely have to select on the basis of applicants' academic credentials, but also on the grounds of their suitability for a programme leading to a professional qualification. The evidence presented here shows that these responsibilities were considered very seriously and that the overwhelming majority of programmes appeared to set stringent selection procedures in which applicants were tested in several different ways.

At the same time, the themes presented in this chapter are not just specific to social work. The government’s widening participation agenda places clear
responsibilities on HEIs to support students from backgrounds where they may be the first family member to enter higher education. The increase in the number of younger entrants with ‘A’ levels and the requirement for numeracy and literacy mean that programmes have to balance applicants’ academic suitability with their longstanding commitment to supporting people not possessing these qualifications but who have personal and vocational experiences that would help them become effective social workers. This means that it will be important to continue to monitor the number of successful applicants from access courses or from other non-traditional entry points into higher education.

Research into student retention in higher education has highlighted the way in which some students are privileged over others in terms of selecting a particular HEI or subject of study (Reay, 1998; 2003). Although responses to the online survey suggest that social work students now appear to be consulting a wider range of sources before applying for programmes, convenience of location continues to be the most important reason for choosing a particular HEI, as it was with DipSW students. However, given that many localities offer more than one HEI in which social work can be studied, we continue to know little about how students choose one university or college over another. This means that it will be important to find out more about the sources used by applicants in making their choices and how they prioritise between different sources of information.

While student finance is a subject that has attracted widespread policy and media concern, the evidence presented in this chapter suggests that the decision to fund a social work bursary has been a success in terms of attracting applicants for social work and in supporting people who might otherwise have felt unable to enter higher education. The next chapter moves from students’ experiences of applying for social work onto their actual experiences of studying.
Chapter Six: 
Teaching and Learning

Social work as a discipline which is at once academic and professional exists in tension between the competing demands of the profession, the state, social service providers and the community of scholars.

(Nash, 2003, p.23)

Students come to courses, not as tabula rasa waiting to have professional knowledge and skills imprinted upon them, but with specific educational biographies of their own and with ambiguous, problematic expectations. These also deserve attention.

(Cox, 1982, p.394)

Summary

This chapter uses data from the GS CC, the online survey, and the case studies to examine the learning and teaching experience within the HEI setting from the perspectives of social work educators and students. It explores issues relating to curriculum development, course content, and methods of delivery, and resource issues. The chapter sets qualitative findings from focus groups and interviews with students and social work educators within the context of results from the online survey relating to student satisfaction with the learning and teaching experience. In addition, the chapter explores how two particular innovations required under the new degree, interprofessional learning and e-learning, were implemented.

Key findings

- Social work educators and students report largely positive experiences of teaching and learning on the social work degree.

- Students and social work educators report that degree programmes have been developed to include a wide variety of new modules and methods of delivery and this is appreciated by students.

- However, the challenges of meeting the demands of the curriculum have created some pressures in terms of timetabling. While this applies to both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, the effects on postgraduate programmes appear to be greater.

- There is variation in students’ experiences of e-learning and interprofessional work that needs to be monitored.

- The contribution made by teaching staff to developing new degree programmes while simultaneously maintaining DipSW programmes needs to be acknowledged.
Scope of chapter

In looking at students’ and HEI perspectives on the new degree, this chapter considers three of the four research questions.

1. How has the move to degree level professional social work education and training been implemented?

2. How far has the new degree met the expectations of those entering the profession and other stakeholders?

3. What are the main outcomes of the change from diploma to degree level study?

This chapter looks at teaching and learning in the HEI setting. Information on practice teaching and learning is covered in Chapter Seven. The involvement of service users and carers was such an important element of the process of introducing the new degree that it is discussed separately in Chapter Eight. Chapter Nine discusses the relationship of teaching and learning to assessment, along with specific information about the requirement for students to be proficient in computer skills to the level of the European Computer Driving Licence.

Background

The DipSW curriculum

Chapter One explained that the DipSW professional qualification was offered in conjunction with the academic awards of a Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE), an undergraduate honours degree, and a postgraduate diploma or degree. It was based on the acquisition of six core competences:

- communicate and engage;
- promote and enable;
- assess and plan;
- intervene and provide services;
- work in organisations; and
- develop professional competence.


Each of these competences was underpinned by a wide-ranging knowledge base designed to be the basis for ‘informed practice’:

[Qualifying workers] should be able to explain in a coherent, comprehensive and convincing manner how their practice is informed by their knowledge base, and be able to apply their knowledge and learning to new situations through appraising what is general and what is particular in each situation.

However, as Chapter One suggested, social work educators were concerned that it was difficult to achieve these competences within a two year non-graduate programme.

**Satisfaction with the DipSW**

Work commissioned by the Department of Health as part of its review of social work education, which helped inform the decision to implement the new social work degree, also concluded that, while there were excellent examples of DipSW courses, aspects of the curriculum needed to be strengthened. In particular, improvements were needed to achieve better integration of theory and practice and in developing what were termed students’ ‘thinking skills’, defined as research-mindedness, critical analysis, and reflective practice (J M Consulting, 1999).

These themes were echoed in focus groups undertaken with social work students, service users and carers, frontline social workers, and employment agencies (Barnes, 2002) as part of the same review. These concluded that social work education needed to pay greater attention to the teaching and development of core skills and abilities, such as problem solving, interviewing, assessment, and risk assessment. Students attending these focus groups reported that they valued a range of teaching methods to develop these skills, including role-play, simulation, observation, and case studies (Barnes, 2002).

Research undertaken in Wales with newly qualified social workers and their managers also identified a need to improve risk assessment skills (Pithouse and Scourfield, 2002).

Other research carried out with recently qualified social workers concluded that some aspects of the DipSW curriculum were taught better than others. Table 6.1 shows that respondents taking part in the University of East London surveys were noticeably less satisfied with the areas that were most strongly related to their everyday work, such as care management, budgeting, information technology, and record keeping.

### Table 6.1: Newly qualified social workers’ satisfaction with aspects of the DipSW curriculum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects of DipSW curriculum</th>
<th>% of respondents who ranked training as good or better</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social work theory</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social policy</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social work practice</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Aspects of DipSW curriculum | % of respondents who ranked training as good or better
--- | ---
Care management | 40
Information technology | 27
Record keeping | 24
Residential work | 21
Budgeting and finance | 8

(Lyons and Manion, 2004, p.142)

Finally, the other major study looking at newly qualified social workers undertaken prior to the introduction of the degree (Marsh and Triseliotis, 1996), concluded that while participants were broadly satisfied with what they had learnt, the quality of teaching was sometimes poor in classroom and practice settings, ‘especially regarding theoretical material and its application’ (p.203).

**Place of social work in higher education**

Although social work training courses were established in universities over a century ago (Manthorpe, 2002), commentators have observed that the position of social work as an academic subject had remained uncertain:

> The UK government’s decision to locate the new award at degree level in higher education institutions is a clear signal that social work does have a place in the academy. Social work is seen as requiring both practical skills and academic learning. Theoretical knowledge, skills and values must be taught and assessed in order to ensure that students are competent for practice.

(Preston-Shoot, 2002, p.621)

This last statement reflects the strong support among social work educators for a degree level professional qualification, not only as a way of improving the knowledge and skills within the workforce (Orme, 2001) but also as a means of reinforcing its status within higher education.

**Prescribed curriculum for the social work degree**

The picture presented above provides important contextual information behind some of the changes that the introduction of a degree level qualification was intended to achieve. The prescribed curriculum for the social work degree comprised three documents:

- Requirements for Social Work Training (Department of Health, 2002a)
In addition, the *Requirements for Social Work Training* (pp.3-4) set out minimum standards for the time students were to spend in academic and practice learning. These were that the number of ‘hours spent in structured academic learning [was]…at least 200 days or 1,200 hours’ and that students had to ‘spend at least 200 days gaining required experience and learning in practice settings’. They envisaged that a range of stakeholders would be involved in designing and delivering the degree and that employers, service users, practice assessors, students themselves, and HEIs would all have roles in the provision of teaching and learning.

The GSCC (2002b) also issued a document setting out the process by which HEIs could be accredited to undertake the validation of new programmes. It elaborated on some of the Department of Health requirements and established some further requirements that needed to be met through the GSCC approval process.

Taken as whole, the degree curriculum was intended not only to raise the academic standard of a social work qualification but was designed to address some of the specific problems that had been identified with the DipSW, while maintaining its strengths.

**Moving to a degree level qualification**

For many social work programmes, the introduction of the new degree meant that they would be offering a degree level qualification for the first time. Table 6.2 shows the number of HEIs offering DipSW and degree programmes in 2002-2003 (the last year before the degree was introduced) and 2004-2005 (the first year in which there were only degree programmes).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Programme</th>
<th>DipSW 2002-2003 Number of HEIs</th>
<th>New Degree 2004-2005 Number of HEIs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Single programme</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non graduate only</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate only</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate only</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Multiple programmes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non graduate and undergraduate</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non graduate and postgraduate</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate and postgraduate</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All three types</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotals</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEIs with non graduate programmes</td>
<td>49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total offering undergraduate</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total offering postgraduate</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total number of HEIs</strong></td>
<td>77</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6.2 shows that of the 74 HEIs offering undergraduate degree programmes in 2004-2005, 19 of these had previously offered an undergraduate DipSW programme. Of the 14 HEIs that offered postgraduate DipSW programmes, seven now provided both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Overall, Table 6.2 indicates how within three years of the announcement that social work was to be a degree level qualification (Department of Health, 2001), 81 HEIs were offering a social work degree qualification.

Developing undergraduate programmes in HEIs that had previously only run non-graduate programmes, and developing new undergraduate and postgraduate programmes elsewhere, required a considerable amount of work on the part of social work educators who were involved in developing degree programmes at the same time as delivering DipSW programmes. Key informants in the case study sites described the process of achieving approval to run a social work degree programme and the work they had undertaken to meet the requirements:

How I think of it, it’s like being the sort of director and producer of a film…The university had to first become accredited [with the GSCC] to be able to offer the qualifying degree…and then we had to validate the degree internally [in the university] with external people on the panel obviously, and then we had to get the GSCC approval for the new qualification…We sort of very much involved people along the way, and…we had a number of development days [to] which we invited all our partner agency representatives; service users, carers and existing students, and the Practice Assessment Panel.

(Case studies, Programme Leader, Time One)

In another site that had previously offered a non-graduate diploma, those planning the new programme had to conform to the requirements of the university undergraduate award system, which they had not had to do previously:

We’ve had regular meetings, four of us particularly…[We] were meeting on and off, for a year or more. [First of all] initially in seeking information…and then as we moved on in planning and got more information and so on, it was very much…planning the structure of the degree, and then individually taking away modules to write up, to contribute towards the submission that was approved by the university and by [the] GSCC…One specific difference was to come within the academic [undergraduate] credit system…At the time that we were planning, we also had a degree partnership going on, and the partnership was [local] social services, [another HEI] and us, so that helped to some extent in our thinking.

(Case studies, Programme Leader, Time One)

Differences from the DipSW

Generally, key informants in the case study sites considered that the degree had grown out of the DipSW:
I think at the end of the day we were a degree that tended to evolve from the Diploma. We did take an opportunity to start completely afresh [but] anybody who knew the Diploma would recognise quite a few modules.

(Case studies, Programme Leader, Time One)

These similarities existed because both qualifications were based on a common set of principles:

The essential elements of what we used to do in the DipSW and CQSW are there because they’ll always be fundamental to social work.

(Case studies, Programme Leader, Time Two)

However, the degree had been the impetus for making improvements:

I mean obviously I’m not naïve enough to think that the new three-year degree is going to sort out the problems within social work, because actually I think those are much, much broader [but] I think if we can be part of trying to improve the quality of practice then that's a very good thing. And I think our programme now is more coherent as a whole. It’s better structured…and it gave us the opportunity to really sort of update it, to rethink it, to really think about the structure.

(Case studies, Programme Leader, Time One)

They also looked to the increased academic standard as a way of helping students gain a greater understanding of social work:

From our own perspective, what I wanted was for social work students to get a chance to train at a broader and deeper level that they were able to within a two-year frame, essentially. And I think that this is a good opportunity to allow us to do that.

(Case Studies, Senior HEI/Social Work Staff, Time One)

[Students] will get into a different kind of mindset over the three years in relation to personal development, intellectual development, and development of practice.

(Case Studies, Senior HEI/Social Work Staff, Time One)

Programme content and timing

An indication of the breadth and depth of the social work degree curriculum emerged clearly in the students’ responses to a question in the online survey asking them, ‘Which of the following components of the social work degree programme have you covered so far?’, and offered a predefined list of 25 topics. Using a five-point scale, students were then asked to say how satisfied they had been with the ‘Quality of the learning opportunity’ provided on each of the topics that they said they had covered. These results are presented in Table 6.3. Since the results for successive phases did not vary substantially, Table 6.3 combines the results from Phases 1-6.

The curriculum topics have been divided into three lists, according to the timing of their introduction into the syllabus. ‘Universal’ topics were covered
by over half the students participating in the online survey at some point in their first year, and by almost all by the second year. ‘Second year’ topics were less likely to have been covered in students’ first year, but by the second year by two-thirds or more. ‘Less common’ topics were again less likely to have been covered in students’ first year, and although more students noted them in the second year, coverage at that stage reached lower levels. Table 6.3 shows the proportion of students having covered that topic who were ‘very satisfied’ with the ‘quality of the learning opportunity’, and the topics have been ranked in that order. The topics for which the highest proportion of students reported that they were ‘very satisfied’ were anti-oppressive practice and social work values and ethics.

The topics grouped into the ‘Universal’ category are, unsurprisingly, linked closely to the prescribed curriculum for the degree, and were covered by the majority of students in their first year. The ‘second year’ topics relate strongly to working in practice settings and cover areas such as interprofessional working and working with different groups of service user. ‘Children and families’ appears at the top of this list, and comes joint fourth overall in terms of student satisfaction among the 25 curriculum topics asked about in total. The final group of ‘Other’ topics shown in Table 6.3 includes items such as record keeping and report writing that are most likely to be covered in the third year. However, it is noticeable that fewer students reported having covered study skills and time management. While study skills may have been provided centrally within the HEI, it is possible that the comparatively low proportions of students considering that they had covered this area may, arguably, have some implications for later sections in this chapter looking at student satisfaction with, and pressures within, the curriculum. Of these ‘Less Common’ topics, none attracted especially good satisfaction ratings from students, except Sociology.

Table 6.3: Satisfaction with curriculum content (online survey, Phases 1-6 combined)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components of degree programme covered so far (see text)</th>
<th>‘Very satisfied’</th>
<th>N students having covered this topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Universal’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-oppressive practice</td>
<td>1055</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social work values and ethics</td>
<td>1077</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>861</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal communication skills</td>
<td>823</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology/human growth and development</td>
<td>816</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social work theory and methods</td>
<td>796</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social/public policy</td>
<td>726</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Second year’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children and families</td>
<td>629</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social work practice skills and knowledge</td>
<td>655</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health</td>
<td>532</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment, planning and intervention</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>457</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Box 6.1 uses examples from the case studies to show how differing aspects of the curriculum were put into practice.

**Box 6.1: Putting the curriculum into practice (case studies)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social work theory and methods</th>
<th>I’d been...familiar with the social work practice, and for me coming and learning the theory was important [so] that I understood [how to relate] the theory to the... practical social work...that I’d been used to...It’s like] the theory was...like...hanging...a jacket on a hanger.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Case studies, Student Focus Group, Time Two)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research methods</th>
<th>So, the research and practice module we have adopted a case study approach, that has been one which we have introduced with the development of the new degree, and has been really successful...They work in learning sets and they are given a number of case studies throughout the module and for their assessment they’ve got to choose one of the case scenarios, write about a particular method they would use and how they would use that. And the second part is where they’ve got to identify a piece of research that has helped them understand the person’s situation.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Case studies, Programme Leader, Time Two)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anti oppressive practice</th>
<th>We do quite a lot of things on faith, which is because most of the black students have a faith and most of the white students don’t and we look at Islam, Judaism and Christianity and students gain a lot of awareness. Even that just waking up to the fact of, ‘Oh, hold on, actually in this group are a group of people who don’t think like I do’.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Case studies, Admissions Tutor, Time Two)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| This course has pushed like a lot about anti-discriminatory, anti oppressive practice at every opportunity, but I think that is really good because like we probably all practise like that anyway but now we’re aware of actually the reason that we’re doing it. |
|---|---|
| (Case studies, Student Focus Group, Time Two) |
Genericism and specialism within programmes

The debate about how generic or specialised qualifying training in social work should be has persisted since the development of the first generic qualification, the Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (CQSW) in 1970 following implementation of the Seebohm report (1968). Neither are these debates restricted to social work – they also occur in nursing (Robinson and Griffiths, 2007). While most CQSW programmes had teaching input on childcare and mental health, they were more variable in relation to other groups of service user. The revised DipSW requirements (Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work, 1995, 1996) allowed for ‘particular pathways…which concentrate on work in particular services or settings, or work with particular service groups’ (1996, p.13). Wallis Jones and Lyons (2003) reported that around three-quarters of newly qualified social workers participating in their study had followed a particular pathway, mainly to work in children and families. Marsh and Tresiliotis also found that the majority of newly qualified social workers participating in their research had approached their studies with a ‘specialised eye’ but that they saw a ‘solid generic foundation…as highly desirable’ (1996, p.205). They themselves concluded that there was a ‘need for foundation at a broadly generic level, with specialism becoming increasingly acknowledged as training proceeds’ (1996, p205).

Thus, the context for the development of the Requirements for Social Work Training (Department of Health 2002a) was that work with children and families already featured very strongly in social work qualifying programmes. In identifying the five key areas for specific learning and assessment - human growth, development, mental health and disability; assessment, planning, intervention and review; communication skills with children, adults and those with particular communication needs; law; partnership working and information sharing across professional disciplines and agencies - the aim was to ensure that these areas were covered as adequately as was work with children and families.

Teaching on children and families has continued to feature strongly on social work programmes. How it has incorporated this into practice can broadly be seen as operating along an integration continuum. At one end of the continuum, every module is exploited to highlight its contribution and relevance to children and families' social work. At the other, children and families’ social work is organised into specialist dedicated modules (Blewett and Tunstill, 2007). At the time of writing, many social work programmes are undergoing their five-year periodic review and so this is a changing area.

As mentioned in Chapter One, the separation into Children’s and Adult services occurred after the evaluation had begun and so could not be directly addressed in the study methodology. However, as a key policy change that emerged during the course of the evaluation, participants described how teaching and learning had been adapted to incorporate these changes and speculated about what was likely to happen.
Within the six case study sites, the integration continuum was also observed to be operational. All nine programmes integrated elements of childcare in the compulsory modules. In three sites, students were able to choose a particular pathway, relating either to adult services or children and families. In two others, students were able to choose modules in specialist areas within the final year, which enabled them to develop a level of specialism within those areas. In the remaining site, modules with both adults and children were compulsory.

Around three quarters of respondents to the online survey reported that they had been taught materials specifically relating to the needs of children and families, mental health, and disability. The most probable explanations as to why not all respondents to the online survey had covered all these areas is that they were completing the online survey during their first or second years on programmes where these subjects were taught in the third year or that they were on programmes in which they were able to follow a specific pathway. The case studies offered information explaining how these differences might work in practice:

A fairly major change was that material that we taught in year three [has been brought] into year two and vice versa. Teaching on social work with children and families and on adult services and community care...used to be in year three...[It is now]...in year two after the first 100-day placement. I think we had some support from employers [but] I wouldn’t say that that was the main driver for change. Some of it was feedback from students, and our own experience of students on placement.

(Case studies, Programme Leader, Time Two)

The analysis of documents from the case study sites showed that programmes could be structured in different ways while still meeting the Requirements for Social Work Training. For example, in one site students studied service users from every age group by completing a compulsory generic 'human development' module. This was then followed by a specialist pathway with children or adults. In another, all students looked at different service user groups using a framework focusing on interventions and professional practice. They were then able to choose two further modules from five different user groups.

Opinions on the merits of the two approaches within the case study sites were mixed. From the perspective of students, some of those participating in focus groups in the case study sites that did not offer the opportunity to specialise wanted greater specialism whereas those enrolled on more specialist programmes spoke of the benefits of genericism. Those who wished to see the introduction of a more specialist approach were influenced by what they perceived to be the issues of significance within their practice placements:

I'm quite in favour of that actually because I feel that would have prepared me more...to make it more generic in the first year and then specialist.

(Case studies, Student focus group, Time Two)
The most useful part that I found on the course was in the first term this year when we decided what options we were doing, like adults or children and families...so that period of lectures were very specific because I'm doing adult care so it was specifically looking at services and policy so that was really good.

(Case studies, Student focus group, Time Two)

I think it’s useful to have pathways to give people the opportunity to engage more in-depth with specialist areas...although I feel a generic degree is not so much about content but it’s more about developing the kind of abilities to critically reflect and think.

(Case studies, Senior HEI/Social Work Staff, Time Two)

Those who were in favour of continuing with a more generic approach outlined the reasons for this in terms of the need to have an understanding of a wide range of areas in order to be an effective social worker:

Even if you are working in adults, it doesn’t mean to say you are never going to have a child protection case or vice versa, so I think that’s why it needs to be generic.

(Case studies, Student focus group, Time Two)

Making a comparison between the DipSW and the [degree], in the second year [of the DipSW], our students specialised. I think one of the problems with that kind of choice that students were making was that it was too specialist...I think in comparison with the DipSW, [the degree] is more generic.

(Case studies, Admissions Tutor, Time One)

A significant disadvantage of asking students to specialise early in a programme relates to their initial uncertainties about their preferred service user group. This was reflected in some of the students’ comments:

At the beginning, you don’t know. You might know a vague area of what you’re interested in but you’re getting all this different information and you feel like you’ve got to take all of it in, because it’s all...important and then trying to do that, and also then kind of following your heart with whatever you’re really interested in.

(Case studies, Student focus group, Time Two)

I was going to say it was difficult for me because it’s a generic course so I [did a] placement in child protection and I felt that I had hardly learned anything on my course on child protection...we’d done like six sessions and I felt like what we’d done didn’t actually help me on the placement...I know there [are] discussions about splitting it, you know, an adults degree and a children’s degree but I don’t know if that would be helpful either because I didn’t know what I wanted to do when I started the course.

(Case studies, Student focus group, Time Two)
This widespread desire to keep options open was apparent in students’ answers to the online survey too, as reported in Chapter Eleven.

Key informants also identified that any future changes to social work education would need to be considered within an international context, for example in terms of the implementation of the Bologna Process, which aims to make academic degree standards and quality assurance standards more comparable and compatible throughout Europe:

Well one [expectation about the degree] would be to produce a graduate workforce for social work. There’s been a long-standing debate about the training of social workers in England, and particularly in relation to other countries, for example both in Europe and across the world, in terms of the shortness of it and the implied inadequacy of it in that respect. So, in one way, it went some way to meeting the expectations of some people in terms of wanting a qualification that reflected the needs of training, which we perceived to require a longer period basically.

(Case studies, Programme Leader, Time Two)

There were also feelings of uncertainty in the sense that further change might affect what were seen as the established benefits of moving to a degree:

I think [the degree has] brought professionalism to the heart of it…so I think it’s been a really good development. I’m not sure about the future because I don’t know whether it will stay generic, or whether it will become specialist…I don’t know where I’m up to in the debate either!

(Case studies, Programme Leader, Time Two)

Methods of delivery

Data from the online survey and from the case studies both suggested that programmes had developed a wide variety of methods of delivering aspects of the programme. While traditional academic lectures, seminars, and essays and written assignments comprised the core methods of delivery, these were interspersed with a wide variety of other techniques. Table 6.4 uses the online survey data to show the range of different methods of teaching, learning, and assessment that students reported they had experienced. (Although assessment constitutes a separate chapter in this report, activities such as exams, tests and quizzes are included here since the online survey did not ask respondents to separate out activities that contributed to students’ overall degree marks and those that were based on self assessment or were not assessed). Table 6.4 also illustrates how some of the these methods seemed to be tailored to the stage at which students had reached so. For example, portfolios and reflective exercises were experienced more often in the second and final years than at the beginning of programmes, mainly because they are generally completed while students are on practice placement and, as Chapter Seven will show, most placements occurred in the second and final years.
Table 6.4: Range of different methods of teaching, learning, and assessment that students reported they had experienced (online survey)

<p>| Teaching, learning and assessment methods experienced so far | 1st years 04-05 intake | | 1st years 05-06 intake | | 2nd years 04-05 intake | | 2nd years 05-06 intake | | 3rd and final years 03-04 intake | | 3rd and final years 04-05 intake |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
|                                                           | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Academic lectures                                         | 384 | 88 | 1240 | 91 | 386 | 87 | 498 | 93 | 114 | 83 | 205 | 92 |
| Use of scenarios/case study materials                     | 359 | 82 | 1159 | 85 | 394 | 89 | 480 | 90 | 114 | 83 | 196 | 88 |
| Seminars/small group discussions                          | 355 | 81 | 1151 | 85 | 381 | 86 | 459 | 86 | 109 | 80 | 189 | 84 |
| Essay writing                                             | 331 | 76 | 1104 | 81 | 362 | 82 | 446 | 84 | 101 | 74 | 178 | 79 |
| Student presentation/s                                    | 327 | 75 | 1027 | 75 | 377 | 85 | 482 | 90 | 109 | 80 | 200 | 89 |
| Class exercises                                           | 327 | 75 | 1094 | 80 | 355 | 80 | 436 | 82 | 93 | 68 | 174 | 78 |
| Feedback from teaching staff                              | 298 | 68 | 996 | 73 | 334 | 75 | 400 | 75 | 98 | 72 | 180 | 80 |
| Presentations/talks from service users and carers         | 288 | 66 | 996 | 73 | 362 | 82 | 458 | 86 | 110 | 80 | 200 | 89 |
| Reflective exercises                                      | 280 | 64 | 916 | 67 | 368 | 83 | 444 | 83 | 103 | 75 | 177 | 79 |
| E-learning: social work study materials from own HEI intranet | 277 | 63 | 909 | 67 | 332 | 75 | 363 | 68 | 70 | 51 | 152 | 68 |
| Role play                                                 | 266 | 61 | 864 | 63 | 291 | 66 | 381 | 71 | 96 | 70 | 168 | 75 |
| Other e-learning: online materials                        | 263 | 60 | 855 | 63 | 310 | 70 | 356 | 67 | 80 | 58 | 144 | 64 |
| Computer/IT training                                      | 260 | 59 | 788 | 58 | 303 | 68 | 338 | 63 | 78 | 57 | 160 | 71 |
| Feedback from fellow students                             | 239 | 55 | 782 | 57 | 256 | 58 | 311 | 58 | 83 | 61 | 141 | 63 |
| Workshops                                                 | 224 | 51 | 734 | 54 | 301 | 68 | 336 | 63 | 82 | 60 | 158 | 71 |
| Portfolio/workbook                                        | 201 | 46 | 663 | 49 | 372 | 84 | 446 | 84 | 110 | 80 | 200 | 89 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching, learning and assessment methods experienced so far</th>
<th>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; years 04-05 intake</th>
<th>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; years 04-05 intake</th>
<th>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; years 05-06 intake</th>
<th>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; years 05-06 intake</th>
<th>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; and final years 03-04 intake</th>
<th>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; and final years 04-05 intake</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shadowing of experienced social worker (longer than one day)</td>
<td>156 36 470 35</td>
<td>275 62 303 57</td>
<td>59 43 134 60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test/s, quiz/zes</td>
<td>155 35 576 42</td>
<td>223 50 247 46</td>
<td>63 46 124 55</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint teaching with students on other courses</td>
<td>144 33 491 36</td>
<td>194 44 258 48</td>
<td>71 52 97 43</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills laboratory*</td>
<td>143 33 499 37</td>
<td>159 36 206 39</td>
<td>63 46 93 43</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice studies</td>
<td>139 32 468 34</td>
<td>311 70 356 67</td>
<td>84 61 161 72</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam/s</td>
<td>134 31 476 35</td>
<td>297 67 350 66</td>
<td>79 58 156 70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadowing of experienced social worker (one day)</td>
<td>127 29 416 31</td>
<td>208 47 255 48</td>
<td>67 49 96 43</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project work</td>
<td>115 26 427 31</td>
<td>237 53 216 40</td>
<td>64 47 135 60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Base n</strong></td>
<td><strong>437</strong></td>
<td><strong>1362</strong></td>
<td><strong>443</strong></td>
<td><strong>534</strong></td>
<td><strong>137</strong></td>
<td><strong>224</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Students may not have known what was meant by this term and so these proportions may underestimate the frequency with which skills laboratories were used.
Examples of how some of the activities summarised in Table 6.4 were successfully implemented in practice are shown in Box 6.2 below. It is important to recognise that informants were reporting on innovations within their own site. These approaches may have been established for longer on other programmes.

**Box 6.2: Programme innovations in teaching and learning (case studies)**

| Student presentation/s | And what we thought was successful...we used group presentation work. So right from the start they're already working in research groups...we've set aside some workshop time for them to work on their topics, but they're expected to gather together at other times and they go off and do their research. They present their research either in group[s] or because of large numbers, we are moving to poster presentations in a sort of bazaar.  
(Case studies, Social work staff, Time Two) |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Scenarios and case studies | There is a case study system on the mental health module where students were given sort of basic information and a set of questions structured around a case study system, questions such as 'What sort of diagnosis do you think the psychiatrist might be thinking of in this particular case? What are the implications of this mental health problem for this family, for the individual, for the carers?' and so on. And so it becomes a structured exercise that's a move away from 'Let's give you a teaching session about what diagnosis is', kind of thing. So part of a move towards a more student centred way of learning.  
(Case studies, Senior HEI/Social work staff, Time Two) |
| Practice techniques | I was working with [service user] who didn’t want to work with a woman and it’s like, ‘no-one wants to work with me’ and you feel anxious for no reason and then you learn a technique like ecosculpts, genograms and culture maps and they [the service user] are like, ‘Wow!’  
(Case studies, Student Focus Group, Time Two) |
| Project work | We split into groups and we are kind of set tasks each for each section like social work with adults and social work with children and families. We are set a number of tasks which look at the law surrounding it and we also look at different things, service users’ and carers’ perspectives, and theories and research and everything. I find it a really useful way of learning. Because everyone has got their different bits of knowledge.  
(Case studies, Student Focus Group, Time Two) |
| Reflective exercises | In our group, we did a really useful self-appraisal at the beginning of the first session and we found it very, very useful and beneficial. You actually say, you know, we have weaknesses here because in every group there are issues of group dynamics. We had some difficulties in our group and we worked through those difficulties - conflict resolution basically.  
(Case studies, Student Focus Group, Time Two) |
| Role play | I didn’t know, I just didn’t get it. Then when they put the role-play in and I thought, ‘Oh this is what I’m doing. Yes, I can use narrative. I can use this’...The role play helped me.  
(Case studies, Student Focus Group, Time Two) |
Satisfaction with different methods of teaching and learning

The online survey also asked students to rate their experiences of the methods of teaching and learning listed earlier in Table 6.4. Figures 6.1 and 6.2 divide these items into those students completing the online survey rated as ‘excellent, very good’ or ‘good’ most often by those students who had experienced them and those that were rated as ‘excellent, very good’ or ‘good’ least frequently. It is important to preface discussion of the findings presented in Figures 6.1 and 6.2 by noting that, overall, they suggest that most of the respondents to the online survey rated the methods well, but that there were areas where there was potential for improvement.

A series of factor analyses were undertaken to see if the methods of teaching and learning shown in Figures 6.1 and 6.2 could be summarised into different groups representing a smaller number of underlying dimensions. This is shown in more detail in the Technical Appendix. The analyses grouped the following items together and they were given the description ‘didactic’.

‘Didactic’ methods

- academic lectures
- e-learning: social work study materials from your HEI intranet
- e-learning: online materials from other sources
- presentations and talks from service users and/or carers
- computer/IT training
- joint teaching together with students on other courses (e.g. nursing)

The following items also grouped together and they were described as ‘interactive’.

‘Interactive’ methods

- seminars/small group discussions
- skills laboratory (video-ed practice simulation/s)
- student presentations
- classroom exercises
- feedback from teaching staff
- feedback from fellow students
- use of scenarios and case study materials

A statistical procedure, logistic regression (see Technical Appendix) was then undertaken to see whether different students rated the two approaches differently. It showed that younger students preferred didactic methods. As didactic methods included e-learning, it may be that younger students felt more confident in this area. It may also be that they preferred approaches, such as lectures and presentations, with which they were more familiar. By contrast, students who already had some experience of social work – working or personal (as opposed to none) – and also Black students, preferred interactive methods of teaching and learning.
Figure 6.1: Methods of teaching, learning, and assessment rated as ‘excellent, very good’ or ‘good’ most frequently by students (online survey)
Figure 6.2: Methods of teaching, learning and assessment rated as ‘excellent, very good’ or ‘good’ by fewest students (online survey)
There is not enough space to discuss each of aspects presented in Figures 6.1 and 6.2 in detail but six areas (shadowing, use of scenarios/case studies, skill laboratories, e-learning and interprofessional learning) have been selected for more detailed discussion below in view of their prominence in the Requirements for Social Work Training (Department of Health, 2002a) and its emphasis on ‘practice and the practical relevance of theory’ (p.1).

Shadowing, use of scenarios/case studies, and skills laboratories

Figure 6.1 shows that both short and longer periods of shadowing were highly rated by almost all students participating in the online surveys. The Requirements also state the ‘teaching of theoretical knowledge, skills, and values is based on their application in practice’ (p.3). Figure 6.2 shows that scenarios/case studies were rated as ‘excellent, very good’ or ‘good’ by between 80-90 per cent of students. A further expectation in the Requirements is that service users and carers should be involved in all aspects of the degree, including teaching and learning provision (p.9). Presentations by service users and carers were students’ third most highly rated method of delivery. Finally, as part of the new degree, the Department of Health provided additional funding to HEIs to establish skills laboratories. Figure 6.2 indicates that first year students valued skills laboratories whereas third year students rated portfolios and workbooks more highly. The use of portfolios is discussed further in Chapter Nine on Assessment. Here, it is worth mentioning that what this finding suggests is that as students’ confidence increases over the course of their studies this affects their appreciation of different learning methods.

E-learning and the use of technology

Use of technology across the case study sites to assist with and enhance learning generally took the form of online learning tools such as WebCT or Blackboard. Their use varied across the sites and usually depended upon the presence of a committed individual within the department and/or the level of IT support within the HEI. At one end of the spectrum, use of technology was limited to the posting of lecture notes online. There were also examples of more imaginative uses, such as interactive materials or learning objects such as case studies or quizzes.

Generally, the increased use of technology was regarded as positive by students. They valued the use of online learning tools such as Blackboard and WebCT as these allowed them greater flexibility in terms of independent studying. In particular, if a student had missed a class, the posting of lecture notes online enabled them to catch up. Staff also generally valued the use of technology, although the infrastructure for its delivery within HEIs could vary:

Well the Blackboard system at the University here is amazingly good. The real problem is resourcing it and I think we need to make progress here…I think if you were describing it in a derogatory way you would say that progress here is patchy.

(Case studies, Senior HEI/Social Work Staff, Time One)
Two negative aspects of the use of technology were identified by staff and students across the case study sites. The first related to the fact that not all students had access to a personal computer at home. This resulted in a level of inequality being introduced across the student group. It was, however, observed that across all sites, access to computing facilities within the HEI setting was good although there were sometimes issues around, for example, inflexible opening hours in information services centres or facilities.

Secondly, the use of technology created difficulties for some students who did not feel comfortable about the use of computers. When group work or peer learning was involved, this could discriminate between students:

*We are using WebCT an awful lot...I think it...can create tensions between peer learning groups because not everyone likes working on WebCT, a lot of people who don't have access to computers, and we need to think of a way to provide another option.*

(Case studies, Admissions Tutor, Time One)

Consistent with the online survey findings, a small number of students in the case study sites felt that further support was required to enable them to develop the skills to use technology:

*And so the support isn't always there...or there isn't you know, another support group that will say, there is an IT class just you know, to polish your skills up, so you can actually use the systems here and it's all a bit of a rush.*

(Case studies, Student Focus Group, Time One)

**Interprofessional learning**

Interprofessional learning is seen as increasingly important across all health and social care qualifying and post-qualifying programmes because of the changing work environments in which professionals are increasingly likely to work. The rationale for interprofessional learning is that ‘service users want social workers who can collaborate effectively with other professions and agencies; and strategies for service partnership and for the protection of children and vulnerable adults require it’ (Whittington, 2003). However, there is no ready consensus as to what constitutes interprofessional learning and, until comparatively recently it occurred more often in post qualifying than in qualifying education (Sharland et al., 2007).

At Time One, the case study sites acknowledged that interprofessional learning was an area requiring development:

*We are aware that there were a few areas of weakness, I suppose, in our programme. One is the interprofessional learning bit and so we have changed the way in which we integrate that into the curriculum from what we had previously.*

(Case studies, Programme Leader, Time One)
In most instances, the most frequent form of interprofessional learning was joint teaching with students on other courses. This brought financial benefits to HEIs in that, for example, in one site first year social work and first year criminology students could be taught together for some modules. However, the increases in student numbers on social work programmes and the size of some other programmes could create class sizes of over 100 students in which social work students were often in a minority. Key informants recognised the limitations of this approach:

*I wasn’t convinced that just because you sit next to a nursing student you’re learning about interprofessional practice.*

(Case studies, Programme Leader, Time One)

*I’m not against it. But the worry with it is that, it’s actually nursing inviting social workers to their lectures…and it’s not integrated.*

(Case studies, Senior HEI/Social Work Staff, Time Two)

By Time Two, there was evidence that some programmes had made efforts to develop their approaches to interprofessional learning:

*We have a number of initiatives around inter-disciplinary learning…we have specific timetable slots where specific events are delivered to a range of professional groups, be it nursing, or other professionals or social work and they work really well which you know, from the clichéd problem family to multiple issues that are looked at in different ways through to more esoteric, theoretical discussions about how would you define poverty and impact on your service users.*

(Case studies, Senior HEI/Social Work Staff, Time Two)

However, negotiating these developments with other professional programmes could prove time consuming:

*What we were hoping to do was actually to get different students from different professional programmes here within the HEI together to kind of have some shared learning. That’s the process for the next year and the year after. We’ve got colleagues…within the programme who have connected up with nursing and they’re looking at doing it within the specialist pathway…We’ve been trying to get something going in terms of connecting with education on the teaching side because that would be useful in terms of the children and families pathway…but it’s hard to put into operation.*

(Case studies, Senior HEI/Social Work Staff, Time Two)

Another difficulty stemmed from debates about the stage at which the interprofessional learning should be included in the curriculum. Some staff felt that students should develop their own professional identity, values, and knowledge base before trying to understand those of other professionals. By contrast, others felt that it was needed before professional identities, stereotypes, and barriers had formed:
I was fed up with being told, 'Oh well they should do [interprofessional learning] post qualification'...because my own opinion is it's too late then. It needs to be done pre-registration...my own feeling was this is a very timely and important way to do it.

(Case studies, Senior HEI/Social Work Staff, Time Two)

One key informant suggested that more attention could be paid to identifying where joint teaching was more appropriate than others:

They might do more in year one...[for example, learning] essay writing...and that’s fine but I think when you really get to the core of the syllabus, you know, child protection, mental health, nurses look at it in a very different way. They’ve got very different roles and responsibilities [but] you might join up on [for example] mental health legislation. Why do that separately?

(Case studies, Senior HEI/Social Work Staff, Time Two)

Despite these changes, for many students, it was their experiences on practice placement, rather than in classroom based learning, that had developed their understanding of interprofessional learning:

I think my interprofessional working was learned on placement almost totally. We had a jointly located team of occupational therapists and social workers with the same team manager...and that worked amazingly well. And I now would like to seek out co-working cases with [occupational therapists] and things like that, which I don’t know if I would have done before.

(Case studies, Student focus group, Time Two)

This is discussed more fully in the following chapter, Chapter Seven.

**Meeting expectations**

Figure 6.3 summarises the aspects of their studies that students responding to the online survey found better and worse than expected. The 'expectations' items in Figure 6.3 were also subject to factor analyses and divided into five groups (see Technical Appendix). Of these, four were all significantly associated with students’ enjoyment of their programme:

- quality and relevance of teaching
- manageability of studies;
- access to resources;
- support to students.

Analysis of individual items showed that ‘quality of teaching’, ‘teaching that was relevant to social work practice’, and ‘coping easily with your studies’ were most strongly associated with expectations being met. These results are consistent with those reported by Marsh and Tresiliotis (1996) who highlighted the importance of good quality teaching relevant to social work. In this sense,
the introduction of the degree has shown that the fundamentals of social work education remain the same.

Figure 6.3: Aspects students rated as ‘better’ or ‘worse’ than expected (online survey, Phases 1-7 combined)

This chart is based on adding the responses from all seven phases of the online survey together. The difference in the number of responses reflects the fact that there was a third option, ‘same as expected’, or students may have neglected to answer on every question.

The high proportions of students reporting that their experiences of ‘timetabling’ and ‘coping easily with studies’ were worse than expected in Figure 6.3 suggest that they feel that their learning has been pressurised. In some respects, this is not a new problem. Primarily because of the need to
meet the demands of academic and practice work and the integration of both, university based training for professional work, with periods spent on practice placements, poses specific pressures of managing time for students, social work educators and practice assessors. However, there are four key reasons, outlined below, why this may have been accentuated with the degree.

Demands of the curriculum

Some of the key informants in the case study sites felt that the prescribed curriculum itself was very demanding:

The curriculum is so full of things that you had to teach that it leaves little opportunity, I think, for students to…develop their own areas of interest.  
(Case studies, Programme Leader, Time Two)

Some students shared this viewpoint:

In terms of structure, because they obviously have requirements that they need to teach, and then we have requirements on how much we need to learn and from what I’ve found on this course it’s a real struggle in terms of managing all those competing demands.  
(Case studies, Student Focus Group, Time Two)

However, a contrasting view was expressed by a smaller proportion of students who appreciated being taught a wide range of subjects:

There is a huge amount of breadth in the knowledge we are getting, and while that causes problems with timetabling and having too much on our plates, it’s also actually a really good thing.  
(Case studies, Student Focus Group, Time Two)

One key informant even suggested that there were arguments in favour of a four-year programme:

One of the things that we thought was that we would get a lot of extra time in the three-year programme. I do not think that has materialised in the way that people had expected. My view is that it needs a minimum of three years training, given that part of your time is spent in practice. I think demands out there would be better served by a longer period of training than three years.  
(Case studies, Senior HEI/Social Work Staff, Time One)

Increase in time spent on practice learning

In theory, the requirement for 200 days of practice over the three year undergraduate period is similar to the minimum of 130 days of practice learning on the DipSW, giving an average of 65 days per year. However, for postgraduate programmes, the requirement for 200 days over two academic years seems to have had a greater impact:

It’s such a tough course; it’s like putting a quart into a pint pot.  
(Case studies, Senior HEI/Social Work Staff, Time One)
Furthermore, on two of the postgraduate programmes the availability of placements meant that some core teaching, for example on methods of intervention, started after the first practice learning opportunity had begun, although it was recognised that educationally it would have been preferable if it had occurred beforehand. Most postgraduate programmes also tended to conform to the pattern of two 100-day placement periods of placement:

> Whether you actually get the dissertations done [on time] seems to be a tougher question. By the time the students have finished their placement they’re very tired and they don’t get into the dissertation immediately.

(Case studies, Senior HEI/Social Work Staff, Time One)

**Greater alignment with HEI timetabling and teaching practices**

Social work educators in the case study sites commented that the new degree and increase in popularity of social work among higher education applicants had improved the increase in the status of social work within their HEI. However, it had also led to pressures for greater alignment with HEI timetabling and teaching practices:

> We are way above the university norms in terms of contact hours and we are under pressure to review the programme…And that’s created a number of problems, you know, relating to the university system - the HEI is not used to a Masters programme running over two years.

(Case studies, Senior HEI/Social Work Staff, Time Two)

The DipSW academic year for college-based routes often ran to the end of June or early July. By contrast, it appears that the current academic years for undergraduate programmes are shorter and more in keeping with norms elsewhere in the HEI. Where programmes do have a longer year, the HEI may not always have recognised the additional load this placed on social work educators:

> A concern of ours is [is] late teaching and practice learning in years two and three and a very late exam board - much later than other degrees in the university and so on.

(Case studies, Programme Leader, Time Two)

Social work education has always prided itself on the personal tutor system (Watson et al., 2001; Watson and West, 2003) and the role tutors play in monitoring and reviewing students’ progress. However, greater alignment with HEI practices in terms of teaching practices and the increased numbers of students on programmes may have created pressures to reduce the levels of individual support that students might expect to have:

> The discussion that I’ve had with the social work group…goes along the lines of, ‘Look, you know, if you want to grow, you need to get more students’. That’s the way universities work. You’ve got to understand that.

(Case studies, Senior HEI/Social Work Staff, Time Two)
Another informant suggested that one way around this was to move from individual to group tutorials:

*I used to say to people, ‘Why are you seeing students always individually on their research projects? Because 90 per cent of what you’ve been saying to nine students in a day is the same thing’. It’s trying to not lose the individuality and the personal support, which students I know, value…It’s just trying to get people to see, you can actually be much more supportive sometimes by doing it in groups and getting the balance right there.*

(Case studies, Senior HEI/Social Work Staff, Time Two)

**Accommodation**

The increase in student numbers brought about by the new degree was also thought to have created a significant pressure on teaching accommodation in five of the six case study sites. At these sites both staff and students expressed concern and reported problems with accommodation availability and suitability:

*In relation to rooms, we have struggled because of the numbers in terms of being able to get rooms that are suitable. I think that’s a HEI issue, the fact that the HEI is expanding at such a rate but [they] haven’t actually got the infrastructure.*

(Case studies, Programme Leader, Time Two)

**Discussion**

The introduction of the social work degree brought important changes to social work education in terms of directly addressing some of the problems that had been identified in earlier research looking at the DipSW. The evidence presented in this chapter demonstrates the swift progress made by HEIs in terms of developing social work degree programmes within a comparatively short space of time after the degree. It shows that they had used a range of approaches to developing programmes while ensuring that they covered the prescribed curriculum and met the *Requirements for Social Work Training* (Department of Health, 2002a). They have used the opportunity presented by preparing degree programmes to build on existing teaching and learning methods to develop innovative approaches. Evidence from the evaluation suggests that different students value differing ways of delivering teaching and learning. As Chapters Three and Four have shown, the intakes on many social work programmes encompass an increasingly diverse group of students. This suggests that it is important that programmes continue to offer, and develop, a wide variety of teaching methods in order to achieve the best learning outcomes.

Specific requirements set out by the Department of Health, such as the opportunity to shadow an experienced social worker and practical applications of theoretical knowledge, skills and values are highly valued by students. Developments in skills laboratories, e-learning and interprofessional learning have been more variable. However, it is important to emphasise that these
are longstanding issues, and difficulties in these areas cannot be directly attributed to the degree. There are multiple facilitators and barriers to the implementation of interprofessional education, including the availability of other programmes, the quality of the teaching and learning environment within HEIs, and issues of status between different teaching professionals (Sharland et al., 2007). In the same way, provision for e-learning varies across the higher education sector. Thus, the provision of interprofessional education and the quality of e-learning are issues that go beyond social work education. Equally, the introduction of the degree appears to have resulted in greater alignment with teaching practices within the higher education sector as a whole in terms of expected levels of contact time and the teaching timetable. There are pressures on social work programmes to conform more to some of the practices followed by other courses. This has implications in terms of student support and may have adverse consequences for the high levels of progression found hitherto on social work programmes when compared with many other subjects.

Having considered some of the different aspects of teaching and learning influenced by the introduction of the social work degree, the following chapter considers another important area of change, practice teaching and learning.
Chapter Seven: Practice Teaching and Learning

Under the new arrangement for the social work degree the programme provider has a clear responsibility to ensure that placement providers are meeting expectations and contractual obligations.

(Torry et al., 2005, p.37)

Service providers, working in partnership with other key stakeholders, must deliver sufficient quantity and quality of practice learning opportunities in order to ensure that tomorrow’s social workers are properly trained to do the job.

(Department of Health, 2002, i)

Summary

This chapter uses data from the GSCC, the HEI Fact Find, student online survey, interviews with key informants, students, and practice learning co-ordinators and questionnaires completed by practice assessors in the case study sites to explore how the changes to practice learning introduced by the new degree were implemented. It considers the organisational issues around arranging practice placements complying with the Requirements for Social Work Training, students’ satisfaction with the practice learning experience, and identifies areas where improvements were suggested.

Key findings

- Seventy eight per cent of placements were rated by students responding to the online surveys as ‘excellent, very good’ or ‘good’.
- The number of placements provided each year has risen because of the increase in student numbers. In 2005-2006, a total of 8087 placements were provided by the statutory, voluntary and private sectors.
- Almost 90 per cent (n=1198) of students for whom information was available had at least one placement working with children and families and almost 75 per cent (n=1002) had at least one placement working with an adult care group.
- Students and practice assessors identified practice placements as a key way of learning about multi-agency and inter professional working.
- The main issues identified as contributing to the overall quality of placements were: the ability of different agencies to provide students with a useful range of practice learning opportunities; the quality of practice assessment; and how students were treated.

Scope of chapter

As noted in Chapter One, in keeping with the policy aim that the degree’s emphasis should be on ‘practice and the practical relevance of theory’ (Department of Health, 2002), two of the main changes introduced in the
Requirements for Social Work Training were the increase in the number of days that students had to spend on practice placements from a minimum of 130 under the DipSW to 200 days and the stipulation that students should undergo an Assessed Preparation for Direct Practice to ensure their safety to undertake practice learning in a service delivery setting. Assessed Preparation for Direct Practice is covered in Chapter Nine, where it is discussed in the wider context of assessment throughout the programme. This chapter concentrates on the provision of practice learning. In doing so, it aims to partly answer two of the four research questions:

1. How has the move to degree level professional social work education and training been implemented?

2. What are the main outcomes of the change from diploma to degree level study?

In addition to undertaking 200 days of practice learning, the Requirements for Social Work Training also state that students must have experience in at least two practice settings, giving programmes discretion to decide when this occurs. Students must have experience of ‘statutory social work tasks involving legal interventions’ and of ‘providing services to at least two user groups’ (Department of Health, 2002, p.3). In order to examine how this has been implemented, this chapter will first consider

- how the 200 days of practice learning were divided across programmes;
- where students were located; and
- which groups of service users they were working with.

It will then discuss participants' experiences of how the requirements for practice learning had been implemented.

Background

Practice placements have always been a central part of social work education (Manthorpe, 2002) and many of the issues are longstanding. For example, looking back over her 40 years in social work education, Parsloe has written:

*The endless, nagging problem of the number and quality of placements has not been eased...*[Looking into my crystal ball] I fear that placements will...continue to be time consuming and to raise questions about standards.*

(2001, p.7, p.18)

In addition, students have always faced the challenge of learning in changing organisational contexts (Cox, 1998) in which they see themselves at the centre of unequal power relationships linking themselves, the agency in which they work and the HEI in which they study (Doel and Shardlow, 2002). The introduction of the degree was accompanied by increased funding (Department of Health, 2003) to address some of these pre-existing problems and by the establishment of the Practice Learning Taskforce which ran from
2003-2006 with a specific remit to increase the quantity, quality and diversity of practice learning for the social work degree. The Practice Learning Taskforce was succeeded by the establishment of regional Learning Resource Networks aimed at enabling employers, education and training providers, and others to work together to support workforce development. These have been renamed as sub-regions of the regional Skills for Care regional structure.

Early work evaluating the delivery of practice learning under the new degree (Doel et al., 2004, 2007) described the delivery of practice learning as a ‘patchwork quilt’ (2007, p.221), in which there were variations in the staging and length of practice learning opportunities across programmes. Examples of the variations included offering shorter placements in the first year of undergraduate programmes or restricting placements to the second and third years; differences in the number of days per week in which students spent in settings (whether practice learning occurred in blocks or ran concurrently with classroom based learning); and in the location of settings (for example, whether they were in the statutory sector or not). As with the DipSW, concerns about the quality of some practice learning opportunities have been raised and it has been suggested that this might be assisted by the use of quality improvement tools of which one, the practice learning quality evaluation tool, PeLQET, was developed as part of the work commissioned by the Practice Learning Taskforce (Pettini, 2006).

Staging and distribution of placements

Educationally, there is a debate about when students should embark on their first placement. Arguments in favour of Year 1/Level 1 placements on undergraduate programmes centre around their ability to provide less experienced students with an induction into social work. Others make the case for placements in the later stages, arguing that, because first year placements tend to be shorter, students do not have time to benefit fully from them, and need a strong grounding in theory beforehand (Doel et al., 2004).

The 2004-2005 Fact Find asked HEI informants how they distributed the 200 practice learning days across the programme. Thirty eight per cent (n=26/42) of undergraduate programmes on which information was obtained offered practice placements in Year 1/Level 1 with the number of days ranging from 20-60. This gave them greater flexibility in the length of time students in spent on placement in later stages. Among the 16 undergraduate programmes where students did not go on practice placements until Year 2/Level 2 and Year 3/Level 3, providing two 100 day placements was the most frequent option, with 11 programmes using this arrangement. All 18 postgraduate programmes on which information was available used two long placements, most often two 100-day placements but occasionally 80 and 120 days.

Table 7.1 summarises the information given by respondents to the online survey about the length of practice placements and the stages at which they occurred. It confirms the data obtained in the Fact Find by suggesting that the pattern of one short and two longer placements occurred most often on undergraduate programmes and that that the majority of undergraduate
students also had two, rather than three, placements. Compared with undergraduate respondents, the placement lengths reported by postgraduate respondents were significantly longer (59 days compared with 87 days; 74 days compared with 94 days; 80 days compared with 91; (t-test p-values <0.001, <0.001 and =0.012 respectively). However, fewer than one in ten postgraduate respondents (n=22) reported having three placements. As none of the 18 postgraduate programmes on which information was available through the Fact Find used this option, it is possible that these respondents were repeating a placement or were confusing an observation period with part of the 200 required days.

Table 7.1: Mean length of placement in days by programme type
(online survey, cross sectional data)

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<td>First placement</td>
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<td>Second placement</td>
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<td>Third placement</td>
<td>80 222</td>
<td>91 22</td>
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Students were asked about each placement they had undertaken so the totals represent total placements, not total number of responses.

Since the first social work degree programmes were developed, it has been suggested that pressures to find placements have resulted in a reduction in the number of programmes offering practice placements in the first year as part of the 200 required days. In particular, undergraduate programmes appear to be moving to the pattern of two 100 placements, especially in universities that offer postgraduate and undergraduate routes (Doel et al., 2004). This was certainly the pattern in the case study sites. Four of the nine programmes (two undergraduate and two postgraduate) offered two placements of 100 days. Just one undergraduate programme offered placements in year one whereby a 40 day placement was followed by two 80 day placements in years two and three. The four remaining programmes (one postgraduate and three undergraduate) offered two placements ranging from between 80-90 days for the first placement and 110-120 days for the second. The views expressed by key informants and students participating in focus groups in the case study sites reflected the wider debates about how long each placement should be and when it should occur.

I think 200 days [of practice learning] is absolutely spot on…[but] I have mixed feelings about how the [HEIs] apportion those over the years. Because, [another local HEI] used to have a system of 40, 60 and 100 and now they’ve come in line with us [two 100 day placements] but they’ve done so - I don’t think it’s out of a view that that’s the best way to learn, I think it’s because placements are so difficult to get.

(Case studies, Practice Learning Co-ordinator, Time 2)

Some students valued the sustained learning opportunities afforded by longer placements:

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I quite like long placements. I think it gives you... I think... if you're in a good placement. I think it's really good, you know. I think you get a real chance to grow.

(Case Studies, Student Focus Group, Time Two)

However, key informants pointed out that longer placements could create pressures both on students and on practice assessors:

I think what we've learned is, we need to look at how we've actually structured the practice learning experiences. We're getting a lot of feedback from students saying, 'Actually I find it too demanding.'

(Case Studies, Admissions Tutor, Time One)

These issues also emerged in the Time Two interviews:

And I think, for us, that has been one of the major... challenges, is how to accommodate such a [long] placement in an academic year...

(Case Studies, Programme Leader, Time Two)

Students also pointed out that concentrating placements in the later stages of the programme could create difficulties in terms of balancing the competing demands of classroom and practice learning:

You've got assignments, you've got portfolios, you've got your placement work... and then, in particular, in the last few weeks, you know, we're all now struggling to get all these things done.

(Case Studies, Student Focus Group, Time Two)

As Chapter Six pointed out, students rated portfolios as a method of learning reasonably highly but they were considered time consuming to complete:

It's a huge part of the course. It is the core of the course... You know, I mean in a way there's so much work in it because they're big items of work.

(Case Studies, Practice Learning Co-ordinator, Time Two)

As mentioned earlier, programmes vary in the extent to which they use block and concurrent placements. Five of the six sites used block placements. Only one site had concurrent placements. However, while the respective advantages and disadvantages of each approach has been an ongoing debate in social work education, it was not one of the themes that emerged in the discussions with social work educators and students, with the exception of one informant who was concerned that poor timetabling mean that students were given too many assignments to complete while on placement.

However, students pointed out that block placements could be isolating if good systems for student support were absent:

Location of placements

Data from the GSCC suggested that programmes had successfully complied with the stipulation in the Requirements for Social Work Training that students...
gained experience of statutory work while also achieving the overall broader policy aim of giving students the chance to work in a variety of settings. Table 7.2 uses GSCC data on 2022 placements that were provided to students enrolling on the new degree in 2003-2004, the first year of the degree.

Table 7.2 shows that 70 per cent (n=1409) of students had at least one placement in a local authority and 63 per cent (n=1264) of students had at least one placement in the independent (not for profit and private sectors combined) sector. Between three and four per cent of students had at least one placement in health, education, unspecified statutory, or other types of placements. In terms of the total number of placements overall, 52 per cent (n=1910) took place in local authorities while 35 per cent (n=1288) were in the independent sector.

Table 7.2: Sector of placements (GSCC data, 2003-2004 cohort)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of placement</th>
<th>Placements N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Students with at least one placement in sector* N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local authority</td>
<td>1910</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>1409</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not for profit**</td>
<td>1288</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1084</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private sector</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statutory unspecified</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**Valid n</td>
<td>3667</td>
<td></td>
<td>2022</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Percentages total more than 100 as students had more than one placement.  **Includes independent, voluntary, charitable and other not for profit organisations.

It is important to note that this data only covered placements for the first cohort of students undertaking the degree and that, over the course of the evaluation, there was increased use of placements in the education sector. At Time Two, this was identified as a major change since the first round of interviews:

I am thinking in terms of them going out and getting jobs. If they want to work in children and families and they do a school placement and then a children and families placement, they are very, very well set up, both for job applications and for practice, given that, with the new directorates, you’ve got education and social services for children under the same directorate.

(Case Studies, Practice Learning Coordinator, Time Two)

Data from the online survey showed that the sector in which students were placed was significantly associated (\(\chi^2\), p-value <0.001) with the stage in their studies that they had reached. Table 7.3 shows that voluntary sector placements were more common in the first year of the programme, whereas local authority (LA) placements, particularly in Children’s Departments, were much more likely in the third year.
Table 7.3: Type of agency in which students placed by year of programme (online survey)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector of placement</th>
<th>1st Year N</th>
<th>2nd Year N</th>
<th>3rd Year N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LA Adult Services</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA Children's Services</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other NHS</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary sector</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private sector</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total placements</strong></td>
<td><strong>277</strong></td>
<td><strong>307</strong></td>
<td><strong>239</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Experiences of working with different service groups

The GSCC data also provided information on the focus of placements, in terms of agency and categories of service users on 3973 placements for the 2003-2004 cohort of students. Table 7.4 shows that almost all students (87 per cent n=1198) had at least one placement working with children and families and almost three quarters (73 per cent, n=1002) had at least one placement working with an adult social care group.

Table 7.4: Distribution of placements according to service user focus of placement (GSCC data, 2003-2004 cohort)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main service user group</th>
<th>Placements N</th>
<th>Students with at least one placement in this setting N</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children’s Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children &amp; families</td>
<td>1172</td>
<td>954</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoption &amp; fostering</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic violence</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offenders</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education social work</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>All children and families subtotal</strong></td>
<td><strong>1422</strong></td>
<td><strong>1198</strong></td>
<td><strong>87</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult services</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health</td>
<td>415</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older people</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning disability</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical/sensory impairment</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>All adult care groups’ subtotal</strong></td>
<td><strong>1043</strong></td>
<td><strong>1002</strong></td>
<td><strong>73</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All age groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance misuse</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital social work</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with carers</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits/welfare rights/housing</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data on the service user group was missing for 766 placements, relating to 699 students. These placements have been excluded from this analysis.

**Likelihood of at least one placement working with children**

We examined differentials in the probability of students having at least one placement in children’s services by conducting a binary logistic regression model (see Technical Appendix for explanation of this statistic).

**Table 7.5: Results of logistic regression model examining the probability of students’ having at least one placement in services for children**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Significantly associated variables</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>OR</th>
<th>95% C.I. for OR Lower</th>
<th>95% C.I. for OR Upper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Study mode</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time versus full time</td>
<td>0.044</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Region</strong> (reference category Yorkshire and Humber)</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>0.284</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>0.982</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>1.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>0.392</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>0.668</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>0.478</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>0.159</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>1.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>2.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men versus women</td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constant</strong></td>
<td>0.310</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The result of this model showed that only attendance mode, gender and region were significantly associated with having a practice placement working with children. Part time students and men were significantly *less likely* to have at least one placement in working with children than full time and women students (odds ratios 0.11 and 0.73; p-values=0.044 and 0.011 respectively). Students attending HEIs based in the West Midlands were *more likely* to do so when compared to the reference category (Yorkshire and Humberside) while those studying in London were significantly *less likely* (odds ratios = 1.7 and 0.48; p-values = 0.003 and 0.000 respectively). The fact that men were less likely to have a placement in children’s services may reflect the fact that
this sector has always attracted proportionally fewer men (Balloch et al.,
1999). Equally, part time students are more likely to be already working in a
social work related field and to have an identified area in which they plan to
work when qualified. However, the regional variation in the proportion of
placements working with children may reflect differences in the availability of
placements. (Ethnicity, disability status, programme type, and employment
based versus college based programmes were not significantly associated
with having a placement in children’s services and so have been omitted from
this table.)

Securing practice placements

Key informants presented a mixed view of the difficulties of securing enough
practice learning placements, although a large majority of staff members
reported that organising placements had become more difficult over time. As
this pithy comment from one practice learning co-ordinator illustrated, their
role was not one that others envied:

Somebody said to me…’There are two jobs I wouldn’t do. I wouldn’t be
a carpet fitter and I wouldn’t be a placement coordinator’. I said, ‘What’s
the link?’ and she said, ‘You are on your knees all the time!’

(Case Studies, Practice Learning Coordinator, Time Two)

Several factors were identified as creating pressures on HEIs to identify and
access good quality placements. These included the:

- increase in placement days in the new degree;
- increase in the number of students, creating an additional demand
  for placements;
- local conditions, such as competition for placements between
different HEIs; and
- new requirements of the degree, including meeting the different
  needs of younger students.

This comment from one senior member of staff summed up many of these
issues:

I think there [are] a number of reasons, really. I think one - obviously,
the increase in student numbers for us - obviously taking on the third
year of the degree meant that we’ve got another cohort of students to
find [placements for]. I think also regionally there are now more social
work students within the region... I think increasing pressures on social
work practice assessors mean that they're not always available to take
as many students as perhaps they were. And all of that's culminated in
a huge pressure, I think, on placements generally.

(Case Studies, Head of Social Work Programme, Time One)

Another was concerned that practice assessors were also coming under
increasing pressure to supervise students:
We've got some excellent people as well, really experienced, really excellent practice assessors, but those people are now in a position where...because we've got undergraduate and postgraduate students and the other [local HEIs seeking placements]...They're back-to-backing students non-stop all year...they will burn out. They won't be able to do it. So my fear is we'll lose our really good people...and be left with...you know, more mediocre people and then I'm faced with the prospect of, you know, OK I've got 80 or so students I need placements for. Some people are going to end up in placements I wouldn't want our students to be ending up in.

(Case Studies, Practice Learning Coordinator, Time Two)

A minority of staff and students noted that employers in statutory agencies gave priority to providing placements to their own employment based students:

We have got some seconded students on our postgraduate course...and they get priority for placements. So you know, it does have implications for students who want to travel from other parts of the country, or from overseas, because there is a limit to how far [we] can expand.

(Case Studies, Practice Placement Coordinator, Time One)

The importance of local work in developing partnerships was seen as key to providing enough placements

Traditionally it's been quite hard to find placements. But this year the practice learning [co-ordinator]...actually found a surplus...In terms of the quality of [students'] learning experience I think there's more of a guarantee because we're working very closely with those partner agencies.

(Case Studies, Admissions Tutor, Time One)

However, even this was not always able to secure enough placements, particularly when students failed or needed to repeat a placement for other reasons:

Despite having a number of partner agencies, it is extremely difficult to find a second placement within the statutory sector...[when a] student fails. It is extremely difficult.

(Case Studies, Practice Placement Coordinator, Time Two)

Practice learning co-ordinators commented that pressures on finding placements resulted in their looking to an ever-widening geographical area from which to secure placements. This could create increases in travelling time for students. Although this problem had pre-dated the degree, it had been exacerbated by the need to find increased numbers of placements.

We scatter our students pretty wide, you know, we tell them they could be anywhere within a 50 mile radius. And it is not all that popular, to do that much travelling.

(Case Studies, Programme Leader, Time One)
A service user also gave an account of the pressures that organisations could face to start taking students:

As an organisation, [organisation name] has been asked to take on students and we are a very small organisation. We don't do paperwork. We very firmly don't do paperwork. We are not an appropriate organisation for a social care student in that sense and yet we are asked to take on students. And it would be for us... because we're a small organisation and somebody would have to supervise them and it would be very close supervision because that's the way we do things. It would be taking away from service delivery.

(Case Studies, Service User, Time Two)

Role of PLTF and Learning Resource Network in placement provision

Key informants’ views on the success of the Practice Learning Task Force (PLTF) and its successors in securing more placements were mixed:

I think maybe the task force at senior level...has sort of enabled more, generated more placements.

(Case Studies, Practice Learning Coordinator, Time One)

Another spoke positively about their role in the search for placements and the opportunities to integrate practice learning into wider workforce planning:

We’ve got three sub-regional [LRN] groupings, each with its own development manager in place. Across those three, there will be 17 project workers...and their first task is to find and develop and support new placement learning opportunities in the private/voluntary sector. And then subsequently assist in developing the kind of training for the social care workforce.

(Case Studies, Senior HEI/Social Work Staff, Time One)

By contrast, another commented that the remit given to the LRNs to find permanent placements had been ‘unrealistic’ as new placements were often available for only a single year.

Daily placement fee and practice learning Performance Indicator

Two further policy initiatives were also mentioned as having provided important benefits. These were, firstly, payments in the form of the increased daily placement fee (DPF) to agencies providing practice placements. This funds agencies for each day that a student has on placement in the agency and is paid at a higher rate to agencies in the voluntary, private, or independent sector than to statutory agencies. As many of these agencies are small and have limited resources, they would not have been able to provide the number of placements they have made available without this support. Secondly, support for practice learning was included as one of the local authority Performance Indicators (PIs):

The requirement [on] local authorities in terms of their performance
indicators to take on more students...[has] been helpful...because finding placements...is problematic. You know, there is a lot of competition. Demand exceeds supply, and so that has changed. With the...new degree, there have been more offers of statutory placements.

(Case Studies, Practice Learning Coordinator, Time One)

I think practice learning feels pretty good. I think we are in a really solid position again, I mean it wasn’t a massive increase but that increase in funding [through the daily placement fee] has meant perhaps more voluntary agencies are able to come on board. The fact that it is a key Performance Indicator is fantastic because it has made the statutory agencies improve so I feel really good about practice learning.

(Case Studies, Programme Leader, Time One)

This has now been removed and was felt by key informants to be a significant loss in the move to improve the provision of practice learning opportunities.

Practice assessors’ backgrounds

There have been longstanding debates in social work education about the position of students on placements where they are not directly supervised by a qualified social worker (Baron, 2004). Table 7.6 presents information from the practice assessor questionnaires on their professional backgrounds. It shows that the majority of respondents were qualified social workers. Most practice assessors responding to the survey were providing on site supervision. While it is possible that the table over estimates the proportion of practice assessors with a social work qualification as these might be supposed to have been most interested in the research, being assessed by someone who was not a qualified social worker was not a theme that emerged in the interviews with students in the case study sites.

Table 7.6: Practice assessors’ professional background (case studies, practice assessor questionnaires, Time 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DipSW</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CQSW</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DASS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSS</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home office letter</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseas social work qualification</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal with social work qualification</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other professional qualification</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No qualification</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid n</td>
<td>116</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were also indications that practice assessors responding to the questionnaire had a commitment to continuing professional development.
Seventy nine per cent held one or more post-qualifying awards in social work, with the most commonly held award being for practice teaching.

There was some evidence that the degree had necessitated recruiting new practice assessors. Respondents’ experience of assessing practice ranged from less than one year to 30 years, with a median length of involvement of three years. Set against this, 20 per cent had been involved in assessing students for over 10 years.

Changes to role of practice assessors

Practice assessors who had supervised DipSW students were asked about the changes to their role since the introduction of the degree. Although a minority (17 per cent) felt that their role was unchanged, the majority of those answering this question identified some changes. The most common of these was to the assessment process itself, with almost a third of respondents commenting that the emphasis upon students’ evidencing that they had met the National Occupational Standards was the main change that they had identified. Almost 45 per cent of respondents thought the changes brought to their role by the introduction of the degree had been positive. Almost half thought that the changes were mixed and just five per cent saw the changes as negative. This minority regretted what they saw as a reduction in the importance given to practice assessors’ views on a student’s performance. Set against this, the majority welcomed what they saw as greater clarity about their own role and improvements to the assessment forms which were less time consuming to complete.

Support for practice assessors

Almost all the practice assessors responding to the survey were white, and so the evaluation was unable to discuss the experiences of assessors from black and minority ethnic groups, although this has been identified as an issue elsewhere (Singh, 2006). Practice assessors responding to the questionnaire were generally satisfied with the support they received from HEIs. Examples of support that practice assessors appreciated included:

**Box 7.1: Examples of support appreciated by practice assessors (case studies)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support groups for students run by practice learning co-ordinators</th>
<th>We have a very active and supportive practice co-ordinator who organises student placements…and puts on support group sessions.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workshops</td>
<td>[HEI] give[s] regular workshops for all practice supervisors/assessors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for professional development</td>
<td>[Agency] work closely with the university - allow time off for updating knowledge, sharing/improving practice of practice teachers to support students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Many practice assessors identified the greater emphasis on practice as an improvement upon the DipSW and thought that HEIs were now better at keeping them informed. However, the barrier identified most frequently by the assessors was that there was no reduction in their workload in acknowledgment for their role in supervising students, but this has been an ongoing issue in arrangements for social work education.

**Working across organisational and professional boundaries**

Options for Excellence (Department of Health/Department for Education and Skills, 2006) identified that the changes taking place in Adults and Children’s Services would increase the importance of interagency working and would call upon practitioners to undertake new roles and new ways of working. This highlighted the importance of identifying the extent to which students’ current placements were helping them to acquire the skills that they would need.

Several questions in the practice assessors’ questionnaire carried out in the case study sites addressed the issue of offering opportunities for interagency working, which was likely to involve working with other kinds of professionals (teachers, doctors, nurses and allied health professionals) as well as across a range of organisational settings. Defined in this way, interagency working was also seen as offering opportunities to work across professions.

The overwhelming majority (89 per cent, n=57) of practice assessors completing questionnaires at Time Two reported that the placement offered opportunities for interagency working. In the majority of cases, this was because the organisation in which the student was placed was a multi-agency setting (the practice assessor quoted below used the term ‘interdisciplinary’ in this quote, as an example of interagency working, reflecting the wide variation of language in this area). Examples of interagency work included the opportunity for students to attend case conferences and team meetings (which have been multidisciplinary in some settings for many years) or, as in this case, the opportunity to work with different professionals:

> *The entire placement was inter-disciplinary. The student was placed within [name] services multidisciplinary team in the hospital. The team is linked with the local authority and the [primary care trust]). The student also worked with housing and with the Benefits Agency.*

   (Case Studies, Practice Assessor, Time Two)

In other instances, the organisation was not multi agency but created opportunities for students to work with other professionals:

> *[Students have] a limited…chance to work with the Pathway Planning Team for care leavers.*

   (Case Studies, Practice Assessor, Time Two)
At Time Two, 83.3% (n=29/35) of practice assessors working with children and 97% (n=28/29) of practice assessors working with adults reported that students could gain experience of interagency work in their organisation. These differences were not statistically significant (Cramer’s V=0.218, \( p=0.08 \)). This is an important finding as it suggests that, whether placed in adults or children’s settings, students were similarly likely to gain experience of interagency working. It is not possible to produce this information for Time One because adults and children’s services were not separated at this time.

Opportunities for innovative working

As mentioned earlier, the Practice Learning Task Force had been established to increase the quantity, quality, and diversity of practice learning opportunities. Around two thirds of practice assessors at Time One (71% per cent) and Time Two (69% per cent, n=42) reported being able to identify what they characterised as innovative practice in their organisations. Sixty six per cent (n=23/35) of practice assessors in working with children and 72 per cent (n=21/29) of practice assessors working with adults considered that students gained experience of innovative practice in their setting. Once more, these differences were not statistically significant (Cramer’s V=0.072, \( p=0.565 \)), suggesting that opportunities of this sort were similarly available in both settings.

While not all practice assessors provided concrete examples of what they meant by ‘innovative practice’, of those who did, there was an emphasis on providing students with opportunities to acquire new skills and try out different approaches:

*The student was able to negotiate one afternoon a week to run an art class to get [service users] to trust her and tell them about the advocacy service and how it could work for them.*

(Case Studies, Practice Assessor, Time Two)

*My student was able to work with Sure Start and to facilitate a parent and toddlers group at the […] Children’s Centre*

(Case Studies, Practice Assessor, Time Two)

Developing agency-based skills

In addition to developing social work skills, practice assessors also identified, in their responses to the questionnaires, ways in which they supported students to acquire the agency-based skills that they would need once qualified. For example, some organisations had tried to help students acquire skills in using the agency information systems:

*Students are involved in new development with electronic assessments and [record] storage. We are moving towards a combined system and students are receiving some level of training and encouragement to utilise new systems.*

(Case Studies, Practice Assessor, Time Two)
Increased use of web-based sources to help students’ learning was also reported. The Care Matters website was singled out by several practice assessors as having been an important way of helping them and the students they assessed to keep up to date.

**Practice assessors’ appraisals of students’ performance in practice**

Practice assessors who had also worked with DipSW students were asked to compare the performance of degree and DipSW students on first and final placements in five areas (preparedness, performance, theoretical knowledge, approach to equalities and communication skills). Figure 7.1 uses data from the practice assessors completing questionnaires at Times One and Two to compare DipSW and degree students. It is very important to note that the same assessor was not being asked to compare the same student at two different points in time. These findings should also be viewed as indicative as practice assessors may have been influenced by the fact that their most recent experience of supervision was of students on the degree.

Figure 7.1 shows that at both Times One and Two, the overwhelming majority of practice assessors rated degree students’ performance to be the same as, or better than DipSW students. Although proportionally more respondents chose the ‘same as’ option, rather than ‘better than’, it is important to point out that as the overwhelming majority of DipSW students had high levels of previous experience, practice assessors often started out with lower expectations of degree students:

*I expected to have to lead them by the hand far more than I actually had to.*

(Case Studies, Practice Assessor, Time Two)

Another point they emphasised was that both the DipSW and the degree placed an equal responsibility on them to assess students’ practice. In this sense, the standards they expected of students remained unchanged. As one experienced holder of the practice teacher's award wrote firmly:

>[Academic] expectations may have [risen] in line with any student who has been identified [as] being able to undertake a degree course. However, my expectations in relation to practice remain unchanged in respect of certifying that a student is able to satisfy the Requirements necessary.

(Case Studies, Practice Assessor, Time Two)

They also pointed out that, irrespective of the award being studied, some students would not reach the required performance level:

*I have assessed DipSW students in the past who have struggled to learn, structure their work, and needed constant direction. This has added to the amount of time one gives to a student. It has also then placed additional pressure on the supervisor, especially if they are also managing a team and caseload.*

(Case Studies, Practice Assessor, Time Two)
This bar chart is based on 91 responses from practice assessors who had worked with degree and DipSW students at Time One (students on first placement) and 45 responses from practice assessors at Time Two (students on final placement).

However, in respect of students on final placement, the proportions of students performing as well as, or better than DipSW students had risen on every aspect and was seen to have improved most on two aspects emphasised in the Requirements for Social Work Training (Department of Health 2002a) – namely the emphasis on communication skills and theoretical knowledge:
Final year students have always needed to be able to communicate and think for themselves...[Overall] degree students would appear to have performed very well on placement.

(Case Studies, Practice Assessor, Time Two)

The most striking difference was in their assessments of degree students’ theoretical knowledge:

[I] came to recognise over time that the ability for [DipSW] students to gain and develop knowledge and understanding of theory to practice was not as thorough as with the degree course. (Wish I had this when I trained!)

(Case Studies, Practice Assessor, Time Two)

Practice assessors were also strongly in favour of the increase in the time spent on practice placement:

With longer placements, [students have] more in-depth knowledge of all elements, more self discipline in meeting competencies, [in] informing practice assessor of what they need to do to cover gaps, keeping to deadlines alongside their university work, more confidence.

(Case Studies, Practice Assessor, Time Two)

Student satisfaction with placements

Table 7.7 uses data on all placements from the student survey (see Technical Appendix). It shows that almost half (49 per cent, n=870) of all placements were rated as ‘Excellent, very good’ by students and a further 29 per cent (n=520) were rated as ‘Good’. Ratings of placements were significantly associated ($\chi^2$, p-value<0.001) with the sector in which students were placed. A higher proportion of students rated placements in the statutory sector as ‘Excellent, very good’ compared with those in voluntary or private agencies (57 per cent, n=522 compared with 32 per cent, n=39 and 36, n=234 respectively).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Voluntary sector</th>
<th>Private sector</th>
<th>Local Authority</th>
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<td>N (%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Excellent, very good</td>
<td>234 36</td>
<td>39 32</td>
<td>522 57</td>
<td>75 58</td>
<td>870 49</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>212 33</td>
<td>38 31</td>
<td>242 26</td>
<td>28 22</td>
<td>520 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither good nor poor</td>
<td>82 13</td>
<td>19 16</td>
<td>64 7</td>
<td>13 10</td>
<td>178 10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>60 9</td>
<td>14 12</td>
<td>40 4</td>
<td>5 4</td>
<td>119 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Very poor</td>
<td>52 8</td>
<td>11 9</td>
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<td>640 121</td>
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<td>1779</td>
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136
The online survey also asked students, ‘How satisfied were you with the following aspects of this practice placement?’ Figure 7.2 summarises the student responses to this question. Developing communication skills, being a member of a team, opportunities for working directly with service users and carers, were all rated very highly. Consistent with the practice assessors’ perceptions reported earlier in this chapter, practice placements were seen as offering students the chance to experience interprofessional working at first hand and for extending their social work skills. However, students were less satisfied about not having enough opportunities to learn about statutory social work and become clearer about the role of social workers.

Figure 7.2: Student satisfaction with practice placements (online survey)
Student satisfaction with placements in non-statutory settings tended to be lower across all 14 aspects listed in Figure 7.2. Where there was a qualified social worker present for ‘all or most of the time’ satisfaction on all aspects was higher. Cross-analysing by students’ overall rating of the placement showed that the largest effects on satisfaction were found on those aspects towards the top of the list at Figure 7.2, that is where student satisfaction was lower. This means that the better placements fulfil these criteria, some of which are achievable as much in non-statutory as statutory placements, the higher the rating received. So it may be less a question of students seeking statutory placements above all else, but more that they want primarily to learn as much as possible about the social worker’s role. The importance of voluntary and private sector placements, not just their numbers, is further underlined by the finding from the online student survey that they provide extra opportunities to work with certain service user groups in, for example, substance misuse (77 per cent of placements with this group were in the voluntary or private sector, n=65), mental health (44 per cent, n=111), physical disability (39 per cent, n=38).

Interviews with programme leaders, tutorial staff, and practice learning coordinators in the case study sites provided additional contextual information for these findings. They commented that many students perceived that employers would always favour applicants who had had more experience of statutory work:

“That seems to be the stamp of approval. That it must be a [placement with a] social worker in a statutory team, which I find slightly bizarre, because I think...we have some very good voluntary sector [social workers]. But that seems to be the seal of approval. And actually, to be fair, I think that’s what students, who are graduating are finding, is that...employers are looking for recent experience in the statutory sector.

(Case Studies, Practice Learning Coordinator, Time Two)

Thus, an important part of their role was to explain to students that the skills needed for statutory work could be acquired in other settings:

[Student] said to me...‘This is great. I’m learning an awful lot about domestic violence, but when I go into social services for my third year placement, I won’t know how to fill out the forms’. I said to her, ‘Forget the forms, because they’ll be different anyway, by the time you get there! But this is about learning about domestic violence and interacting with the women, running groups. Learning about why women can’t extricate themselves from the situation. Linking it with child protection.

(Case Studies, Practice Learning Coordinator, Time Two)

This comment encapsulates how many students participating in focus groups identified skills that could be learned in non-statutory placements but also expressed the viewpoint that the level of skill acquisition in other areas would be insufficient to work in the statutory sector:

From this last placement, the one working with the disabled children, I think I’ve got the communication skills I was talking about...I think that
has been quite useful because I don't think I would have got that kind of experience anywhere else, but...when it comes to the assessment skills...the standard that will be required for statutory services is completely different...way, way different.

(Case Studies, Student Focus Group, Time Two)

One consequence of this level of doubt over the opportunities presented by placements in non-statutory placements was a sense that students had to be 'creative' in how they interpreted and reported experiences. Such an approach was characterised negatively and positively by different students. This comment sums up what they saw as the dilemma:

See...you can be creative and you can draw things from it, but you've got to have the experience first.

(Case Studies, Student Focus Group, Time Two)

Support and supervision

Figure 7.2 also showed that comparatively few students rated the support they had from supervisors and their contact with practice teachers as 'excellent, very good'. The qualities and qualifications of practice assessors were seen as a vital issue by many staff and students, since these were key to the learning opportunities available within a setting. However, key informants also raised concerns about the capacity of some non-statutory social work agencies to provide the right kinds of experiences and for their practice assessors to be able to provide the right amount of support and teaching to students on placement:

I mean the biggest problem for the voluntary sector is that a lot of their staff aren't social work qualified and...neither are the managers...and they would offer the 100 day placement, but the problem is you need the dual qualification to be able to sign off... and they would like to become involved in that.

(Case Studies, Practice Learning Coordinator, Time Two)

(The reference to 'signing off' is a reference to the GSCC requirement that practice assessors on student’s final placement must hold a social work qualification.)

One way of ameliorating what were commonly seen as the limitations of practice assessors who were not social work qualified was endeavouring to train and recruit off-site or ‘long arm’ practice teachers:

[Non social work practice assessors] are great at what they do, but they haven't got the social work background and theoretical base to enable the students to really link the learning, the opportunities with the theory and reflective practice and values. I'm working very hard at the moment to increase that pool of long arm practice teachers.

(Case Studies, Practice Learning Coordinator, Time Two)
Responses to the practice assessor questionnaire suggested that the model of recruiting independent practitioners with a practice teaching background to support practice assessors (Kearney, 2003) appeared to be the most common way of trying to resolve this problem. Where this worked well, both students and practice assessors benefited:

This is the first time we have had a social work student and [we] have very little knowledge of the current degree and none [of the] previous [qualification]...We relied on the [off site assessor] for guidance as we all have an education and not a social work background. We have had a very positive experience, as the student we were given was extremely competent.

(Case Studies, Practice Assessor Time Two)

Two main issues were seen by many students as important in terms of their treatment. Too little responsibility was seen as not providing the right kinds of experience and too much as being treated as an ‘extra pair of hands’ and not having the chance to reflect and learn from the experience. One student described how she had been pleased to have the opportunity to develop a group for children in kinship care, but indicated that this had created a pressure to work long hours:

But they also wanted me to deliver the programme for the kids after the hours I was supposed to work. I would have ended up doing about 60 hours a week then if they’d had their way.

(Case Studies, Student Focus Group, Time Two)

Having support from a variety of sources was seen as crucial for several students: where such support was available, it was highly valued. Two comments from a student focus group reflecting on experiences typify these feelings. They also reinforce the finding in Figure 7.2 that access to peer support on placement could be variable:

I really felt valued as a student there at placement, a really positive experience. Student support groups have been really interesting. We did evaluations of the student support meetings and this year things have been commented on, we have brought in and...so in terms of positive things...a really, really positive experience.

(Case Studies, Student Focus Group, Time Two)

I felt isolated during my [placement] and if we could have that kind of, you know, that little bit of network it can actually help. There was one time when...where you've been faced with a crisis, I mean that kind of support can actually help to rebuild your confidence.

(Case Studies, Student Focus Group, Time Two)

Discussion

This chapter has explored a set of organisational and quality items in relation to practice teaching and learning. First, it is important to note that despite increased pressures, HEIs have been able to arrange increased numbers of
practice placements to match the increase in numbers of students and the numbers of practice learning days required. However, the evaluation was unable to identify whether this has had an impact on the number of students whose placements have been delayed.

The pressures to ensure that sufficient good quality placements were available necessitated different strategies on different programmes. However, there appears to be some convergence around splitting the required 200 days of practice learning between two longer placements. Longer placements are argued by some to offer a more in-depth experience for students and mean that the actual number of placements required for degree students remains the same as that under the DipSW. Others argue that there are educational benefits to be derived from placements that occur at every stage of a student’s programme. Because the case study sites were randomly selected, it so happened that all but one of the programmes offered two longer placements. This means that further research would be required to appraise the advantages and disadvantages of each approach.

The Requirements for Social Work Training stipulated that students should have experience of working with at least two groups of service users. GSCC data suggest that almost all students enrolling on the degree in 2003-2004, the only year for which completed data were available, had at least one placement working with children and families and almost three quarters had at least one placement with an adult service user group. The separation of Adult and Children’s Services, identified as one of the most important organisational changes in social care since the Seebohm report (Glasby, 2005), potentially could have disrupted the provision of placements. To have maintained a high level of placements in both sectors, despite organisational changes, would seem to represent an important indicator of the success of the implementation of the degree.

A clear tension that emerged for programme providers was the need to offer students an increased variety of placements to equip them with the broad range of skills that they would need to be able to work in new settings with new types of worker while fulfilling the requirement for students to gain experience of statutory social work settings and recognising that most newly qualified social workers first wish to gain employment in the statutory sector (Wallis-Jones and Lyons, 2003). Only 70 per cent of students experienced at least one placement in a local authority setting, where they will have most opportunity to experience statutory social work. Providing increased resources through the daily placement fee has been well received and is thought to have resulted in extra placements, particularly in the voluntary and private sector. However, the local authority Performance Indicator (PI) for practice learning has ended. This may have reduced the amount of statutory placements that are available. The difficulties experienced by many programme providers, despite the support from Learning Resource Networks, in finding a suitable supply of placements in the statutory sector suggests that there is scope for judicious consideration of what future incentives might be developed to help support programme providers find more statutory placements.
The pressures to find sufficient good quality placements emerged as a key issue. One of the main elements identified by staff and students in terms of the overall quality of placements was the ability of agencies to provide a range of experiences for students and good levels of support. Many respondents indicated doubts over the ability of private and voluntary sector placements to provide this, particularly if all of a student’s placements were in these sectors. While the experiences gained in such agencies could be valuable, there was a view that students needed to experience at least one placement in the statutory sector, which was also seen as something employers would value most. Furthermore, a higher proportion of students responding to the online survey rated placements in the statutory sector as ‘excellent, very good’ compared with voluntary or private agencies.

Developing practice teaching and learning was a central goal in the development of the social work degree (Department of Health, 2002b). This chapter has highlighted that considerable efforts are being made to secure sufficient placements and that issues of quality are being identified and addressed. However, the availability of statutory placements, which are viewed as being an important part of the overall quality of student experiences of practice teaching and learning over their qualifying period remains key, especially in light of the findings about concerns of the quality of some non-statutory placements. Finding ways both to increase availability of statutory placements and to support and develop capacity in the private and voluntary sector therefore remain of key importance.
Chapter Eight: Service User and Carer Involvement

Agencies and practitioners are required to consult with and involve service users in their assessment, in comment and complaints procedures and in service management and planning. The fullest expression of this so far is the requirement in the new social work degree introduced in 2003, that service users are involved in all aspects of social work education and training, from developing the syllabus to assessing student social workers.

(Beresford and Croft, 2004, p.61)

We should train them up, never mind them training us.

(Service user quoted in Beresford et al., 2007, p.222)

Summary

This chapter uses data from the interviews with key informants and separate focus groups held with students and service users and carers in the case study sites to examine one of the key changes introduced as part of the new degree, the requirement for service user and carer involvement. It explores views about the nature and level of service user and carer involvement, contrasts this with the previous qualification, and considers whether service user and carer involvement was confined to the launch of the new degree or whether it has been sustained. The chapter concludes that social work education has built upon a sound and innovative base, when compared to other professional training, to provide strong levels of user and carer involvement in professional education.

Key findings

- The new degree provided a spur for the increased involvement of people using services and carers in social work education.
- Involvement does not appear to have been confined to the development of the new degree but to have experienced a ‘step change’ in the level and range of opportunities for users and carers to be engaged in social work education.
- Students value service user and carer input to their training and education as providing a unique perspective.
- People using services and carers find involvement in professional education and training to be worthwhile and beneficial.
- Barriers to service user and carer involvement still exist, including security of funding, and further work is required to sustain this development.
Scope of chapter

This chapter contributes to answering three of the four research questions:

1. How has the move to degree level professional social work education and training been implemented?

2. What are the main outcomes of the change from diploma to degree level study?

3. How far has the new degree met the expectations of those entering the profession and other stakeholders?

This chapter draws on data from the case study sites to explore views of the nature and level of user and carer involvement, to contrast this with the previous qualification, and to establish whether user and carer involvement was confined to the launch of the new degree or whether it has been sustained. Earlier chapters have considered this subject briefly. Chapter Five showed that progress had been made in involving service users and carers in the recruitment and selection of students, although there was scope for further development. Chapter Six reported that students completing the online survey rated input from service users and carers on the teaching programme very positively. This chapter discusses the ways in which service users were involved in teaching and the efforts made by HEIs in the case study sites to develop better capacity and funding for service user and carer involvement. The conclusion of the chapter is that social work education has built upon a sound and innovative base, when compared to other professional training, to provide unprecedented levels of user and care involvement in professional education.

Background

Service user and carer involvement was an innovation that was warmly welcomed within the new degree by all stakeholders and confirmed social work education as a leading professional exponent of the principles of service user and carer involvement in England. Although examples of involving service users and carers in social work education predated the degree, (for example, Manthorpe, 2000; Waterson and Morris, 2005), the allocation of specific funding to HEIs to enable them to develop service user involvement (Department of Health, 2003) and statement in the Requirements for Social Work Training (Department of Health, 2002) that service users and carers should be involved in all aspects of programme design and delivery were identified as vital levers in improving best practice (Levin, 2004).

Early work evaluating progress in service user and carer involvement concluded that progress was patchy (Levin, 2004; General Social Care Council, 2005). Service users have identified that barriers to progress still exist and Branfield and colleagues (2007) have summarised these as:

- Academics do not value service users' knowledge highly enough.
- The culture in universities needs to change.
• Access requirements are not fully met.
• Service user organisations lack capacity and infrastructure to involve service users fully.
• There is a lack of training and support for service user trainers and their organisations.
• Payment policies, practices and the benefits system discourage involvement.

(2007, p.4)

It is important, therefore, to consider the findings presented in this chapter within a broader perspective.

Culture changes

Key informants in the case study sites considered that the degree had provided an important impetus for a change in culture in terms of expectations about the level of service user and carer involvement. Such changes fostered a climate where service user and carer involvement was not merely encouraged but expected:

So, it’s more input than we used to do in the diploma [in social work]...and the module is assessed whereas before it was a series of sessions, talks, from service users and that sequence didn’t have a formal assessment.

(Case Studies, Programme leader, Time Two)

These changes were not seen as isolated developments but represented part of the wider changes brought in with the degree and a more explicit recognition of different types of knowledge and expertise:

The other thing that’s changing with this degree is our understanding of what teaching is and who does it. And I think we’ve started getting the service users involved. And I think its part of this overall process, nationally of greater integration between practice learning and so-called academic learning. And I think one of the assumptions we were working on was one, the service users become mentors and tutors and part of the learning and teaching process, and in the same way, practice teachers as well as practitioners. So I think there will, there should be an expectation and I think there is that the changing nature of the delivery from an academic institution point of view...

(Case Studies, Programme leader, Time One)

In all case study sites service users and carers were involved across all aspects of the social work programmes. This included the selection of students (as discussed in Chapter Five), teaching, curriculum development, assessment and course monitoring and validation. However, the extent and nature of involvement varied across programmes. The level of involvement was thought to have increased since the degree began:
Things were only just starting at that point and we have increased the involvement of service users. So there has been an increase in the amount of involvement of service users in the delivery of the programme and for the first time we have had service users involved in the interviewing of candidates.

(Case Studies, Programme Leader, Time Two)

I mean I've been very impressed at how central they are to the whole business of course development and learning on the course and so on.

(Case Studies, Senior HEI/Social Work Staff, Time Two)

Service users are involved at every single level really...service users and carers are just involved as a matter of routine now...and they are a fairly diverse group.

(Case Studies, Programme Leader, Time Two)

Funding from the Department of Health

The additional funding from the Department of Health to involve service users and carers was identified as having provided important ‘seed corn’ funding for service user and carer involvement:

*It provided the impetus to involve service users and carers much more in social work training. We recently held a one day conference...and this provided a powerful insight and source of information for students to hear first hand from service users about their contact with social workers.*

(HEI Fact Find, 2004-2005, 014)

*Good to have some cash earmarked for work with users (which we already did and had difficulty funding) plus it enabled us to extend this to work with carers’ groups.*

(HEI Fact Find, 2004-2005, 007)

Developing different types of involvement

All stakeholders suggested that there needed to be some flexibility in the type, level and method of service user involvement in order to suit the skills, needs and abilities of different and diverse service users and carers. It was recognised by key informants and service users and carers alike that service users and carers would have differing preferences about the sort of involvement they wanted:

*And...different ways of delivering the material, you know because not everyone wants to stand up in a group and talk about their own personal lifestyle...different ways of people being able to get across their experiences, like you know, case studies...people might not necessarily have the skills to be able to develop their own training session, you know to plan a training session, content of it, structure of it...and what kind of support was going to be put in place in terms of that...*  

(Case Studies, Service User and Carer Focus Group, Time Two)
There had been an overall movement away from asking service users and carers to participate in one-off sessions where they tended to share their experiences by ‘telling their stories’ (the ‘testamentary’ model see Manthorpe, 2000) towards encouraging service users and carers to play a more active part in shaping their input and where this might best fit within the course overall, through module design and curriculum development. The downside was that this latter type of involvement could be less visible and students may be less aware of the extent to which it was going on:

We asked about service user and carer involvement and I was thinking other day that actually for students it could seem quite invisible. I mean I know that we do adopt a service user and carer perspective in all our modules and I know that that’s there and that’s fine, but as for the actual service user and carer group, it’s not that often that students would necessarily meet them, because a lot of their involvement is in the background and supporting the infrastructure of the programme, rather than kind of saying here is your service user and carer person, ask them, you know, that kind of stuff.

(Case Studies, Senior HEI/Social Work Staff, Time Two)

Thus, the greater involvement of service users at strategic level may mean that their role is less apparent to students.

Involvement in the design and delivery of modules

Among the case study sites a number of examples were identified where service users and carers had been involved in the design and delivery of modules. The following examples illustrate the ways in which case study sites engaged with different groups of service users.

Understanding service user perspectives

At one site, different service users came to the HEI each week to deliver the teaching input and two service users were members of the module team who designed and co-ordinated the module. These service users were jointly responsible for the validation and on-going quality assurance of the module which involved attendance at committees, including course monitoring meetings:

It’s a module that runs over 12 weeks and what happens is that each week there is a service user from a particular...service area. So for example, we’ve had older people, young looked after people, people with disabilities, people with mental health issues, partners of prisoners, foster carers, people with a hearing impairment, people with HIV/ AIDS, people seeking asylum, so lots of different particular needs and their brief is to be able to find a way of helping the students to see things from different perspectives. So that’s really kind of like at the heart of the...how can you begin to put yourself in the shoes of other people so that you can see things from a different perspective? How can you begin to use your creativity in order to be like a real resource? So, within that…but to see things from different perspectives, to be able to identify
key issues that service users have identified as being of importance for them and to be able to look towards how we can really begin to work in partnership.

(Case Studies, Programme Leader, Time Two)

Service users at the heart of ethical practice

At another site, service users had been involved in the delivery of a new module relating to ethics and values. Each week service users helped run the teaching sessions and participated by facilitating small group work sessions where they discussed the ways in which particular ethical issues related to practice and the lives of service users and carers. The aim of involving service users in this module was to encourage students to relate complex micro-ethical dilemmas to their practice:

We wanted to make sure that students could take these very abstract ideas and work with them in practice. So, the way we designed it is that we start off with a case scenario. Not give them any information, in terms of ethical theory but just say, ‘Here is an ethical dilemma that is presented to you, how would you go about trying to solve it and resolve it?’ And they actually did come up with the words and ideas that had their link to ethical theory but they wouldn’t know that really. And you know, that was quite interesting in terms of getting them to think about these issues which were located in practice. The service user would be sort of present in the group, but we would always ask the service user to make a comment at the end. So, you have got the students’ views and perspectives, and then we brought in the service user perspective which would either confirm or disconfirm what the students had said.

(Case Studies, Programme Leader, Time Two)

Working with young people

As mentioned in Chapter Six, some sites offered students the option of specialising within their final year. Young people and children who had experience of being looked after were responsible for joint organisation and delivery of the children and families pathway in one site. The academic staff reported that it was particularly challenging to ensure that young people could be involved in this development in a meaningful way. Given that young people continued to be involved in the pathway three years after its inception, it suggests that continued engagement was effective in honing the skills of the young people involved:

We constructed things very much around their story and then tease out the issues and...practice certain skills. And they are driving this...much more as their confidence and so on develops and...they want to be involved again next year, so that would be their third year...there are arguments you know, should we draw more people in but its been a very labour intensive thing and we don’t want to lose that expertise.

(Case Studies, Admissions Tutor, Time Two)
Mental health

At another site, service users were involved in a mental health module from its initial design, to the delivery of the teaching sessions, to the evaluation of the module at the end of the process:

The module convenor wrote to the Mental Health Service User groups in the area and invited them to take part in the consultation...regarding what the new module should consist of, what the curriculum should be...there was a pretty strong consensus about what aspects of the course should consist of...the curriculum that emerged was one that in one sense was slightly more conservative than what you might have expected if a bunch of social work lecturers sat down to do it...it became a case study system where students were given the basic information and a set of questions structured around the case...so it became a structured exercise and that's a move away from the, 'let's give you a teaching session about what diagnosis is and what the effects of this are kind of thing', so part of the move towards the more student orientated way of learning.

(Case Studies, Senior HEI/Social Work Staff, Time Two)

Improvements to programme quality

Key informants' views

All staff who took part in the research emphasised their commitment to the principle of service user and carer involvement. They saw the introduction of the requirement for involvement as part of the degree as a way of encouraging those who were less keen initially on the concept:

I am very keen on the whole principle and I am not simply saying that because it may be trendy or whatever. I actually think it is a very good thing...I had a session last week with a couple of service users and the students said they want more of those types of sessions. So I think the students are very keen. And I actually think it increases the quality of the course, it makes it better in a sense.

(Case Studies, Senior HEI/Social Work Staff, Time One)

The only thing I would say is I have been surprised, maybe I ought not to be surprised at how sympathetic staff are to the whole idea. In fact, more than sympathetic, enthusiastic. And I think its probably a legacy of five, ten years of emphasis on equal opportunities...I find the whole area of service user and carer involvement an awkward one...now we talk about not diagnosing or labelling people but actually the reason why we've invited this person onto the premises is because they have some kind of disability and I think the staff handle that problem very, very delicately and well. But given the sort of problem, the difficulty, I think the staff were very enthusiastic and have handled it very sensitively.

(Case Studies, Senior HEI/Social Work Staff, Time One)
**Students’ views**

Students who participated in the focus groups in the case study sites found the involvement of service users and carers to be particularly beneficial. They explained that it helped them make connections between theory and practice. Generally, they were in favour of greater input from service users and carers:

> I have enjoyed getting the experiences of…we have had a lot of service users coming in and give us presentations and I think that has been brilliant. That was really, really good. And understanding oppressions. Every week we have had a different panel come in and they talk about their experiences of a particular oppression we are studying that week and then we go into smaller groups with a particular member of the panel and I find that really fascinating.

(Case Studies, Student focus group, Time Two)

> It makes you realise the power that you will have as well and the impact you can have on someone’s life if you make the wrong decision. And I think that’s what I found really beneficial the day those two chaps came in…because you read about it, you read about it when you are researching the kind of impact that social workers have had. But when you actually listen to service users who have not had a particularly great time, who are having a better time now. I think that really made me realise how much power, how much you can alter someone’s life in other ways.

(Case Studies, Student focus group, Time Two)

They also considered that it should occur early on in their programmes:

> The lectures at the end where it was service user and carer involvement…I personally think we should have had that involvement right from the beginning, not just throw it all in at the end, you know.

(Case Studies, Student focus group, Time Two)

**Service users and carers’ views**

Although not all the service users and carers taking part in focus groups at the case study sites were familiar with all aspects of the degree, those who were, saw their involvement as part of a wider process that would lead to an overall increase in standards:

> I just thought that the two-year Diploma was too short for the social worker to develop the knowledge, skills and values that are needed in society. So I think the…degree would be a good thing basically for everybody…Take the placements, you know, longer placements, I think it is a 200 day placement, 100 days in each placement. By being in placement longer, they gain more skills, really.

(Case studies, service user and carer focus group, Time One)

> My understanding is that they will have a better, sound knowledge and understanding of the social problems that are involved in the social care
job, how you populate a city like this, that they would be given more care, there would be more input in to the actual student, and we are hoping academically. They will be in a stronger position to face, not only their job but their [peers], they would be on a par with other professionals.

(Case studies, service user and carer focus group)

They were also clear that they hoped that their involvement would help to produce social workers able to work with individuals in achieving their goals:

_A better service at the end, better end product I suppose...A student who may become a care manager or social worker [who has] a greater awareness of the needs of people when they plan, perhaps, the services...It’s very important to have an understanding of the individual’s needs, its so different from one person to the next. So, nothing should be hard and fast - it’s about the flexibility and how you can apply that flexibility to improve that person’s independence._

(Case studies, service user and carer focus group, Time One)

Service users identified that they thought an important part of their role was helping students, especially those with limited previous experience of social work, to get a better understanding of service users before the students began their practice learning experiences:

_I also think it has the breaking the ice syndrome. You know you’re meeting with, perhaps, people you will be interfacing with later on and it has that sort of ‘breaking the ice feeling’ about it._

(Case studies, service user and carer focus group, Time One)

_I think it helps [students] to actually meet the service users before they go on the job as well. It’s like I suppose it can be a bit apprehensive before you are, when you have just been put into the job new. You don’t know what to expect._

(Case Studies, Service User and Carer Focus Group, Time One)

They also wanted to play a role in breaking down barriers and in shaping students values. One participant described a workshop aimed at helping students become more aware of learning disability in which social work students met students with learning disabilities enrolled in a further education college or members of local advocacy groups. At one level, it was also aimed at helping to break down barriers:

_There was about 30 people with learning disabilities. It was the same [number] with students, including [tutors] as well]...It’s an icebreaker. We all met students to tell us one thing [sharing something that we didn’t know about eachother]._

(Case Studies, Interview, Time Two)

At another level, it was about making the social work students aware of the qualities that people with learning disabilities wanted in social workers:
And then we did drawings to [to say what a social worker should look like]. They all ended up with great big hearts and really big ears.

**Tokenism**

Fear of tokenistic involvement was raised by almost all of the research respondents. At two of the six sites, service users and carers felt that tokenism applied when they were undertaking teaching roles:

> We’ve been evaluated by the students so we know that is has had an impact on them. But it didn’t have an impact when we stood up…but when we were involved with them more on a personal level, we’d done case studies and we had lunch with them, they were talking to us and we were talking to them and listening…that had a far greater impact than someone…standing in front of the group.

   (Case Studies Service User and Carer Focus Group, Time One)

Echoing, perhaps, the concerns of one key informant cited earlier who expressed the view that social work students were less aware of ‘behind the scenes’ involvement, students identified what they saw as one-off involvement as tokenism:

> I think either we have more of it or they scrap it…Either, it's much more active, it should be a positive, or get rid of it altogether because I think…they’re brought in as a ‘look here are some service users that we are going to involve for the day’ and then you don’t see them again.

   (Case Studies, Student focus group, Time Two)

Staff, on the other hand, felt they were making good progress in terms of reducing tokenism although they did recognise its risks:

> There would be times when we would have service users or carers coming in, usually to do just one session really. So, you know, particularly in working with mental health or working with children or young people we might have had people coming in to do one session…What we wanted to do was take it much further and one of the things we got, that we picked up very clearly from the service users we were working with, they were saying, ‘We want to know what happens before we come in, we want to know what happens after we come out…We don’t just want to do this one bit’….What we have tried to do is to think much more creatively about how we can involve service users.

   (Case Studies, Programme Leader, Time Two)

I’m very anxious that where we do involve our service users and carers its not seen by anybody to be tokenistic and so you know, plonking someone on a chair at the front of the room and saying ‘talk’, is the worst possible thing that can occur.

   (Case Studies, Senior HEI/Social Work Staff, Time One)
Addressing under representation

HEIs and user and carer representatives were keen to broaden the groups of service users and carers involved in local programmes. This presented challenges. Working with existing organisations had advantages in that the basis for an infrastructure of involvement already existed. However, these organisations were often aimed at supporting a specific service user group and HEIs found it harder to engage with those who were not members of such groups. As a result, there was significant under-representation from ‘harder to reach’ groups of service users such as young people, parents of children who have been looked after, those with sensory impairments, those who misuse substances, criminal justice service users as well as the victims of crime. This was recognised by staff and service users and carers alike and is an issue that has an importance outside social work education (Beresford, 2004; Begum, 2006).

Efforts were being made across all case study sites to increase the variety of users and carers involved in the programmes. At one site, service users and staff had compiled a list of groups not currently involved and were attempting to target these. At another, an organisation of service users and carers had been set up to work across the range of agencies in health and social care across the city and surrounding area.

Funding issues

Need for co-ordinating role

At the time of writing, only one of the case study sites employed a dedicated person to co-ordinate service user and carer involvement within the department or school but relied upon committed members of staff to take this on as part of their existing workload. At the end of the evaluation period, sites identified the benefits that would come from employing a new person with a specific remit to do this or through ‘workload buyout’ in which the workload of an existing member of staff was reduced. This was identified as a way of achieving a more co-ordinated approach to involvement:

There have been service users and carers involved on an ad hoc basis rather than a more structured teaching delivery.

(Case Studies, Programme Leader, Time Two)

Payment for service users and carers

The issue of payment has been identified by service users as one of the biggest barriers to participation (Turner and Beresford, 2005), and policy is increasingly aimed at identifying more transparent and fair systems for organising payments (Department of Health, 2004; Commission for Social Care Inspection, 2007). There was unanimous agreement among respondents that service users and carers should be paid for their time but there were some concerns about the difficulties involved in the payment of service users and carers. These related mainly to the practicalities of ensuring timely payment because of complex HEI systems as well as
difficulties with regard to payment and entitlement to benefits. What service users and carers valued ultimately was timely payment, particularly in relation to travelling expenses and personal assistance costs.

Case study sites had adopted different approaches in an attempt to address these difficulties. The HEIs offered service users and carers different rates of payment with some adopting the standard external lecturing rate and others adopting different rates of payments depending on task (for example, £10 per hour for attendance at a meeting without preparation, £15 with preparation and £20 per hour for teaching). One site did not pay service users and carers for their time, only for their expenses.

Service users and carers felt payment was important not only in terms of financial reward but in terms of showing that their contributions were valued. A small number of service users chose not to accept payment or chose to donate their payment to the organisation that they represented, or another charity.

Security of funding

It was recognised that service user and carer involvement was extremely resource intensive. Representatives from the case study sites appreciated the monies that had been made available from the Department of Health to fund this endeavour to date. Concern was expressed however about where money would be found to fund future service user and carer involvement whether externally or within the HEI. This was particularly the case given that as the level of service user and carer involvement increased so too did the resources required to support it:

Service users are in the main very willing to be involved...we're constantly looking for new ways that we can involve them within the limited budgets that we have to pay for their involvement. It is not possible for people to do everything but it is possible, I think for us to improve on where we've gotten to date, and involve service users and carers more in the face to face work of the programme.

(Case Studies, Programme Leader, Time Two)

Training and support for service users and carers

The opinion of service users and carers about the availability of suitable training was mixed. There appeared to be consensus that further training from HEIs was required:

The way I see it, we've learned how to do the training sessions as we've gone along...so there's been no real direction from or training skills offered, you know, given from the (HEI), which would have been useful generally.

(Case Studies, Service User and Carer Focus Group, Time Two)
Staff in one HEI recognised the need to formalise the process of capacity building by offering training in areas such as presentation skills and research training and, where possible, offering accreditation for this:

And...we are reflecting on, together, how well prepared service users felt...so we've been listening to their feedback...how they felt about the process, how well prepared they felt about it...generally the feedback has been positive...but I think it would be negligent not to look at...looking at ways in which we can improve briefing and training of service users to be involved in these kinds of things.

(Case Studies, Programme Leader, Time Two)

Service users and carers participating in the focus groups were clear that training was required. The possibility of recognising their expertise through the development of a qualification was also recognised:

I was feeling quite strongly about the support systems and what service users were going to get out of it...You know, is there going to be a qualification developed? Is there going to be like an induction?

(Case Studies, Service User and Carer Focus Group, Time Two)

Another common theme was the need to provide the opportunity for debriefings. This was felt to be particularly important by users and carers as people might be sharing sensitive or upsetting information:

One thing I have noticed with the programme developing is that we, as people who use services or people who care for people who use services, we are coming with our own lived experiences. We’re not teaching theory, its coming very much from here. So that when you’ve done the teaching, you’ve shared that gut feeling, you actually need a chance to talk about it afterwards. And I think the staff are getting better in recognising that...that necessity for a debrief afterwards.

(Case Studies, Service User and Carer Focus Group, Time Two)

Benefits of involvement for service users and carers

So far, this chapter has shown that social work educators and students identified clear benefits from service user and carer involvement. Service users and carers also reported that they had derived benefits from participating in social work education. They talked about the range of benefits they had enjoyed since becoming involved, including health gain in relation to mental health. A small number felt they had developed transferable skills that they might put to use at a later stage, for example, in the labour market:

My confidence has grown a lot more and my training skills, being able to present things...and listening skills and understanding, you know what to do and what not to do and things like that...and make priorities, you know maybe if I want to get a job or something, I have all this experience of presenting things.

(Case Studies, Service User and Carer Focus Group, Time One)
Because it’s that sense that makes you want to come back and do more. And its that feeling of…two years ago I was very isolated, wouldn’t want to go out, wouldn’t want to do anything and all the rest of it…to where I am now…where I can go into a class of potential social workers and have the confidence…a little bit of experience…and able to steer someone in possibly the right direction…It’s that motivation that keeps me going.

(Case Studies, Service User and Carer Focus Group, Time Two)

Although the overwhelming majority of participants – ranging from service users and carers, to key informants, and students spoke positively about their experiences, there were some instances resonating with the wider service user literature on why service users and carers’ experiences of involvement are not always positive (Barnes et al., 1999; Tew, 2006; Beresford et al., 2007).

One student participating in a focus group appeared to privilege her own experiences above services users’:

I don’t personally find it useful. I mean I am not really that bothered about it because I think you do get it through your own personal experience or you can get it through placement. Also, I am not sure it is entirely, there is something, you know, that kind of like them and us, you know.

(Case Studies, Student Focus Group, Time Two)

In another example, criticism was focused on a service user, rather than on the teaching staff who had allowed her to present without appropriate support or guidance:

Every time we talked about anything, she would just tell us about [her difficult life event] and I mean we felt as if we’d just finished a really heavy placement…we needed therapy.

(Case Studies, Student Focus Group, Time Two)

Concern was also raised by a small number of participants about whether service users and carers become ‘professionalised’:

I’ve always been slightly cynical about…because I think service users become an institutionalised part of the process over time.

(Case Studies, Admissions Tutor, Time Two)

While views such as these were expressed in the context of the need to address the under representation of certain groups, it is also important to acknowledge that service users are often asked to justify their representativeness in a way that other stakeholders are not (Beresford and Campbell, 1994; Beresford, 2004).

Overall, opinions such as these were exceptional but, without including them, there is a danger of presenting a picture that is at dissonance with the lived
experiences of some service users and carers, as outlined earlier in the chapter (Branfield et al., 2007).

Areas for further development

Notwithstanding this, service users and carers suggested innovative ways in which they could become more involved in social work:

*It's one thing to stand there in front of a class and give a lecture or whatever...maybe there is a role for us to sit there, almost as a listening exercise, so that the students can ask us questions, explore our experiences.*

*I think the development of e-learning is something that (HEIs) need to take on board and it would not be impossible to set up an e-learning opportunity, a forum, where service users and students can interact...where a student can throw open a question and say, 'What are service users’ views on this?' And you know, in my spare ten minutes I can trot off a reply.*

(Case Studies, Service User and Carer Focus Group, Time Two)

Another participant wanted to see greater service user involvement in the research on social work education:

*I think it's important that the time that we do spend is focused in increasing capacity within existing organisational structures...Talking about personal narrative is good and changes values. With changes to structure...I [have] found that that's a true way to make a difference. I can see that being done more enhanced by actually increasing the service user involvement in research pertaining to the degree.*

(Case Studies, Service User and Carer Focus Group, Time Two)

Discussion

The full impact of the policy objective of integrating service user and carer involvement into all aspects of social work degree programmes will only become evident in the long term:

*We must keep a sharp focus on the main purpose of involving service users and carers. This is to ensure that the new generation of social workers understands the outcomes from social care that people want and the standards of practice they expect, and that social workers are skilled and confident in working with service users and carers towards achieving them.*

(Branfield et al., 2007, p.13)

In the meantime, the evidence provided in this chapter confirms that the Requirement to involve people using services and carers was met in the development of the new degree and that the resultant increased level of engagement has been sustained. Taken together with the observations of user and carer engagement in student admissions and assessments (contained in Chapters Five and Nine) this reveals a high level of involvement.
Social work education has been cautious in making claims for its expertise in this area but this evidence appears to confirm that it has a unique experience from which other professions may wish to learn. The Department of Health funding for investment in this area was an important resource without which many of the developments described in this chapter would not have happened.

Data from the case study sites revealed that there was some pre-existing service user and carer involvement in social work education. However, the degree acted as an impetus to raise the level of such involvement and to address issues of variability and of representativeness among user and carer groups by facilitating investment and capacity building among those involved.

In line with other research (Levin, 2004; General Social Care Council, 2005), several issues crucial to sustaining developments in this area were identified. Since every programme requires money to sustain and further the developments, resources need to be committed for long term planning and development. The programmes have demonstrated the value and necessity of service user and carer involvement in social work education and commensurate funding is essential to maintain this endeavour.
Chapter Nine: Assessment

Assessment defines what students regard as important, how they spend their time and how they come to see themselves as students and then as graduates. It is a major concern of those who learn, those who teach and those who are responsible for the development and accreditation of courses.

(Brown, 2001, p.4)

Above all assessment should be about enhancing learning. However, the paradox is that assessment can so often do the opposite; it can promote competitiveness and strategic or partial learning by encouraging students to focus on those things that are assessed at the expense of those things that are not...It seems to me our role as teachers must, above all be to act as motivators, to guide students through a process of self discovery and self reflection in order to make sense of the often contradictory world of social work and to instil in them a passion for social work

(Singh, 2001)

Summary

This chapter draws on data from the case study sites, from the online survey, from interviews with employers, from the questionnaire sent to practice assessors to explore the types of assessment included within the social work degree, including the requirements that students should reach a level of computer literacy to the level of the European Computer Driving Licence or its equivalent and that they should undergo Assessed Preparation for Direct Practice to ensure their safety to undertake practice learning in a service delivery setting.

Key findings

- The new degree has afforded the opportunity for programmes to create more diverse methods of assessment and rigorous assessment procedures are in place.
- There are generally high levels of support for the new requirement for Assessed Preparation for Direct Practice.
- The European Computer Driving Licence equivalence requirement has been problematic for some HEIs and needs further investigation.
- Overall, there has been an effort to involve service users and carers in assessment but the ways in which this is done vary.
- About three quarters of students are satisfied with assessment but students without previous experience in social care, and postgraduate students tended to be less satisfied.
Scope of chapter

This chapter considers the way in which the degree acted as an impetus for HEIs to re-evaluate their assessment methods. Then it looks at two specific areas in which the social work degree introduced new types of assessment – assessed preparation for direct practice and the European Computer Driving Licence. Finally, it considers student satisfaction with assessment and the areas that could create assessment overload for students.

Background

Assessment plays a crucial role in shaping students’ experiences and demonstrating the outcomes of learning. Within the last decade, there have been considerable changes to assessment methods within HEIs with the introduction or continuance of adult learning methods, the greater use of new technologies and the move to mass undergraduate teaching in many HEIs (National Committee of Enquiry into Higher Education, 1997). This has meant that there is now an extensive literature discussing the aims of assessment and how it can be undertaken across the whole higher education sector (Brown et al., 1997; Heywood, 2000; Rust, 2002) and within the context of social work education (Cree, 2000; Braye et al., 2005; Social Policy and Social Work (SWAP), Undated).

The three main purposes of assessment are to:

- give a licence to proceed to the next stage or graduation;
- to classify the performance of students in rank order;
- to improve their learning

(Brown, 2001, p.6)

Assessments can be both formative and summative. Generally, formative assessments do not count towards a student’s grade but provide students with feedback so they have opportunities to improve. Summative assessments contribute to the overall marks for a module, level, or degree. Within this, students can be assessed in different ways. Course work is thought to provide a more reliable estimate of a student’s capabilities but can increase the potential for plagiarism. Unseen examinations provide a ‘snapshot’ of students’ capabilities but reduce the likelihood of plagiarism. Social work programmes vary in the emphasis they give to course work and examinations.

A wide range of assessment methods was already in place on social work programmes but the degree afforded the opportunity for them to be reviewed and for good practice to be shared. This was facilitated by various forms of dissemination such as Social Work and Social Policy (SWAP) workshops and Joint University Social Work Education Conferences (JSWEC).
Using the degree to review assessment practices

Unsurprisingly, key informants talked most about the underlying pedagogical rationale behind assessment. Their interviews contained much detail about assessment purposes and practice, indicating its central place in HEI staff’s activities. For example, one senior social work academic explained that the alignment of learning, teaching methods and assessment methods had been reviewed, following the introduction of the new degree. The principle of alignment is that teaching and learning input is linked to the intended outcomes for an award and assessment is then linked to those expected outcomes.

Another theme, related to the external HEI environment, was the importance of creating a fair and transparent assessment system, taking account of GSCC and HEI requirements. The new social work degree had thus provided the impetus to review the objectives for the qualification to ensure that new requirements were being met. For some staff, assessments in the new degree were aimed at confirming the intended outcomes of social work education:

*We’re really looking to encourage the reflective practitioner, rather than assess whether somebody may have got it ‘right’, or ‘wrong’.*

(Case Studies, Senior HEI/Social Work Staff, Time One)

Diversification of methods

As explained in Chapter Two, this was not a ‘before and after’ study in which DipSW assessment methods could be compared with those developed for the new degree. Nonetheless, key informants depicted the move to the new degree as an incentive to review and diversify assessment methods.

*We’ve diversified our assessment methods considerably. We should probably have been doing that anyway. And this gave us the opportunity to do this.*

(Case Studies, Programme leader, Time One)

*I think this is one area certainly that has changed since the DipSW days. There have been changes from the DipSW from largely summative essay-based assignments, to the use of a learning framework which consists of a series of formative assessments in terms of students bringing little pieces of work to their tutor to show them their academic abilities for diagnostic purposes to using case studies.*

(Case Studies, Senior HEI/Social Work Staff, Time One)

Students appreciated the benefits of more creative and practice-oriented assessment methods:

*I think it gives people a bit more scope to be creative social workers and not just sitting writing essays about things, but be creative in how we are going to meet our key roles.*

(Case Studies, Student Focus group, Time Two)
Participants also appreciated what they saw as the demanding nature of the programme:

I’ve felt really stretched and challenged and I like the fact that they expect a lot of us. The Department is quite committed to social work as a profession and they recognise the fact that it’s changing and they do expect a lot of us because they are interested in putting out a new generation... they’re making sure that the social workers they put out from here are competent and confident and critical.

(Case Studies, Student Focus Group, Time Two)

Improved status for social work

An important change identified by key informants was a different orientation towards professional development underpinning the new degree and a strengthening of links between qualifying and post qualifying programmes:

It appears to me to be about standardising and professionalising what was previously a vocational course. The shift from diploma to degree recognises this, hopefully, and also represents a shift in status. Certainly, at this institution there were concerns about the way the Diploma in Social Work had been delivered and differences that just occur naturally, so there was no standardised way of qualifying in social work. And also, I think, it’s part of that bigger move towards ongoing qualification and reforms in PQ [post qualifying education]. There’s a structure and a recognition of a need for a level of qualification to fulfil what is a very complex task.

(Case Studies, Admissions Tutor, Time Two)

Making explicit links with the Requirements for Social Work Training

Others explained that the change to the degree had been an opportunity to make clearer links between assessment and the social work degree requirements. For example, the new emphasis on communication skills and being able to meet objectives had meant that:

We had some sequences in the teaching before in the Diploma that weren’t formally assessed. For instance, before we used to devote a lot of time to interpersonal skills, and moving on into second year to self-management, some self-management skills. But for that there was no formal assessment. Whereas now we have a module [which]...quite rightly, I think, is not a traditional assessment in the form of essays. The assessment for that module is a reflective diary and a ten minute role play on video with a commentary. We mark the video, the student showing skills on the video in conjunction with the commentary of that video, and making theory links and a critique of their performance and skills and so on. Then there is the reflective diary so there are two [parts to the] assignment.

(Case Studies, Programme Leader, Time Two)
One programme leader felt that the increased focus of the new degree on practice had meant that:

*Generally, students are more energised and engaged with the assessment process. It’s less, I suppose, less stiff and less academically focused than it was*

(Case Studies, Programme Leader, Time Two)

Another informant explained that the DipSW had been assessed mainly by course work but that, with the new degree, a decision had been made to introduce an examination to assess law.

**Raising standards**

Most key informants considered that the new degree had resulted in a refining of assessment systems and an increase in the rigour of assessment. For example, two adjustments to the assessment system had been put into place at one HEI because of the new degree. The first was a requirement that if a student failed three assignments, their programme would be terminated.

*There is no point in re-sitting a module. You have demonstrated that you are not functioning sufficiently competently to warrant carrying on this course.*

(Case Studies, Senior HEI/Social Work Staff, Time One)

A second change had been made to the mitigation system. With larger student numbers, it was felt that there was less opportunity for individual discretion on the part of tutors.

An analysis of the external examiners reports made available by case study sites showed that examiners concluded that the assessment methods in place were appropriate and interesting, that students who were passing assignments had demonstrated that they were meeting the national occupational standards for social work and the social work benchmark statement. Marking and feedback were commented upon positively. The standards of assessment procedures were deemed to be rigorous and the conduct of examination boards was reported as being appropriate. The following excerpts from external examiners’ reports are illustrative:

*Much of the assessment in Year 1 is by assignments which test the students’ knowledge and its application as well as their ability to begin to reflect and critically analyse their practice. Legal Studies is tested by examination and is an appropriate method for this subject. Students are required to be able to write coherently and to a standard commensurate with that required of a professional social worker. The Year 3 sample had more of a focus on tasks presented in portfolio style. These gave students ample opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and application of learning to practice situations. The methods of assessment across these two years are rigorous and diverse. They are appropriate to the level of student progress and it is*
clear that some students have developed considerably as learners by the time they reach Year 3. Some students are still unable to follow instructions and are penalised accordingly.

(Case studies)

Linking assessment with agency based skills

Key informants identified a number of reasons for the choice of assessment methods that were related to helping students prepare for professional practice. Group presentations were favoured at one site as it was considered that these mirrored what would be required in the professional world. Examinations were used in another site in recognition that employers expected that students should demonstrate an ability to work independently:

And we’ve spent quite a lot of time considering whether exams were the best way of assessing students’ learning. And we got a clear message from partners that we want to have some knowledge that when people come that the work they have done is their own, so addressing the issue of plagiarism, but also, very importantly, that students can work under pressure. That they’re able to put down a coherent amount of knowledge in a small space of time because that’s what you’ve got to do when you’re in court, or if you are in a review, or a child protection conference.

(Case Studies)

Employers’ comments on student assessment in the case study sites were limited and it was not clear if they had been involved in devising or contributing to assessment processes. One spoke about the need to ‘weed out’ (Employer 4) those people who were unable to meet the academic and practice standards of the degree, a process that this informant thought was lacking in the DipSW. Not surprisingly, six of the nine employers interviewed hoped that the degree would enhance the skills of social workers, particularly written skills.

Values and ethics

HEI staff also raised aspects of the DipSW programme that they felt had not transferred to the new degree. A minority spoke of their perceptions that the DipSW had enabled greater attention to anti-oppressive practice and that this decrease had affected assessment:

I don’t think there is as much emphasis placed on values and discriminatory practices, as there should be: to a certain extent it has been left up to individual programmes. The key roles [National Occupational Standards] in themselves don’t provide those, and there is perhaps some area of negotiation around the code of practice. I think the notion that students must be able to show that they have got a very clear value base, a very clear value framework, could get lost unless individual programmes really focus and address that.

(Case Studies, Programme Leader, Time One)
New methods of assessment

Documentation from the case study sites showed that a wide variety of assessment methods existed in addition to traditional examinations or essays. They included:

- Individual, group and poster presentations
- Skills video and reflective commentary
- Reflective study on the input of service users
- Assignments based on case scenarios
- Core skills portfolios
- Web quiz
- Family Observation

European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) equivalence

Before the introduction of the new degree, a key concern of employers was a lack of ability among newly qualified social workers to use information systems within organisations (Barnes, 2002). As a result, it was thought to be essential that new social work graduates should be computer literate. To this end, the General Social Care Council document on the accreditation of universities to offer the new degree stated that:

Universities should be satisfied that...students have been assessed as competent to the level of the European Computer Driving Licence or its equivalent.

(General Social Care Council, 2002, p.16)

Initially there was some concern across the case study sites at the lack of guidance from the General Social Care Council as to how this requirement should be implemented. This allowed HEIs to interpret the requirement in different ways. Programmes varied on whether the ECDL should be a separate award or integrated into the programme requirements. Thus, approaches across the case study sites ranged from students having to attend evening classes at a local Further Education College (which they paid for themselves) to allowing students to construct a portfolio to demonstrate their competence in each of the key areas:

If you can use Blackboard [university web based learning system] you have demonstrated a lot of the competencies required for the ECDL, just by being able to log onto a particular site, download material, all this kind of stuff.

(Case Studies, Senior HEI/Social Work Staff)

At another site, the HEI made the arrangements:

I’m arranging for someone from the IT side to come in and assess the students. Some students will then be able to use a CD and work on their own. But if necessary the [HEI] will do support sessions for students that...
need some help and teaching in areas …that they’re struggling to work with on their own.

(Case Studies, Programme Leader)

During the first phase of the evaluation, there was concern across the case study sites around who would meet the financial costs of the requirement. Students, in particular, were concerned that they may be penalised financially as a result of the requirement were unhappy with this. In addition, some students voiced concerns about the demands of completing the ECDL, given their already heavy workloads:

So that leaves you the term before you start your placement and then the third semester…just practically I don’t think they have thought it through. It’s like…‘oh just do the ECDL’…but actually it’s not that simple, I mean it’s actually quite a tough course.

(Case Studies, Student Focus Group)

Generally, initial concerns around the ECDL requirement did not materialise and by Time Two, most case study sites had modified their approaches to allow students the greatest possible flexibility while allowing them not to incur financial costs. There did remain however, a feeling that greater clarity was required in terms of the particular relevance of the ECDL to social work. A suggestion came from one site that the NHS had provided a useful model with its own ECDL and new Essential IT Skills (EITS) programme:

We have not been helped at all by the General Social Care Council or the Department of Health in terms of, you know, what do you want this to be…the ECDL requirements are still not yet fully understood…Nursing have been working for a couple of years in terms of what ECDL should look like purely for nurses and similar work needs to happen…for social work.

(Case Studies, Senior HEI/Social Work Staff)

Assessed preparation for direct practice

The Requirements for Social Work Training (Department of Health, 2002) state that:

All students must undergo assessed preparation for direct practice to ensure their safety to undertake practice learning in a service delivery setting. This preparation must include the opportunity to develop a greater understanding of the experiences of service users and the opportunity to shadow an experienced social worker.

(Department of Health, 2002, p.3)

This requirement has been interpreted in social work programmes as having two main elements, the element to ensure ‘safety’ to practice and the element of ‘preparation’ for practice placements. All programmes met the former element but varied in the extent to which the preparation element was tackled.
The 2004-2005 HEI Fact Find sought information from the programmes in order to gain a sense of the range of methods used in the Assessed Preparation for Direct Practice (APDP) and their comparative frequency. There was some missing information for these questions, as informants such as programme administrators did not always know the answers so there were only 35 HEIs (just under half of the total HEIs providing social work programmes at the time) on which information on Assessed Preparation for Direct Practice was available.

Methods used to assess students’ suitability

The results suggested that there was a wide range of ways in which the Requirement has been operationalised. In addition to shadowing, which was the method stipulated in the Requirements, additional methods included:

- assignment/portfolio;
- exercises (e.g. videos);
- statement or interview; and
- whole module.

The most common combination, used in 12/35 programmes, was shadowing and completing a written assignment:

Students complete a written case analysis based on a case study and are assessed by a qualified social worker after shadowing.

(HEI Fact Find 2004-2005, 008)

[They complete] a short piece of coursework early in Year 1 on the GSCC code of practice.

(HEI Fact Find 2004-2005, 014)

[They attend] a series of workshops and [complete] workbooks...marked by a professional social worker and the university. If it is a borderline pass, things are highlighted and taken on into their placement.

(HEI Fact Find 2004-2005, 003)

Some places assessed students’ suitability using exercises such as role play or videos. In others, it formed part of a specific preparation for practice module:

The...programme has an initial module [on being a safe practitioner]...If any student fails to meet the assessment requirements for this module, they are not able to proceed to the first practice learning opportunity.

(HEI Fact Find 2004-2005, 036)

Modules represented a more sustained approach to measuring performance than, for example, undertaking one or two days shadowing and being assessed by an experienced social worker. For example, in one programme, aspects such as students’ attendance and level of participation in discussions
comprised part of the process of assessing their safety to undertake practice learning.

Five HEIs mentioned using an interview or written statement in which students were asked to disclose any information that might affect their performance on placement:

[We have a] new fitness for practice interview with mentor or learning advisor.

(HEI Fact Find 2004-2005)

Seven programmes mentioned using three methods. For example, one set an assessment involved completing a statement and an assignment and taking part in an exercise:

On selection and prior to going out on placement students complete a ‘fitness to practice’ statement which asks them to disclose any information that may affect their performance on placement with their personal tutor. As part of one module, students are asked to write 500 words about their current knowledge and skills and what they need to develop to qualify as a social worker. This is marked as an academic assignment and...it is also used to assess their preparation for practice and students use this to complete their placement application form...Students video an interview...with a fellow student and are given feedback from the other student about their interview skills.

(HEI Fact Find 2004-2005, 007)

At a later point in the Fact Find, a question on whether any students had been asked to leave or had chosen to leave after undergoing Assessed Preparation for Direct Practice was included. Regrettably, this meant that information was collected on only 15 HEIs. Of these, four reported that it had resulted in students being asked to leave. While this represents a small sample of the total programmes, it does indicate that this provision was being used for its intended purpose i.e. to facilitate the withdrawal of students deemed to be unsuitable for social work.

Purpose of assessed preparation for direct practice

Some of the variation in the ways in which this requirement has been interpreted might be explained by the extent to which different programmes attract different types of student. In some circumstances, it was used to give a ‘taster’ of ‘real life’ social work to students with limited experience:

Younger students may need more help in preparation for practice.

(HEI Fact Find 2004-2005, 002)

In other programmes, it was acknowledged that students may have already acquired the skills to undertake practice learning safely and other methods are deemed appropriate:
Most are already involved in work settings. Qualified practice teacher observes and approves students.

(HEI Fact Find 2004-2005, 020)

Students bring to the course a brief portfolio of previous experience and achievements which is assessed by their academic advisor.

(HEI Fact Find 2004-2005, 022)

Data from the Case Study sites revealed a similar range of approaches with some dissenting views about the value of the provision:

One requirement, of course, is that students are declared safe for practice. Most of the staff think that’s an unbelievably silly requirement. OK…This, I think, is an example of a policy, which [is] interpreted to suit the desires of the people who are applying it…What we’ve done is to ask students for evidence of social care activities…And virtually all, if not all students, nearly all students, are able to do that at the commencement of the course.

(Case Studies, Senior HEI/Social Work Staff)

This viewpoint may indicate that the way Assessed Preparation for Direct Practice is interpreted, and the emphasis given to the word ‘safe’, is problematic. However, the predominant view was that the provision was useful and to be welcomed:

The assessment of Fitness to Practise is very rigorous because if they actually don’t pass the Fitness to Practise, they can’t go out on placement. And they can’t continue into the second year…On this degree they’re far more rigorous.

(Case Studies, Senior HEI/Social Work Staff)

Other informants commented that it was supported by service users and carers and by practitioners and employers. Consistent with many programmes participating in the Fact Find, aspects such as attendance were included in the criteria for assessing students’ safety to undertake practice learning:

It was also coming out really strongly from service users and from managers really…So in terms of a student being signed off…for this Fitness for Practice requirement…that takes place in year one…in one of the modules…and certainly looking at the attendance is one of the key things that they would have [to consider]…so if a student’s attendance has dipped…then they wouldn’t be signed off at that point.

(Case Studies, HEI/Senior Social Work Staff, Time One)

Just to give you an example of some feedback I had from an experienced social worker, he said to me, ‘I like the way that the university is doing the ten day placements because…it’s just enough time for the students to shadow you and for you to get a really good feel of the students’ ability to enquire and to learn and to demonstrate their values.’
Students varied in their opinions about Assessed Preparation for Direct Practice, individually and between sites. Some described the experience as invaluable and a good preparation for what they would expect on placement. Others thought it was tokenistic and stated they were unsure of their role and purpose during the activity. However, as seen in Chapter Six, the overwhelming majority of students completing the online survey thought that shadowing element was very helpful.

Practice assessment

The National Occupational Standards (NOS) were seen by some as an improvement on the previous DipSW competence framework.

*I like the core competences of the DipSW, I always liked those, but what it didn’t give you was a sense of level-ness, whereas with the National Occupational Standards you must be able to evidence and map progress pre and post qualification.*

(Case Studies, Senior HEI/social work staff, Time Two)

Others respondents thought there was little difference as the six Key Roles (NOS) were similar to the six competences of the DipSW framework.

*My concerns are that the key roles, to a certain extent, seem to replicate some of the framework, really, on NVQ training. So I think that unless we are very careful, it can almost be a bit of a tick box mentality…I think that it is too prescriptive…those are my concerns about it.*

(Case Studies, Programme leader, Time One)

Service user involvement in practice assessment

A variable picture emerged from the practice assessor questionnaires and from the case study interviews and focus groups about the involvement of service users and carers in assessing students on practice.

In the first round of the practice assessor survey, service user and carer involvement in practice learning was reported to have increased by a third (36 per cent, n=43) of practice assessors since the new degree commenced. While no respondent noted a decrease in service user and carer involvement, most commonly there was no difference (64 per cent, n= 79).

Most of the practice assessors in the second survey, which took place the following year reported that service users were involved in a variety of ways: and in many aspects of students’ assessment, although some also reported that service user involvement was limited to being asked about a student after an observed practice session:

*Service users are asked to give feedback on all aspects of students - their presentation, advocacy, respect, etc.*

(Case Studies, Practice Assessor, Time Two)
Variations in involving service users and in the methods used were a key finding from the interviews and focus groups with case study site students. This was a typical comment:

*Now that does vary, I suppose on the whole they tend to get evidence from one [service user] only … Some have been much more, in terms of equity I think, some agencies, a few, have said, ‘Right, we'll contact all the service users you've worked with, and ask them to give feedback.'*

(Case Studies, Practice Learning Co-ordinator, Time Two)

However, several staff and service users stressed the value of involving service users more directly in assessing practice. For example, one service user thought she had been able to point out issues about a student's performance, which apparently had been missed by practitioners and HEI staff:

*I think that there is a huge need for users to be involved in assessing portfolios because my experience at the (HEI) was of being with a group of professionals, academics…I was the only service user there and there were huge issues...that what I was picking up was very different from what other people were picking up.*

(Case Studies, Service User Focus Group, Time Two)

There appeared to be some development in the roles that service users have been able to play in assessing practice teaching and learning, in terms of increased awareness of the need and a variety of approaches. However, the variation in approach, and particularly in the extent to which service user and carer views are sought and weighed in the overall assessment of students, suggest that this is an area for further development to determine which assessment approaches are most useful.

**Support for practice assessors**

Support for practice assessors was seen as vital for developing the quality of practice placements. Practice assessors review the evidence provided by students and are responsible for passing or failing placements. Consequently, some of the issues discussed in Chapter Seven in terms of placements in the voluntary sector are relevant in terms of the qualifications, experience, and skills of practice assessors. Staff and students identified the importance of the qualities of and relationships with practice assessors, given their central role in assessing such a major part of the course. This places emphasis on developing ways of supporting practice assessors, particularly in the voluntary sector. However, it was acknowledged that non-social work qualified practice assessors could provide a useful and different perspective on the skills and performance of students. As discussed in Chapter Seven, practice assessors identified improvements in the level of support they received and HEI staff described a variety of approaches to support placements with non-social work qualified practice assessors.
Student satisfaction with assessment

Figure 9.1 uses data from the online survey to show that students responding to the survey were generally satisfied with the way that they had been assessed.

Figure 9.1: Student satisfaction with assessment (online survey)

Table 9.1 presents this data according to the stage at which students had received when they completed the survey. It indicates that 79 per cent of respondents were satisfied in the main with assessment and that their levels of satisfaction were stable across cohorts. Although by the final year a lower proportion were ‘very satisfied’ (25, 23 31 per cent), the change in view was not statistically significant.

Table 9.1: Student satisfaction with formal assessment over time (online survey, cross sectional data)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
<th>Year 1 (UG/PG)</th>
<th>Year 2 (UG)</th>
<th>Final year (UG/PG)</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Kw Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>713</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly satisfied</td>
<td>838</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither satisfied nor</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dissatisfied</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly dissatisfied</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very dissatisfied</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid n</td>
<td>1635</td>
<td></td>
<td>713</td>
<td></td>
<td>346</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Differences between different students

Whether students were studying at an undergraduate or postgraduate level was significantly associated with their level of satisfaction with formal assessment. A higher proportion of undergraduates compared with
postgraduates (26 compared with 17 per cent) were ‘very satisfied’ and a lower percentage (8 against 11 per cent) were ‘fairly dissatisfied’.

Table 9.2: Satisfaction with formal assessment by type of student (online survey, cross sectional data)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
<th>Undergraduate</th>
<th>Postgraduate</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>559</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly satisfied</td>
<td>1125</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly dissatisfied</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very dissatisfied</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid n</td>
<td>2155</td>
<td></td>
<td>480</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi square p-value<0.001

Satisfaction with formal assessment was associated with previous experience in social work related activities (see Table 9.3). However, it is hard to identify a trend in terms of level of experience and satisfaction. Those with no previous experience were most likely to be ‘very satisfied’ (36 compared with 24 per cent overall). However, those with personal experience were the most likely (17 compared with 8 per cent overall) to be ‘fairly dissatisfied’. Students who had worked in a social work organisation were about average in terms of satisfaction levels.

Table 9.3: Satisfaction with formal assessment by previous experience (online survey, cross sectional data)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
<th>Social work</th>
<th>Type of previous experience</th>
<th>Voluntary work</th>
<th>Personal</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly satisfied</td>
<td>523</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>535</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly dissatisfied</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very dissatisfied</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid n</td>
<td>1027</td>
<td></td>
<td>995</td>
<td></td>
<td>519</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assessment workload

Several HEIs indicated in the second round of interviews that they were reviewing their assessment schedules as they had identified an ‘assessment overload’ for students. In one HEI the course leader ascribed this to the development of the modular system of course design. Students here expressed concern about the amount and timing of assessments. At the time...
of the student focus group, they were due to submit three essays in one week and were preparing for two exams in the following week. At a different site, students were facing ‘five big events in ten days.’ Similarly, students at another site reported having to submit two or three essays on the same day.

There was also an issue about whether practice learning was awarded academic credits, as is often, but not always the case. Where all credits must be gained through academic work, there is more pressure on the college-based curriculum and quantity of assessment pieces for students.

Discussion

Standards are said to have increased with the move to a minimum degree level qualification and the degree has given the impetus for many programmes to review course processes and develop a greater range of assessment methods than pertained before. These methods are designed to assess different types of learning, suggesting that on some programmes efforts have been made to ensure better alignment between the programme content and methods of assessment. There is also evidence of programmes choosing to use methods of assessment intended to prepare students better for future employment.

A minority of key informants were concerned about the way that students’ values were assessed. The National Occupational Standards (NOS) have a Statement of Expectations devised by service users and carers which are about values and are central to the Standards. The intention was to move away from what was seen as the more ‘prescriptive’ approach of the DipSW regulations to an outcome focused approach in which programmes had discretion in how they implemented this area. The General Social Care Council (GSCC) Codes of Practice was also seen as central. It may be that programmes would value further consultation about this important area and that the GSCC could look at this in its review process.

The requirement to assess IT skills, has been harder to operationalise for some HEIs, possibly because of the great variation of students’ prior skills and in the quality of provision across different HEIs. Greater clarity may be required about how the requirement for European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) equivalence should be achieved in social work programmes. A suggestion was made that it might be possible to develop a social work specific method of assessment that might be explored by either the Department of Health or the GSCC. The ECDL award along these lines might facilitate more effective learning, especially for those students, albeit a decreasing minority, who do not feel comfortable using computers.

There is generally a high level of support for the provision for students to undertake Assessed Preparation for Direct Practice before entry to practice learning. However, as the interviews with key informants showed, there was a lack of precision in the way that it was described. This requirement is commonly referred to as ‘fitness’ to practice but other terms are also used: ‘suitability’, ‘safety’. ‘Fitness to practice is often related to end of training e.g. medicine. There are also ‘suitability’ procedures which can be utilised at any
point in social work qualifying education. The key word in the DH Requirements is ‘safety’ and therefore, it is suggested that the term safety to practice is used as the shorthand term for this requirement.

Overall, student feedback about assessment was positive and this contributed to their high levels of satisfaction with their programmes and perceptions that a degree level qualification had enhanced social work as a career. This leads onto the following chapter which looks at readiness to practice.
Chapter Ten: Readiness to Practise

The relationship between social work education and social work practice is dynamic and by no means straightforward...Research...indicates that there are no simple truths about what constitutes readiness for practice and no position of privileged insight to adopt given the different interests of service users, trainees, the academy, employers, government and 'community'.

(Pithouse and Scourfield, 2002, pp.8-9)

It became clear to us [as final year students] that there was a more complex and demanding requirement with regard to both our level of social work practice and our academic studies. It would no longer be enough to be informed about the subject, we were now expected to be able to integrate theory with practice and reflect on our observations.

(Durrant and Shreeve, 2002, p.211)

Summary

This chapter uses information from the student online survey, interviews with students and social work educators, and from written responses to a set of two scenarios, or vignettes, completed by students in the case study sites to examine the impact of the degree on students' readiness to practise. These show that students appeared to gather greater confidence in their abilities over the course of their studies and that this was reflected in the way that they conceptualised practice as measured by their responses to the vignettes.

Key findings

- Students considered that the degree had enhanced their confidence and strengthened their motivation to enter social work.
- Students also thought that their ability to integrate theory and practice had improved.
- Social work educators felt that the degree was better able to produce students who would be more prepared for the complex and changing world of social work than the DipSW.
- Analyses of students' answers to a set of two vignettes, each outlining a situation with they might be faced in Adult and Children’s services, showed statistically significant changes over time.
- These changes accord with the results from related studies and suggested that students had reached a level of skills acquisition appropriate for the completion of qualifying training. However, some skills are more difficult to acquire than others and it should not be expected that newly qualified social workers have developed proficiencies in all areas.
Scope of chapter

This chapter uses data from the case studies and online survey to explore the extent to which the degree prepared students for their future as social workers. In doing this, it helps address a key part of the tender document, which stated that:

*The focus of the three years will be on preparing competent professionals to take their place in dynamic multi-disciplinary settings where both health and social care workers provide a high quality service to users.*

(Department of Health, 2003a, p.1)

It also provides partial answers to two of the four research questions:

1. How far has the new degree met the expectations of those entering the profession and other stakeholders?

2. What are the main outcomes of the change from diploma to degree level study?

Firstly, the chapter presents evidence from the online survey and from focus groups with students in the case study sites showing that they considered the degree had strengthened both their motivations to become a social worker and their understanding of the social work role. Secondly, while the evaluation was unable to compare DipSW and degree students directly, information from social work educators and from practice assessors suggests that the move to degree level study has helped students to better integrate theory and practice and represents a change from ‘training’ to ‘becoming a reflective practitioner’. At the same time, both students and educators recognised that that completing the degree was not the final stage but the starting point in their future professional development. Finally, the last part of this chapter examines how written responses to a set of two vignettes drawing on situations that social workers working in Adult and Children’s Services might face approaches suggested that students’ approaches to practice developed between their first and final year of study. While these data cannot be used to provide direct evidence on a third research question, ‘Has the new social work degree increased the quality of qualified social workers entering the workforce?’ they are consistent with the literature on professional expertise, which demonstrates the process of skills acquisition over time.

Background

As mentioned in Chapter Two, identifying the effects of professional education is a complex process. Not only is there disagreement about how concepts such as ‘knowledge’ and ‘values’ can be measured (Vleuten, 1996; Merighi et al., 2005) but there are debates about who defines the basis for deciding what constitutes skills or knowledge (Wilson and Beresford, 2000).
Given that the timescale for the evaluation did not enable any direct observation of students’ skills acquisition, the focus in the evaluation was upon ‘readiness to practise’. This has been defined as the:

*Extent to which a [person] is prepared to manage the situations that arise in practice.*

(Kane, 1994, p.139, cited in Biggerstaff et al., 1998)

*Readiness* differs from students’ *actual* performance. As Biggerstaff and colleagues (1998) note in their study of child protection services in the United States, there is a distinction between:

*Competence [which] is the outcome of actual job performance, while readiness is the level of preparation the [social worker] has for entering into practice.*

(1998, p.699)

How then should ‘level of preparation’ be measured? As mentioned in Chapter Two, the model outlined by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) to measure the process of skills acquisition has been used widely in studies of professional development:

*Progression from the analytic behaviour of a detached subject consciously decomposing his (sic) environment into recognizable elements, and following abstract rules, to involved skills behaviour based on the accumulation of concrete experience and the unconscious recognition of new situations as similar to whole remembered ones.*

(Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986 p35)

While Dreyfus & Dreyfus (1986) were identifying the processes that distinguished humans from machines (computers), their theoretical work draws on the work of Benner (1984) in the area of nurse education. They distil her discussion of skill acquisition into five stages.

**Table 10.1: Five stages of skill acquisition (Dreyfus & Dreyfus)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill level</th>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Perspective</th>
<th>Decision</th>
<th>Commitment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Novice</td>
<td>Context-free</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>Detached</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Advanced</td>
<td>Context-free and Situational</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>Detached</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Competent</td>
<td>Context-free and Situational</td>
<td>Chosen</td>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>Detached understanding and deciding. Involved in outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Proficient</td>
<td>Context-free and situational</td>
<td>Experienced</td>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>Involved understanding. Detached deciding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Expert</td>
<td>Context-free and situational</td>
<td>Experienced</td>
<td>Intuitive</td>
<td>Involved</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1986, p.50)
Fook and colleagues (2000, pp.10-12) have summarised how the Dreyfus and Dreyfus model distinguishes between these different stages. The second column in Table 10.1, ‘Components’, refers to the type of rules learners use as the basis for their actions. Novice learners tend heavily to rely on ‘context free’ rules, meaning rules derived from various ‘objective’ facts and features. Once learners move to the advanced beginner stage, they learn also to apply ‘situational’ rules. The third column, ‘Perspective’, refers to the stance taken by the learner when interpreting or judging a situation. In the early stages, learners do not make judgments about situations in terms of identifying priorities. However, at the competent stage, they have progressed to making a conscious, or chosen, deliberation. At the proficient and expert stages, they make judgements based on prior experience. The fourth column, ‘Decision’, refers to the ‘rationality’ with which learners engage in decision-making. At the first four stages, it is based on analytical thinking. Experts, however, use intuition based on their ‘understanding that occurs upon seeing similarities with previous experiences’ (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, p.28). The final column, ‘Commitment’, refers to the level to which learners feel responsible and involved in the situation. In the early stages, they feel detached from the process but, by the expert stage, they have achieved an involved understanding as well as perspective on the situation.

The five year longitudinal study in Australia by Fook and colleagues’ (2000) study of professional development among social work students followed practitioners from the beginning of their professional social work training through to the work place. They developed a theory of social work expertise (Fook et al., 1997) which they refined to dimensions of expertise. These dimensions included knowledge, skills, values, contextuality, reflexivity, use of theory and perspectives on professions and they argue that students demonstrate movement on a number of dimensions.

Table 10.2: Expertise development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From:</th>
<th>To:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Embedded assumptions, context free rules</td>
<td>Contextual rules, ability to prioritise and create</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal/professional tensions</td>
<td>Transcendence and broader values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domain specific and individualising</td>
<td>Contextuality and transferability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive detachment</td>
<td>Reflexivity- agency and responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome oriented</td>
<td>Flexibility; process oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of personal experience</td>
<td>Create theory from multiple sources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Fook et al. (2000), provided in personal communication)

Their findings suggested that students move through the stages of professional development, although not necessarily in a linear fashion, and concluded that the students at the end of their course had reached the ‘advanced beginner’ stage:
It would appear that the bulk of students can be said to have reached advanced beginner stage at the end of their training.

(Ryan et al., 1995, p.30)

One approach to evaluating whether the new social work degree in England had impacted on students’ approach to practice would have been to evaluate students’ performance on completion of their education/training against frameworks developed by Fook and her colleagues (2000), or those developed by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986). However this approach would not necessarily have indicated changes over time. As there was no baseline UK study of social work students level of performance on the DipSW it was thought an evaluation that sought to establish some form of baseline and compare changes over time would be more useful. However, this approach did not preclude comparing the results from the evaluation with those obtained in these studies. While this would not necessarily validate the findings of the evaluation of the social work degree in England it would give indications of points of similarity and difference. It might also provide new insights and observation specific to the UK social work context.

In considering the impact of the social work degree upon the development of professional expertise, the evaluation sought, firstly, to look at students’ readiness to practise through their own eyes and the opinion of those who taught them. Secondly, it analysed whether students’ written responses to two vignettes, or scenarios, indicated that the degree had prepared them to meet with the sorts of situation that they might expect to meet as a qualified social worker.

**Students’ reflections on their readiness to practise**

Students at the case study sites interviewed at Time Two very near the end of their programmes considered that doing the degree had given them greater confidence and that this had grown over time. While it might be argued that all degree programmes should achieve this, among younger students there was a sense that the combination of classroom and practice learning had been crucial:

> For me, when I started the course I used to talk about myself like an eighteen year old, really naïve…but being on placement and hearing things has made me grow up…I never thought I could challenge people who were older than me.

(Case studies, Student Focus Group, Time Two)

This growth in confidence was evident even for older students who came to their programmes with previous experience:

> I did work in social care and I did things and then when I came to the course I realised that I was doing things, but not knowing why I was doing things…now you’ve got the evidence and the theories to back things up…you know why you are doing things and the parameters you can work in.

(Case studies, Student Focus Group, Time Two)
At Time One, some students taking part in focus groups in the case study sites had been concerned that they might not be able to cope with the academic demands of the course and that the degree programme would be ‘too academic’. These concerns were shared by students responding to the online survey when they were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement: ‘At this stage in my studies I feel confident of passing my degree in social work’. Figure 10.2 shows that proportionally very few first year students (Phases One, Two and Seven) agreed strongly with this statement whereas confidence grew in their second (Phases Four and Six) and final year (Phases Three and Five) year of study.

Figure 10.1: Percentage of students reporting they were confident of achieving a social work degree (online survey)

Students’ accounts of the way that they felt that they had developed over the course of the degree broadly centred on three themes:

- integration of theory and practice;
- motivations to work in social work; and
- the degree as the starting point for continuing professional education.

Integration of theory and practice

Part of the students’ increased confidence appeared to stem from changes in their perceptions of their ability to integrate theory and practice. At Time One, they were aware of their need to learn how to use complex reasoning and thinking skills in order to study social work:

[I would] like to be taught to think, but not necessarily what to think.

(Case Studies, Student Focus Group, Time One)

However, they were less confident about how they would be able to apply this learning in practice. Students participating in the focus groups typically commented:
I feel sceptical – will I be able to practise what I learnt in class?
(Case studies, Student Focus Group, Time One)

By Time Two, the ability to comprehend and integrate theory and practice was attributed both to the classroom and practice elements of the degree:

The [HEI] set me up with theories but I didn’t really understand them until I put them into practice.
(Case Studies, Student Focus Group, Time Two)

Furthermore, the process of applying theory to practice was seen as fundamental to the practice of social work:

It’s notoriously difficult to link theory and practice together so we recognise that, but I think certainly what [programme staff are] trying to do is to make us recognise the theory and put it into practice and somehow struggle with that, but manage to do it rather than just sort of say, ‘Oh yes, theory - you don’t have to bother with that. You just need to be a social worker.’
(Case studies, Student Focus Group, Time Two)

Furthermore, at Time One, students participating in the focus groups viewed the knowledge and skills acquired as a result of undertaking a social work qualification as necessary and valuable in order to provide better assistance to people using services. This tended to be expressed in an abstract way:

[The degree is] about empowerment in the profession…and would leave me free to help people in a more positive way.
(Case Studies, Student Focus Group, Time One)

By Time Two, there was a greater sense of how knowledge and skills could be applied directly in practice. Thus, one student talking about the process of assessment suggested:

It’s realising that the process of the analysis you’ve got to do, you know, you’ve really got to think, ‘Now what am I going to do with this information…What does it mean for the person’…and picking it to pieces and applying theory.
(Case Studies, Student Focus Group, Time Two)

Another student identified how the programme had changed her initial understandings of the social work role:

Whenever anyone starts this course and it’s, ‘Why do you want to do it [social work]?’ ‘It’s to help people’. And I think this course helps you realise that social work’s not about helping people, saving them and making their lives better, it’s about - this sounds very corny - it’s about empowering them and just providing them with skills so that they can make the changes they need to make themselves.
(Case Studies, Student Focus Group, Time Two)
These viewpoints show greater concordance with the views of newly qualified social workers in Marsh and Triseliotis’s (1996) study in that the:

Knowledge and skills that usually accompanied the qualification were its main justification [because]…’we are dealing with people’s lives and we should know what we are doing’

(p.196)

Motivations to work in social work

Chapter Four highlighted the strength of students’ motivations to study social work and how strongly idealistic reasons for becoming a social worker persisted throughout their studies. Chapter Five noted that applicants for the social work degree needed to be able to demonstrate their desire to become a social worker. In this sense, students beginning social work programmes were already very clearly motivated. Nevertheless, it was striking how strongly students ascribed their continued motivation to the degree itself:

When I came here, it was just about being a social worker at the end of it, I guess…based on personal experiences but I think along the way it’s kind of changed, in a sense…because now I’ve got more of a passion to do the job like, [more] than just wanting to do it - if you know what I mean?

(Case Studies, Student Focus Group, Time Two)

Students completing the online survey were asked whether they agreed with the statement, ‘Doing this degree programme has strengthened my motivation to go into social work as a career’. Figure 10.2 uses data from the online survey to show the high proportion of students agreeing with this statement.

Figure 10.2: Percentage of respondents agreeing with statement that the degree had strengthened their motivations for a career in social work (online survey)
Role of continuing professional development

Models of professional development do not presume that any form of professional qualifying education will produce expert practitioners; given the right environment and support, the process of skills acquisition continues once formal education and training has ended. Students reaching the end of their programmes acknowledged that they still had a lot to learn:

What this course has taught me is that I am going to have to keep learning all the time…it’s like passing your driving test…you know, pass your test, and then really learn when you are doing it.

(Case Studies, Student Focus Group, Time Two)

I think as well, with social work, it’s…you develop your skills and things to a certain degree, but I think it’s the sort of role that you’re always learning and always developing, so as much as I’ve learned so much over the last three years, I know there’s so much more that I need to know. I think that’s one of the things that you learn, that, it isn’t it?

(Case Studies, Student Focus Group, Time Two)

Students also emphasised in the focus groups that there was a gap between achieving a professional qualification and being confident in taking on the role of a professional:

Obviously, I have learnt a lot, but do I feel like a qualified professional? Not yet.

(Case Studies, Student Focus Group, Time Two)

You’re not going to come away with just, you know, you having that bit of paper doesn’t mean that you’re completely and utterly ready for anything.

(Case Studies, Student Focus Group, Time Two)

It was not so much that these feelings were ascribed inadequate preparation; rather a distinction was made between the level of preparedness achieved through undertaking a professional qualifying programme and the subsequent complexities and uncertainties of professional practice:

I don’t think they can prepare you for everything. I think as long as you’ve got some skills to cope with new challenges, which is what I think they’ve given us.

(Case Studies, Student Focus Group, Time Two)

Key informants’ views

Changes attributed to the degree

Despite some reservations among social work educators about how much could be expected of the degree, staff at the case study sites felt optimistic and enthusiastic from the outset that the increase in practice learning, the requirement for teaching to be practice oriented, and the greater opportunity to integrate theory into practice represented improvements. The key roles in
the National Occupational Standards (NOS) were also thought to offer greater clarity than the DipSW’s competencies:

There is much clearer sense of what [is] theory, what [is] knowledge in practice, how it impacts on defensible decision making, as well as empowerment and building on strengths. I think, my hope is, that is the...key roles connect that much more clearly, I think, than the...competencies.

(Case Studies, Practice learning Co-ordinator, Time One)

However, it was also clear that the degree was seen to be more than training; it was about:

Developing critically reflective social workers, it isn’t just training, it is an education...it’s not just giving them the tools of the trade, it’s also enabling them...to see the point of looking over the parapet.

(Case Studies, Senior HEI/Social Work Staff, Time One).

Perhaps the clearest statement that encapsulated staff expectations at the outset of the degree and in many ways reflects the process of skill acquisition articulated by Benner (1984) & Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986), discussed earlier in Chapter Two and elsewhere in this chapter, was:

My understanding of the new degree is that we want to produce social workers who are aware of priorities and the key concerns or key priorities of practice, so we understand the objectives to be practice driven, but who are also reflective and effective practitioners on the basis of evidence led practice...I think another objective of the new degree is that we are hoping to produce people who are able to practise to a high degree of competence. OK, there is obviously a process of development there, of progression, but nevertheless they are able to set a high standard of awareness in terms of their practice as linked to theoretical underpinnings and research based materials...We place a high priority on connecting theory and practice at each level.

(Practice Learning Co-ordinator, Time One)

Practice assessors also agreed that the degree had brought improvements to students’ ability to link theory and practice:

I think the performance of the students overall hasn’t changed but the specific requirements of them are much more explicit. There is also...better understanding of theory and its application to practice.

(Case Studies, Practice Assessor, Time Two)

At the end of the evaluation, the overall perception of staff was that the objective of integrating theory and practice had been met and that the degree had produced graduates who were ready to enter the workforce:

You think, actually, we’ve done a good enough job...We’ve given them sufficient knowledge and skills and opportunities...[to be] a social worker who’s professionally competent...and, you know, delivers in terms of the
GSCC codes of practice, and the values that underpin that... Somebody who's competent - and that's at all sorts of levels - decision-making, reading and writing, [good at] speaking to other professionals... And I think one of the things, good things, about the degree, is that we've brought it up to that level. I think there's still gaps, but I think we've brought it up to that sort of level of acceptability.

(Practice Learning Co-ordinator, Time Two)

There was also a belief that students had acquired relevant skills:

We are pleased with the students that graduated last summer... I hope we produce competent social workers, realistic workers. I think there is a sense in which we try and give a message that working through therapeutic relationships, traditional aspects of social work, therapeutic work are still possible... Although we realise that... there is so much pressure on meeting targets and keeping to procedures and so on... but we say to students, you are still a professional in your own right and within certain constraints of your agency and local authority and so on, there is still room for professional activity and so on... I don't think we've had formal feedback [from employers] but going to meetings and meeting people, employers and so on... they seem quite positive [about the quality of graduates from the degree].

(Case Studies, Programme Leader, Time Two)

Concordance between key informants' and students' views

In common with the students who had identified a stage between gaining a professional qualification and becoming a professional, social work educators were also concerned that newly qualified professionals should be given an opportunity to consolidate their learning:

I mean we have our... frameworks in... higher education that look at what graduates should look like, and the thought processes that graduates should come out with... We try very hard to differentiate [between] different levels of thought... and to have graduates that have certain characteristics of analytical ability... And I think that... it's important they're given, given the space to... learn and to use their skills... I think there is a fear among student social workers that they could be 'done' for doing something wrong.

(Case Studies, Admissions Tutor, Time Two)

One informant argued that readiness to practise encompassed a two-way set of expectations between newly graduating students and employers. On the one hand, students had to have a clear understanding of what was expected of them:

I think that... the issue is for employers [is] whether or not graduates of the programme... are able to very quickly get up to speed and do the job once they're employed. I think that's what employers are asking for. I think they are also... deeply critical when they have interviewed students
in their final term when they don’t understand the law, they can’t tell people [about] the assessment criteria for particular [areas of work].

(Case Studies, Programme Leader, Time Two)

Equally, employers needed to recognise the variation that would always exist among graduates from any degree programme:

Within the student profile on any programme in the country you will have students who are very good, you will have the most students who fall within the ‘performing OK’ and ‘can get through that level, not going to ever set the world on fire’ but…they’re solid performers. And then you have the small group of students who have really struggled to get through the programme, have something they can offer the profession but…will…need help and support to really integrate into a new team and a new area of work.

(Case Studies, Programme Leader, Time Two)

Using vignettes to measure skills acquisition

Chapter Two gave an account of the methodological considerations influencing this part of the evaluation and the decision to administer vignettes to students at the case study sites during the first year of their programmes before their first practice placement (Time One) and again towards the very end of their final year as their programmes neared completion. As explained in Chapter Two, vignettes are ‘short stories about hypothetical characters in specified circumstances to whose situation the [participant] is invited to respond’ (Finch, 1987, p.105) thereby presenting participants with examples of real life decision making. The use of vignettes in this evaluation was designed to produce data on the integration of learning and teaching and to give an indication of the way students drew on theory when they wrote about practice. It should be emphasised that it was not intended to make any judgements on the work of the students, but was rather to identify if there were differences between students’ conceptualisation of practice at the beginning and end of their programmes.

Content of the vignettes

The vignettes are reproduced in full in the Technical Appendix (See Annexe M). In summary, they presented students with two scenarios and students. The use of vignettes is also discussed in both the Methodology (Chapter Two) and the Technical Appendix. For the purposes of the evaluation it was decided to use scenarios that encapsulated the main organising factors in social work intervention which are working with adults and working with children and families. It was also decided to indicate the possible reason for social work intervention. However detail was kept to a minimum so that what emerged in the students’ answers reflected their interpretation, understanding and use of knowledge. It was decided that giving more detail (of income levels, type of accommodation etc) might influence students’ responses. The questions posed (see below) were designed to encourage students to use their experience and knowledge to reflect on the possible interpretations and explanations. In keeping with the generic nature of the degree, participating
students were asked to comment on both of them. Almost without exception, they complied with this request.

Vignette 1 (Adult Services - David)

Vignette 1 involved a 42 year old man, called David Smith, who lived with his parents who were both aged over 80. David attended a day centre, which was under the threat of closure. David’s support worker reported that David was bored at the day centre, was verbally aggressive, and wished to find paid employment. David’s parents were opposed to the closure of the centre. Both his parents and the support worker believed that David lacked the necessary life skills for independent living. The support worker had expressed the view that it was ‘inappropriate’ for David to live with his parents.

Vignette 2 (Children’s Services – the Brown Family)

Vignette 2 was concerned with the experiences of the Brown family, Cathy and John, and their four children, Claire, Brian, Elizabeth, and Vicky, all of whom lived at home with them. The eldest child, Claire, was born to Cathy when she was in her teens. Brian and Elizabeth were the children of Cathy’s first marriage. The youngest child, Vicky, was the daughter of John and Cathy. All the children lived with Cathy and John. The Health Visitor had contacted the social worker because of her concerns and provided information that John had begun to drink more heavily and that the children had witnessed scenes of domestic violence against Cathy. There had also been changes in the behaviour of the three eldest children; Claire was no longer speaking to John; Brian was not attending school; and Elizabeth, with whom John was spending more and more time, had become very withdrawn.

The students were asked to consider these vignettes using the following framework:

**Box 10.1: Framework for completing the vignettes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framework</th>
<th>Rationale behind framework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As the social worker, what are the most significant factors for you in this situation?</td>
<td>This question was intended to draw on the students’ experience/knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How might you explain what is going on in the situation?</td>
<td>This question was intended to enable the students to demonstrate the application of knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What should happen now in the situation?</td>
<td>This question was intended to facilitate the students’ analysis and assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What could you do in this situation?</td>
<td>This question was intended to enable students to reflect on possible interventions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants were given an hour to answer the two vignettes. Students with visual impairments or dyslexia were given the option to answer verbally.

**Response rates**

At Time One, 222 students participated in the vignettes, representing around half the students on programmes in the case study sites. Participation ranged form 23 per cent of students at one site to 97 per cent at another. The demographic profile of students is described in the Technical Appendix.

A total of 79 students completed vignettes at both points in time The distribution of undergraduate and postgraduate students who completed vignettes at both Time 1 and Time 2 did not vary significantly from those who completed the vignette at Time 2 but not Time 1 ($\chi^2(1) = 3.3$, n.s.). for example, there was no significant difference in the proportions of female and male students between those who completed vignettes at both Time 1 and Time 2 and those who completed vignettes at Time 1 only ($\chi^2(1) = 0.5$, n.s.). Nor was there any significant difference between the ethnicity of students who completed vignettes at both Time 1 and Time 2 and those who completed vignettes at Time 1 only ($\chi^2(3) = 0.4$, n.s.). However students who completed vignettes at both Time 1 and Time 2 were significantly older (mean = 32.7 years) compared to students who completed a vignette at Time 2 only (mean = 28.5 years) ($F(1,102) = 6.0, p < .05$).

**Analysis of the vignettes**

The vignette answers were analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively using a framework (Annexe O in the Technical Appendix). The framework was developed in consultation with Jan Fook, consultant to the project and was designed to achieve data that would enable three processes of analysis:

- Content analysis/check list to identify the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of the students’ answers for quantitative analysis.
- A grounded/thematic analysis designed to identify thematic areas identified by the researchers from the students’ accounts.
- A more deconstructive analysis that analysed the themes in ways that enabled comparisons to be drawn with other studies (in particular Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986, and Fook *et al.*, 2000)

In the first instance a framework (in the form of a proforma) was produced by undertaking a contact analysis of responses provided form a pilot study undertaken in an institution which was not a case study site. The proforma was constructed around the questions on the vignettes that the students’ were
requested to answer. The proforma was then tested on student answers from the pilot site.

Researchers then matched the vignette answers against this framework using a guideline (Annexe N in the Technical Appendix) by considering whether each item on the framework was:

- Not mentioned
- Just mentioned
- Mentioned
- Strongly mentioned
- Emphasised

The qualitative analyses (2 & 3 above) involved a grounded thematic analysis. The researchers who had completed analytic frameworks were required to list themes from the student responses as they coded them. In discussions facilitated by a consultant the researchers grouped the themes into categories which were identified as significant within the themes. This was done in an inductive way whereby the researchers sought to identify unique and shared features of the answers. This was, therefore, a ‘bottom up approach’, as opposed to using an existing framework of skills acquisition and comparing the student answers against this framework. However it is acknowledged that at this stage the material was being organised according to the researchers’ interpretation. The involvement of six researchers not all of whom were social work educators and the consultant, who had not participated in coding the responses helped to counteract individual biases at this point. It was thought that this inductive approach held the students’ answers to the vignettes as central, but reflected the fact that for a comparative analysis over time (and with other studies) some order had to be imposed on the data.

Researchers did not code vignettes from the sites they had visited to reduce any potential biases that might have arisen from having met the students on a particular programme.

At the end of stages two and three the following categories emerged from these discussions as descriptors of the vignette answers at Time One. It should be emphasised that these categories were merely intended to summarise the themes characterising each category, and were not meant to reflect any judgements on the individual students completing vignettes.

1. Attention to process of relationships (creating relationships, use of self as a resource).
2. Non-pathologising/pathologising continuum (extent to which approaches range from not recognising existence/complexity of problems to suggesting punitive or strongly interventionist approaches).
3. Emphasis on helping (offering services)
4. Task/service orientation (context in which services offered)
5. Language (use of ‘lay’ and professional language)
6. Understanding the social work role (legislative and organisational framework in which actions explained)

7. Use of theory (use of theory as framework for explaining situation or offering support)

8. Person/situation continuum (extent to which individual or family is focus of intervention)

9. Awareness of social/structural/political issues (wider context for interventions or as explanation of situation)

10. Attention to risk and prioritising (risk assessment, priorities, balancing risks and rights)

11. Service user and carer involvement (extent to which characters in vignettes are involved in decisions).

Quantitative analysis of the completed analytic framework was undertaken using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) (see Technical Appendix). After initial analyses looking at the distribution, the original five-point scale was reduced to three and recoded as 1, 2, or 3, the numbers representing whether the item was not mentioned (1), just mentioned or mentioned (2), or strongly mentioned or emphasised (3).

The analytic framework (Annexe O in the Technical Appendix) contained a considerable number of items on which the researchers were asked to make a judgement. In order to combine items covering a similar theme, a series of twelve scales were constructed in which each variable was mapped against the themes identified by the researchers. These were then tested to see whether to see whether each item really did ‘tap’ into the 11 theoretical constructs identified by the researchers. This statistical analysis confirmed that the different themes identified in the qualitative analysis did appear to be measuring different aspects and that there was internal consistency within all the items identified as relating to each particular theme. (This is discussed more fully in the Technical Appendix.)

While all the student responses were analysed using both the qualitative and quantitative analysis in order to assess whether there was change over time in the students’ responses the data on the matched responses (that is students who answered at both Times One and Two) were used in the quantitative analysis. Therefore, the discussions that follow are based upon 79 sets of answers.

Time One data

Vignette 1 (Adult services – David)

Although 79 per cent of answers mentioned or emphasised the practical aspects of the situation, such as the closure of the day centre, only 33 per cent contextualised this in terms of discussions about normalisation or social inclusion. While there were many suggestions for practical help, such as benefits advice, this was often done without any mention of assessment. At Time One, half the answers did not mention a formal community care
assessment; 95 per cent of answers made no mention of the social work role when asked what a social worker should do and almost 80 per cent made no mention of establishing a relationship with David (theme one). While 67 per cent of answers mentioned independence and ascertaining David’s wants, few mentioned the situation of his parents and their potential needs at Time One.

**Vignette 2 (Children’s services – Brown family)**

Although 32 per cent of vignette answers mentioned physical abuse and 41 per cent mentioned sexual abuse, 94 per cent did not mention the possibility of neglect. The need to investigate the situation further was identified by slightly more students in response to the situation described in vignette 2 than in vignette 1. Fifty five per cent of answers mentioned or emphasised the need for an assessment while 70 per cent said that the information should be investigated. This suggests that answers were less likely to focus immediately on taking action or helping. Despite the attention drawn to the domestic violence, 20 per cent of answers did not include any comments on this and were more focused upon the children’s behaviour.

**Time Two data**

**Vignette 1 (Adult services – David)**

At Time Two, more answers than at Time One (86 per cent) mentioned or emphasised the practical aspects of the situation. Most answers focused on providing practical support and there was only a marginal increase (two per cent) in the number of answers mentioning, strongly mentioning, or emphasising establishing a relationship with David. However, the proportion of answers discussing normalisation or social exclusion rose from 33 to 78 per cent. This indicated a change over time in the way that answers referred to the wider contextual factors that impinge upon individual service users. There were also changes over time in the proportion of answers identifying the need for assessment. The number of answers referring to a formal assessment increased to 71 per cent at Time Two from 49 per cent at Time One.

**Vignette 2 (Children’s services – Brown family)**

In Vignette Two, there was there was a 10 per cent increase in the mention of physical abuse and a 16 per cent increase in the mention of sexual abuse. There was also a noticeable increase in the recognition of domestic violence as a factor in the situation with only four per cent of answers not mentioning it at Time Two (as opposed to 20 per cent of answers at Time One). However, mention of neglect as a factor in the situation remained limited in that 88 per cent of answers did not mention it as a possibility. There was a substantial increase in the number of answers specifically mentioning the need for an assessment at Time Two - 84 per cent of answers mentioned or emphasised it at Time Two compared with 55 per cent at Time One. Seventy one per cent of vignettes completed at Time Two gave the ‘safety of the family’ as the main reason for intervening in the situation.
Changes between Times One and Two

To manage the volume of data emerging from the analyses at Time One and Time Two a mapping exercise of all the themes was undertaken qualitatively and quantitatively in order to develop scales which could measure change in the themes between Times One Two and test their statistical significance. Table 10.3 summarises the results from both the quantitative and qualitative analyses. It shows that with the exception of themes one (attention to the process of relationships) and ten (awareness of risk and prioritising), there were statistically significant changes in the answers between Time One and Time Two. While there appeared to be some evidence of change in these areas in the qualitative analyses, they were not statistically significant.

The lack of statistically significant changes in ‘attention to process of relationships’ resonates with the comment from a programme leader cited earlier about how students needed encouragement to think about the use of self in professional settings and to recognise that opportunities to do ‘traditional’ social work still existed. It is important to note here that Fook and colleagues (2000) associated ‘awareness of own effectiveness, I can make a difference’ (p.183) with the proficient stage.

Although there was evidence of greater evidence of abilities in prioritising and assessing risk in terms of the qualitative analysis of the vignette answers at Time Two, these were not statistically significant. In this context, Marsh and Triseliotis (1996) and Pithouse and Scourfield (2002) report that employers considered that even 6-12 months after qualification with a DipSW, newly qualified social workers were less proficient in these areas than their employers might have wished. It is, therefore, unsurprising that the changes were not of a magnitude to be picked up by the statistical analyses.

In addition, there was one area, use of language, which had not been included in the analytic framework and so was not included in the statistical analyses, but which other research (Fook et al., 2000) has identified as an indicator of the stage of professional expertise that a student has reached. It was not included because it was thought unrealistic to make an evaluation of use of language in written vignettes that had been completed within a limited time frame. Fook et al had administered vignettes in the context of interviews, but resources in this evaluation did not allow for interviews. Had they been undertaken the sample would have been much smaller and would not have included students from such a wide range of settings.

These issues aside, what Table 10.3 shows is that there were positive developments in the way that practice was conceptualised in the vignette answers between Times One and Two. Although it might be argued that the researchers were not ‘blind’ to the stage reached by students when they completed the vignettes, the analytic framework and protocol for completing the vignettes were designed to achieve as much objectivity as possible.

The emerging themes from the qualitative analysis and which were supported by the quantitative analysis indicate that comparisons can be made with the five stages outlined by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986). It might be assumed that
at Time One students were at the ‘beginning’ stages because they were at the early stages of their training. However, the stages are not linear in the sense that students move through stages over time. Different learning experiences encourage and enable them to deal with the information available in the context of other experiences, both practical and theoretical. Thus, Table 10.3 suggests that, at the end of their programmes, on the basis of their answers to the vignettes, students were operating as advanced beginners - the level described by Benner (1984) as having been reached by nurses in the United States at the end of their training – or as ‘competent’, the level to which Fook and colleagues (2000) felt undergraduate qualifying programmes should aim.

At Time Two, the answers demonstrated characteristics associated with advanced beginners and, in some areas, such as the social work role or use of theory, possibly competent and proficient workers in the Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) categorisation. Answers demonstrated an enlarged conception of the world by acknowledging multiple factors in the situations represented in the vignettes. Although answers still seemed to accept some of the information given in the vignettes at face value, their repeated references to the need to ‘understand the situation’ and recognition of the multi-factorial and multifaceted circumstances presented in the vignettes suggested recognition of complexity associated with the proficient worker. The fact that vignette answers demonstrated greater awareness of the roles and tasks of social workers, evidenced by more reference to legislation and to the roles of other agencies, suggests that the particular social work perspective was recognised by the students completing vignettes and that they had acquired substantive knowledge. The competent worker is a practitioner who learns, or is taught, to adopt hierarchical procedure of decision making, which helps him/her recognise particular constellation of elements. Evidence for development in this area came from the emphasis on the need to undertake an assessment and the balance between risk and safety.

Table 10.3 also suggests that there were areas in which students could be seen to be competent were more competent than others. Fook and colleagues (2000) point out that substantive knowledge (knowledge about facts, concepts and relationships) is easier to achieve than procedural knowledge (information about how to use substantive knowledge in areas that are unpredictable and ‘conflictual’, p.201). Table 10.3 suggests that students completing the vignettes appeared to have greater substantive than procedural knowledge. In the same way, Fook and colleagues also refer to students coming to ‘submerge their values as they sought to master the technical tasks of social work practice (as they perceived them) (p.60). The relative lack of attention to the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of participants is surprising in the light of emphases on this in social work education and practice. It may be partly explained by respondents’ concern to demonstrate their knowledge of legislation and of services within the limited time they had to complete the vignettes.
### Table 10.3: Comparisons of vignette data at Time One and Time Two (case studies)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Time One</th>
<th>Time Two</th>
<th>Analysis of change</th>
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| **Attention to process of relationships** | At Time One students tended not to focus on the nature of relationships between family members, and the possible impact of these relationships on the family dynamics, or the experience of individual members of the family. This could be seen as an example of behaviour in the novice category in that novices tend to recognise objective facts and features but operate with ‘context free’ components, in that they tend not to make connections between what are perceived as ‘objective elements’ and other factors that might impinge upon situations.  

‘David clearly knows what he would like to do and that is to get paid employment.’  

‘David still lives with his elderly parents and is dependent on them.’ | At Time Two, students made more mention of trying to understand the situation:  

‘[I would] work with the parents to help them realise the necessity of David building his independence skills so he becomes as self-sufficient as possible…to explain that David’s wishes and feelings may not match theirs’.  

This suggests that they had an awareness of wider explanations of the situations about which they were writing. The fact that some students were identified by the researchers as using a ‘managed care’ approach and made some references to person centred planning suggests that they were focussing on creating relationships. However, these were to be constructed within rules that had been encountered either in practice or in classroom-based learning. | Not significant |
| **Non-pathologising/pathologising continuum** | Responses at Time One focussed on the facts presented in the vignettes as if they were objective truths. This falls into the category of processing information and accepting the given hierarchy of experience to inform judgements of what is happening:  

‘If John is continually abusing, then it may be necessary to look at the removal of the children’  

‘David has a learning disability. His routine will be disrupted with the closure of the day centre.’ | At Time Two, students were more questioning of the information they had been given and were more likely to refer to user rights. They were less likely to accept stereotypes and were more alert to individual differences.  

\[ F(1,59) = 29.92, \ p < .001 \] |
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Time One</th>
<th>Time Two</th>
<th>Analysis of change</th>
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| Emphasis on helping   | There was a rush to ‘resolving problems’ and ‘helping’ at Time One, which is indicative of a lack of attention to understanding the situation and uncovering the wider context of the information given. Students tended not to recognize the potential complexities (both positive and negative) of the situations described in the vignettes.  
‘Job opportunities in the area [for David] should be looked at.’  
This approach is associated by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) with the novice who tends to concentrate on information given and lacks a coherent sense of the overall tasks. | An advanced beginner recognizes that there are ‘meaningful elements’ that contribute to ‘situational components’. That is, there is a recognition that situations are often more complex than they first appear. This was evidenced by the shift in students’ emphasis in recognising the potential levels of violence in Vignette Two and the potential impact of learning disabilities in Vignette One.  
An example of this was one student who at Time One suggested anger management classes for John (Vignette 2). At Time Two, he/she now focussed on his/her statutory role as a social worker. | $F(1,70) = 12.64, p = .001$ |
| Task/service          | This set of responses was associated at Time One with the helping approach identified above, but focused on performing tasks. There was a tendency to not be aware of, or request, information that might widen the context of the scenarios portrayed in the vignettes, and to act on the basis of information processing without taking a coherent view of the overall tasks.  
‘I am a little unsure but I would expect the health visitor to express her concern to the local social services (as mentioned) and then this would be passed to a qualified social worker. This particular case may require multidisciplinary team working.’  
These characteristics are associated with the novice stage. | At Time Two, students were more focussed on their professional/statutory duty to undertake assessment. The more frequent mention of other agencies also suggests that students had a clearer sense of the role of social work and were less likely to feel that they had to do everything themselves.  
‘And also [I would be] making a referral to [other] agencies.’  
‘A social worker would assess the situation/carry out an initial assessment to determine whether the situation requires a section 17 or section 47 enquiry. A care assessment would then be carried out. Specific proceedings under the Children Act 1989 would be followed. Services would then be commissioned to alleviate pressures and where possible keep the family together.’ | Divided into 2 parts:  
Assessment: $F(1,64) = 14.89, p < .001$  
Service Delivery: $F(1,62) = 5.11, p < .05$ |
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<th>Theme</th>
<th>Time One</th>
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<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Dreyfus &amp; Dreyfus (1986) do not analyze the use of language. However, Fook and colleagues (2000) identified that students at the beginning of a programme often used lay language and 'pop' psychology. 'I perhaps have question marks as to whether or not this was grooming'. The lack of attention to 'technical' or professional language (of the legislation or of theoretical approaches) suggests that there is little recognition of the wider professional context in which the situations should be considered. Theory and knowledge of law, for example, are part of the 'constellation of elements' (Dreyfus &amp; Dreyfus, 1986) that help inform conclusions and decision making by competent practitioners.</td>
<td>The more frequent use at Time Two of professional language, legislation, and reference to social work concepts such as attachment, person-centred planning, and task-centred casework therefore can be seen as part of the repertoire of the competent practitioner. '[I would] conduct a section 47 investigation under the Children’s Act, 1989…if the threshold is met, discuss…the case order which would involve taking the children into voluntary care under section 20.'</td>
<td>Not included on analytic framework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the social work role</td>
<td>The role and purpose of social work also constitute part of the wider context in which the situations of the vignettes should be considered. At Time One, the researchers identified a number of aspects of the responses to the vignettes that suggested a novice approach. '[I would] discuss the case with my supervisor.' 'I would assume that John would have some sort of criminal hearing.' Lack of attention to the role and purpose suggests a lack of understanding of the overall tasks indicative of the novice.</td>
<td>At Time Two, there was greater clarity of the social work role and, perhaps because of this, acknowledgement of the role of other professionals. 'David has a learning disability. An assessment of the level of the disability would contribute in the…planning of services.'</td>
<td>( F(1,53) = 17.57 \ p &lt; .001 )</td>
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| Use of theory         | Theory helps to inform the ‘particular constellation of elements’ that help practitioners come to conclusions (q.v.). The competent practitioner uses such constellations to adopt hierarchical procedures of decision making. While it is not surprising that at Time One students were not drawing on theory, it does position them as novice or advanced beginners. | The fact that there was significant change, albeit in the tacit use of theory, at Time Two means that students had become competent practitioners in this area.  
‘The social worker needs to consider the impact of emotional abuse on Cathy and her attachments with the children.’  
‘Concern around Claire and Elizabeth and the changes in their behaviour could possibly indicate sexual abuse – research shows that children living with their mother’s partners are at an increased risk of abuse than those living with their birth father.’ | $F(1,60) = 35.36$, $p < .001$                                    |
| Person/situation      | At the proficient and expert levels, practitioners draw on previous experience to inform their intuitive responses to situations. ‘Intuitive’ is the ability to use patterns without ‘decomposing’ them into component features, that is not looking at individual aspects but seeing the situation as a whole. Students at Time One were not achieving this sense of the whole. Focusing on individuals suggests that the students were not identifying patterns or ‘particular constellations’ which help them to reach decisions as a competent practitioner. | There was some movement at Time Two:  
‘I would look at the whole ecology of the family support, the environment, to look at all the options on offer and allow the service users to make decisions.’  
‘Closure of the day centre means that he will break his routine and this is a concern to his parents.’  
However, it is important to note that lack of attention to issues of diversity (e.g. race/ethnicity/gender) suggests that students were still not taking a wide view of the circumstances of the individuals in the vignettes. | $F(1,64) = 7.85$, $p < .01$                                    |
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| Awareness of social/structural/political   | In some ways, the lack of attention to wider structural and political factors is one aspect of the holistic approach (that is an approach that considers an individual in his/her context). It is also associated with the novice approaches discussed under family relationships where it was noted that at Time One students accepted situations at face value and did not draw on or identify wider conceptualisations of the service users experience to understand their context and to inform decision making. | While there was limited awareness of diversity at Time Two, there was more awareness of policy issues such as the needs of children and the need to protect vulnerable adults.  
‘Assist David and his parents in accessing direct payments to secure services which are more appropriate to his needs.’  
‘My reasons would be based on government policy of adopting a person centred approach in investing in people with learning disabilities.’ | $F(1,55) = 26.52, p < .01$ |
| Attention to risk and prioritizing         | Prioritizing and ordering are features of competent practitioners. They adopt hierarchical procedures of decision-making based on particular constellations, which in social work could (and possibly should) include risk factors. The fact that students had not appeared to demonstrate this at Time One suggests that they have not moved beyond the advanced beginner stage | Although not statistically significant in the quantitative analysis, researchers did consider that there was a greater emphasis on risk assessment and issues at Time Two in the qualitative analyses.  
‘It would depend on the eligibility criteria as sometimes only adults with a high level of complex needs will see a social worker…however in an ideal world…”  
‘The fact that the children have witnessed violence from their father towards their mother is a great concern and this could be a cause of significant psychological harm in the children. The safety of the mother will also need to be taken into account as she may well be at great risk since there have recently been escalations of violence.’  
‘The risk assessment shows that David is sometimes verbally aggressive towards staff and other service users.’ | Not significant |
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<th>Time Two</th>
<th>Analysis of change</th>
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<td><strong>Service user and carer involvement</strong></td>
<td>At Time One, as the data on the use of terms such as empowerment and independence show, students completing the vignettes were aware of the theoretical importance of involving service users and carers but appeared not to be able to recount how this could be enacted in practice. This would be characteristic of a novice.</td>
<td>At Time Two, this had become more integrated into practice but was consistent with the competent, rather than expert, stage. ‘I would do this to follow all CP [child protection] procedures to protect the children. The family does appear to be on the verge of family breakdown. I would follow through all appropriate protocols to ensure that the family were involved throughout the process.’ ‘The GSCC and BASW codes of ethics and policy and legislation in learning disability and community care generally all expect that choice and independence are desired outcomes for people with learning disabilities. Respect for service users should lead to greater encouragement to greater independence is that is what the service user wants (even if they need you to explain to them what they might like before they actually ask for it).’</td>
<td>$F(1,63) = 14.14, p &lt; .01$</td>
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Comparisons with other research

Other studies of professional development

This section compares the results from the vignette analyses with other studies of professional development in social work education.

Fook and colleagues’ study (2000) involved tracking 39 students who were undertaking a two year social work qualification in Australia and following them up for a further three years post qualification. Using vignettes and critical incident analysis, students were interviewed at least once a year over the five years. The study aimed to test the application of the Dreyfus (1986) model of professional development, both to see whether it was replicated in the development of social work professionals but also to try and access material that might give information about the intuitive nature of professional practice identified by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986). In that it was looking at professional practice, it also provides a useful comparison with Benner’s (1985) study of nurses.

For the purposes of comparison, the findings from the first stage of the Fook and colleagues (2000) study can be considered to equate to the Time One analysis that was undertaken with students at the case study sites for this evaluation. In both studies, this involved focusing on vignettes at the commencement of study before any practice experience had taken place. The difference is that in the former, students were interviewed to ascertain their responses to vignettes. In the latter, students gave written responses.

While acknowledging that there are some similarities in the content of social work training in Australia and England, it also has to be recognised that there are disparities. The first is that there are cultural differences. Second, the stage one interviews in the Fook and colleagues’ study were undertaken in 1990, since when there will have been changes in social work education. Third, the vignettes presented to the Australian students used different scenarios. Despite these differences, there are strong similarities between their Stage One findings and the results from Time One in this evaluation, outlined earlier.

The changes in students’ responses that occurred between Times One and Two (identified in Table 10.3) and described above in relation to the work of Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) resonated with changes that occurred in graduating students in Fook and colleagues’ (2000) study. As mentioned earlier, they identified students as reaching advanced beginner stage at the point of qualification because they were seen to apply situational rules and drew on their concrete experience (that is, experience obtained through practice placements) which helped to give a context to their learning which they applied to other contexts. However, Fook and colleagues concluded that qualifying education should aim to produce practitioners at the competent stage.

Interestingly, Fook and colleagues found that their students made ‘little explicit use of formal theory’ (p.57) and a negligible number named a specific theory.
Similarly, in their retrospective study of practitioners’ views of their readiness to practise, as Marsh and Tresiliotis drew attention (pp.59-64) to the apparently very limited amount of teaching on theory which the newly qualified social workers in their study had received on their DipSW programmes and the indications that respondents were not using theories overtly in their practice. In this evaluation, some students completing vignettes did refer to theories or models of practice including attachment theory, person-centred planning, systems theory, and task-centred work. While students did not quote specific research studies, there was evidence that they had absorbed some messages from research (such as the negative effects of children observing domestic violence). It is possible that the reference to particular theories reflected the organisation of the curriculum or research/teaching interests of staff at particular institutions. However, on the basis of the information given by the sites, it is not possible to test such correlations. This explicit reference to theory is linked more to competent practitioners who use their experience, learning and other information to identify particular constellations that are then used to inform conclusions drawn or as guides to what further information is needed on which to make decisions. It may also reflect the increasing importance given to evidence based practice on professional qualifying programmes than in the past.

The comparison between the evaluation of the social work degree in England and Fook and colleagues’ study (2000) suggests that there was evidence that students on the social work degree were developing appropriate professional skills to be ready to enter the workforce, although there were some areas in which they appeared to be more ‘ready to practise’ than others.

**Development of criticality in social work students**

Another study of professional development in social work students was undertaken by Ford and colleagues (Ford et al., 2004; 2005) drawing on the work of the educationalist Barnett (1997) who argued that universities must develop whole persons who integrate all their critical capacities across the domains of knowledge, self, and the world. He developed a matrix that included these three domains and analysed each of them at four levels. His notion of criticality that underpinned the development of the matrix was, he argued, broader than the traditional concept of critical thinking but ranged through ‘critical skills’, ‘reflexivity’, ‘refashioning of tradition’ to the ‘transformatory critique’. Students were required to not only reflect critically on knowledge, but also develop their powers of critical self-reflection and critical action.

Having undertaken empirical work based on Barnett’s theoretical models, Ford and colleagues (2004) argued that the excellent ‘fit’ between social work education and Barnett’s model was ‘almost magical’ (p.197); social work students were expected not only to think but also to engage in self-reflection and self-development, and then go out and act, to engage with traditions and solve problems.

Based on the work of Ford and colleagues (2004, 2005), the analytic framework for the vignettes also included a section asking the researchers to
indicate the extent to which they thought that students participating in the vignettes were:

- describing their work and the situation (answer focuses on stating what is happening and what practical tasks are necessary without giving any reason for undertaking them);
- demonstrating analytic skills (answer speculates what is happening and why, if theories mentioned, no reason for their relevance will be offered); and
- whether they were indicating a degree of reflection that could be associated with the more complex analysis associated with criticality (answer draws on theories and knowledge to explain what is happening, consequences of any interventions are discussed).

It is, of course, possible for answers to have demonstrated all three aspects but the expectation would be that they would become more analytic and reflective if given towards the end of a degree programme. It is also important to recognise that the process of distinguishing between the categories in each characteristic was not always clear-cut. As Merighi and colleagues (2005) have observed in a study comparing professional expertise among qualified social workers in Australia and the United States:

Judgments made at the boundaries often required considerable discussion to establish more precisely where a participant’s statement or practice narrative might best be categorized.

(2005, p.723)

Tables 10.4 and 10.5 demonstrate that there were changes in the researchers’ ratings of the levels of analysis and reflection found in the vignettes between Time One and Time Two. It is important to recognise that the qualities of being ‘analytic’ and ‘reflective’ (see Annexe N in the Technical Appendix) are about more than being able to analyse and reflect but correspond, respectively to Schön’s (1987) ideas about ‘thinking in action’ (analytic) and ‘reflection in action’ (reflexive) among professionals and so would not necessarily be achieved by all students who have yet to graduate. However, both tables show that a statistically significant proportion of Time Two vignette answers were assessed as demonstrating analytic and reflective qualities when compared with the answers obtained at Time One.

**Table 10.4:** Changes in assessment of students’ approach to Vignette 1 (Adult services) between Times One and Two (Case studies)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Some evidence</th>
<th>Very</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% T1</td>
<td>% T2</td>
<td>% T1</td>
<td>% T2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptive</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>48.6</td>
<td>64.9</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>23.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytic</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>54.1</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>24.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective</td>
<td>77.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Repeated measures analysis revealed students were significantly less descriptive in their accounts of Vignette 1 ($F(1,73 = 8.97, p < .01)$) between Time One and Time Two. There was evidence of statistically significant changes in the proportion of answers assessed as being more analytic ($F(1,73) = 935.59, p < .001$) and more reflective ($F(1,73) = 27.50, p < .001$) at Time Two than at Time One.

**Table 10.5:** Changes in assessment of students' approach to Vignette 2 (Children’s Services) between Times One and Two (case studies)

<table>
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<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Some evidence</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% T1</td>
<td>% T2</td>
<td>% T1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptive</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>46.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytic</td>
<td>60.6</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>35.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective</td>
<td>81.7</td>
<td>49.3</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Repeated measures analysis revealed no significant change as to the extent to which Vignette 2 answers were assessed as being descriptive ($F(1,70 = 0.0, n.s.)$) between Time One and Time Two. However, there was evidence of significant change in the way students were being both more analytic ($F(1,70) = 1073.13, p < .001$) and of their being more reflective ($F(1,70) = 0.00, p < .001$) at Time Two than at Time One.

It is also worth emphasising that statistically significant changes were found in the answers to both vignettes. This shows that, as measured by answers to the vignettes, changes in criticality and reflexivity were no more likely to occur in one area of practice than another.

**Discussion**

This chapter has discussed the results from the evaluation of the new social work degree in the light of the question, ‘to what extent has the new degree prepared students for the situations they are likely to face in practice?’ Using evidence from the students themselves and from their tutors, it has suggested that the degree enabled students to acquire many of the skills and knowledge they would need to be effective practitioners but that skills acquisition is not a linear process and that there were areas in which further development would be required. This should not be seen as a limitation of the degree. As with all professional qualifying programmes, the assumption is that further continuing professional development will be required:

*Today, it is surely a moot point as to whether a basic qualifying programme can in any meaningful way produce practitioners all equally equipped to hit the ground running in what has become a diaspora of social work tasks and settings.*

(Pithouse and Scourfield, 2002, p.11)
The students themselves recognised this and considered that they would always need to continue to learn throughout their careers. The high proportion of students completing the online survey who also ascribed greater levels of motivation to enter social work because of studying the degree is further confirmation of this.

Given all the other requirements for data collection in the evaluation, it was not possible to observe and assess students’ direct practice. Equally, it is important to recognise that students had just one hour to answer the two vignettes and completed them in controlled classroom conditions. This, inevitably, gave them much less opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, values and skills than would be the case through examination of their in-depth coursework. However, the value of the vignettes as a method for the evaluation was that they enabled the researchers to gather data about a large number of students across a number of sites in order to examine the effects of degree level study. In addition, the value of using vignettes had been already demonstrated in other studies in social work (Fook et al., 2000; Sheppard et al., 2000). Neither of these studies had utilised them with large cohorts so the use of written responses that could be analysed qualitatively and quantitatively was a methodological innovation in studies of professional expertise in social work.

The inductive analysis, which in the first instance concentrated on the data produced by the written responses, and then compared the findings with other studies, provided evidence that there were changes over time in the development of professional skills as measured by written answers from the participating students. In some ways, this is to be expected as they had been through the processes of learning and teaching and supervised practice. However, the nature of the changes demonstrated suggested that students had moved from wishing to be a reactive helper to becoming a more discerning, reflective practitioner. This was shown by the greater consideration to wider contexts, greater appreciation of the implications of social work interventions, and more awareness of the ways in which practice is informed by policy and legislation in the answers to the second set of answers to the vignettes. That progress measured in this way appeared to be greater in some areas than in others should not be seen as indicating limitations on the part of students. Rather, it is consistent with existing research showing that skills are not acquired at identical rates. In common with Fook and colleagues (2000), it did appear that substantive knowledge, (for example, of legislation) was acquired sooner than procedural knowledge (what are the likely consequences of an intervention in this situation?). Finally, it is important to recognise that qualifying education is not intended to produce proficient or expert workers. Students reaching the levels of ‘advanced beginner’ or ‘competent’ have the capacity to become proficient or expert, given the right support. This leads into the final chapter reporting the findings of the evaluation, which looks at progression and employment.
Chapter Eleven:
Progression and Employment

‘...though the end of social work has been declared at regular intervals throughout my career, the social worker has proved remarkably resistant.’

(Langan, 2003, p.138-139)

Summary
This chapter uses data from the GSCC, interviews with social work educators and students in the case study sites, interviews with a small number of students who had left social work programmes, and the online survey of employers to examine the impact of the social work degree on students’ progression and intention to practise as social workers once qualified. Employers’ views of desirable qualities in newly employed social workers provide benchmark information about their perceptions of desirable qualities of newly qualified social workers and their views of recently recruited social workers, most of whom will possess the DipSW or have qualified outside the UK, rather than as yet being in possession of the new social work degree.

Key findings
- There is strong evidence that the policy objective of increasing the number of graduates from social work programmes has been achieved.
- Students on postgraduate routes are more likely to qualify.
- Although progression rates from the first cohort of students qualifying with a degree are broadly good, there is evidence of differential progression, as was the case under the DipSW.
- Students from black and minority backgrounds and students with disabilities appear to experience poorer progression but further research is needed to explore this phenomenon in more detail.
- Most students completing the online survey intended to practise as social workers.
- Students seemed to want to be able to keep their options open in terms of the service user group with whom they intended to practise.

Scope of chapter
This chapter presents evidence on student progression and employers’ perceptions of newly qualified social workers and, in the process, helps contribute to answering two of the four research questions, namely:

1. What are the main outcomes of the change from diploma to degree level study?

2. Has the new social work degree increased the quantity and quality of qualified social workers entering the workforce?
The evidence presented in this chapter suggests that the change from diploma to degree level study appears to have sustained the high proportions of students who achieve the social work qualification, all of whom are now educated to degree level or beyond, thus potentially increasing the quality of the future social work workforce, as well as its size. As noted in Chapter One, many programmes have been keen to maintain the commitment of many DipSW programmes to recruit people who have not previously had the opportunity to enter higher education but who have the potential to become effective social workers. Such recruits are largely successful in their studies, although, not surprisingly, postgraduate students are more likely to complete their studies than undergraduates. Some differences in progression are reported here but should be seen in the context of very high progression rates compared to other professional training programmes (Hussein et al., 2006).

Information from an online survey of Directors of Children’s and Adult Services presents their perceptions of the attributes of newly qualified DipSW social workers. As indicated in Chapter One, this is a complex and contested area and this data provides a baseline for future studies of employers’ perceptions of degree-qualified students.

**Progression of 2003-04 cohort**

During the academic years 2003-2004 through to 2006-2007, 18,014 students were registered for the degree. The summer of 2006 saw the first large cohort of students who started in 2003 graduating from the new social work degree although one postgraduate programme also started in 2003. The first part of this chapter reports on the analysis of the progression of this cohort of students. It should be noted, however, that this was the very first cohort of the new degree and was running alongside the last intake of the previous qualification, the DipSW. There might have been particular challenges in the early stages of implementation of the new degree requirements, and the experiences of students of this particular cohort may be hard to compare with the DipSW cohorts and atypical of subsequent cohorts of the new degree.

In May 2007 the GSCC provided the research team with information giving the results for 2207 out of the 2,564 students who registered for the new degree in 2003-04. By May 2007, 67 per cent (n=1,471) of those students had passed while only three per cent had failed (n=58); however, about 15 per cent (n=337) had withdrawn. In addition, four per cent (n=94) were ‘referred’ and 11 per cent (n=247) ‘deferred’. A total of 331 students had been referred or deferred earlier, although the majority had passed by May 2007 (N=321) while nine students failed and only one student withdrew after an earlier deferral/referral. The only available comparable progression data is that among the DipSW students in years 1995-1998; over the three year cohorts 10,891 students were enrolled for the DipSW; 74 per cent (N=8,025) passed on time (with no referrals of deferrals); 14 per cent (N=1,535) passed later and 12 per cent (N=1,339) failed or withdrew. The non-completion rates for the first cohort of the new degree are higher, but not dramatically higher, than was observed on the DipSW (18 per cent versus 12 per cent). Based on previous research (Hussein et al., 2007 advance access), it is anticipated that the
majority of those who are currently ‘deferred’ or ‘referred’ will complete the course in the future, based on r.

Table 11.1 details the characteristics of the 2,207 students who enrolled for the new degree in the cohort 2003-04 and for whom progression data were available, comparing those who had passed with those who had failed, those who were still referred or deferred and those who had withdrawn by May 2007. Differences in the distributions of students by results and different characteristics are examined using the Pearson Chi-square tests. The analysis shows that differences in progression according to employment status, gender, and previous education were not significantly different. We used various ways of analysing previous educational attainment, such as traditional (such as A levels) versus non-traditional education (such as NVQs) in addition to the one represented in Table 11.1. However, previous educational attainment was not associated with progression using the data in the format available whichever way it was analysed. On the other hand, the analysis shows that differences in progression rates were significantly different according to programme type, ethnicity, reported disability, age, financial support and region. Although there seemed to be some differences according to the employment status of students, these were not significant. This was possibly because of the relatively small number of students who were enrolled in this cohort while employment based, and we commented earlier that some employment based students or their sponsors may have hastened to take advantage of the availability of the shorter and cheaper DipSW. It should be noted that many of the students who were recorded as being seconded or sponsored students were also recorded as being college based. This may represent the type of arrangements agreed between the employers (who sponsor the students) and both students and HEI in terms of attendance and workload expected during the course of the study. Any inferences arising from this section of the data analysis should therefore be treated with caution.

The key finding from this analysis is that the proportion of postgraduate students who had passed by May 2007 was significantly higher than that among undergraduate students (81 and 66 per cent; N=94 and 1380 respectively). Similarly, the proportion of deferred postgraduate students was significantly lower than that among under graduates using Chi-square test (6 versus 12 per cent; N=7 and 240 respectively).

A significantly larger proportion of ‘White’ students had passed (69 per cent) than among from ‘Black’ (62 per cent) or ‘Other’ (57 per cent) ethnic minority groups. Interestingly, students identifying themselves as ‘Black’ had the lowest proportion of withdrawal (13 per cent versus 15 per cent among ‘White’ and 18 per cent among ‘Other’ ethnicities). On the other hand, students from a Black background had the highest referral rate. Overall, the proportion of ‘White’ students who failed was significantly lower than that among students of other ethnicities (two per cent versus five per cent). The proportions of students who failed, withdrew, deferred or referred were significantly higher among students who reported any form of disability, than among those who did not, while the proportion who passed was significantly lower.
Table 11.1: Distribution of students enrolled for the new social work degree in 2003-04 by different characteristics according to recorded results by May 2007 (GSCC data)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Failed</th>
<th>Pass</th>
<th>Withdrew</th>
<th>Deferred</th>
<th>Referred</th>
<th>Number^ of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Programme Type</strong>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1380</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employment Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College based</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1416</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment based</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1239</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Black</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1115</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td><strong>Reported disability</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1231</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Any</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>&lt;20 years</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>492</td>
<td>71</td>
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</tr>
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<td>35-44</td>
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<td>401</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45+</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td><strong>Financial support</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant/loan</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics</td>
<td>Failed</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>Withdrew</td>
<td>Deferred</td>
<td>Referred</td>
<td>Number(^{\text{a}}) of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondment/ Sponsorship</td>
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<td>152</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>176</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bursary</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>785</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1166</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>73</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>91</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NVQ3/NVQ4/A level</td>
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<td>722</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma</td>
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<td>80</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Region(^{\text{</strong>}})**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>North East</td>
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<td>135</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>North West</td>
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<td>209</td>
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<td>54</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire and Humberside</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All students</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>1474</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Differences are significant using chi-square test at p<0.05; ** at p<0.005; ^ May not add to total due to missing values
Hussein and colleagues (2007) examined the progression of social work students who were registered in the late 1990s on the DipSW and found similar patterns. Their analyses clearly showed significant variations in progression rates among different groups of students. It also identified significant effects of HEI factors, as well as demographic composition of intakes. The results of this study clearly confirmed that, across all types of HEI and regardless of other characteristics, students’ ethnicity and self-reported disability had significant effects on students’ chances of achieving the DipSW on time (i.e. without any referrals and deferrals). In all types of HEI (pre 1992; post 1992, H/FE colleges or consortia), students from black and minority ethnic groups were the least likely to pass on time (odds ratio 0.39-0.54), followed by students with a self-reported disability (odds ratio 0.55-0.65). However, with the exception of ethnicity and self-reported disability, Hussein and colleagues’ analyses show that the importance of other significant factors affecting the probability of passing on time, such as programme type, peer group composition and students’ age, varies between different types of HEI.

Hussein and colleagues’ work has been extended by the GSCC diversity and progression board that is currently (2008) involved in a second phase of research comparing progression trends between DipSW and new degree students enrolled during the period 1998-2005. In this work Hussein and colleagues are examining the hierarchical effect of HEIs’ and students’ characteristics using multilevel modelling. The GSCC diversity and progression board and the Social Care Workforce Research Unit are also supporting a study being undertaken by Goldsmiths College (funded by a grant from the Social Care Workforce Research Initiative of the Department of Health). This study is a qualitative investigation of retention and progression issues relating to different groups of students who were identified as being at greater risk of deferrals, referrals and failure by Hussein et al. (2007).

In relation to age, a very small proportion of relatively very young degree students (under 20) failed their social work studies (two per cent, N=6); on the other hand the same age group had the highest percentage of withdrawal (23 per cent, N=58) compared to older students. Younger students had a significantly lower percentage of referrals and deferrals than other under graduates. This indicates that younger students who stay on their course are significantly more likely to succeed in their studies with fewer deferrals or referrals than some other under graduates. The high rate of withdrawal may suggest that they had made the wrong choice of HEI or programme, were not able to complete the course for academic reasons, or felt that other or better alternatives were open to them, including thinking that the timing of their career choice was wrong. Withdrawal leaves open the possibility of transferring to another course or resuming study at a later date.

Interviews with staff at the case study sites provided some reflections on why younger students are more likely than others to leave social work courses:

‘...we seemed to be put under pressure in the first year to take eighteen and nineteen year olds... some of them turned out well... a number of them, not surprisingly, have struggled and there’s ones who have even'}
left. And the quality of work they did was not very good...either written work or on placement.'

(Case Studies, Senior HEI/Social work Staff, Time Two)

The ‘struggle’ in practice placements by younger students was reiterated by other staff members:

The younger students, the eighteen year old students, that is a worry to me. Some of them are extremely enthusiastic and bright, but finding placements for them and placing them in the statutory sector worries me.'

(Case Studies, Practice Learning Coordinator, Time One).

However, this might reflect the attitude of agencies towards young students rather than factors in the students themselves.

Leavers’ characteristics

Table 11.2 presents the characteristics of all students who withdrew from the 2003-04 cohort (n=337), compared to all students enrolled for the new degree during the same academic cohort (n=2564). It shows that higher proportions of undergraduates and college based students withdrew compared with the whole cohort. Younger students (aged less than 25 years) were more likely to withdraw than older students, particularly when compared to ‘mature’ students (35 years or older). On the other hand, the proportion of ‘Black’ students among those who withdrew was lower than that among the whole student group (14 versus 17 per cent) suggesting that they are less likely to withdraw.

Table 11.2 Distribution of students who withdrew from the new degree compared to all students enrolled to the new degree during 2003-04 (GSCC data)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>All students</th>
<th>Students who withdrew</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>448</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>423</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire and Humberside</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme type</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Route</td>
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<td>Employment based</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Women</td>
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<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>428</td>
<td>17</td>
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</table>
Perceived reasons for failure

In terms of retention, most key informants felt that progression on degree programmes did not seem to differ greatly from the DipSW cohorts, although it was thought to have been influenced by the requirement of a greater number of practice placement days for the new degree. This was confirmed by information gathered from the case study sites, where some tutors felt that retention was similar to that during the DipSW but others reported dealing with more problems related to practice placements:

*The attrition rate has actually stayed more or less the same [but] I think to be honest we have had more problems with students on placement this year.*

(Case Studies, Admissions Tutor, Time Two)

Other tutors in the case study sites confirmed that practice placements were a crucial element in students’ progression, but that students’ expectations in terms of what is required for their practice placements were not always realistic:

*[The] nature of failure, almost without question is about students’ practice on placement. So it’s about them - obviously not meeting standards, because they’re not competent enough... something’s happened on placement where, which is seen as [their failing to meet]...the National Occupational Standards. I think there’s a whole*
number of reasons [for failure]. I think students’ expectations sometime aren’t realistic in terms of travelling. I think sometimes students, despite us making it very clear from the moment of an open day, ‘This is a full-time course, that means that when you go to placement it is also full-time.’

(Case studies, Practice Learning Co-ordinator, Time Two)

Data extracted from external examiners’ reports and other documentation also pointed to difficulties during practice placements as a reason for the minority of failures. Other reasons given for non-completion ranged from difficult personal circumstances to health problems. One programme leader summarised this in a document providing an overview of the programme:

Students enter the undergraduate programme with high levels of motivation… a small proportion of students choosing to withdraw or transfer. Students do nonetheless leave the course or fail to complete for a variety of reasons. This year these included physical and mental poor health (2), transfers to programmes nearer home (2), and personal and family reasons. The MA in Social Work is a particularly demanding course not only in relation to the workload but the fact that some of the academic topics covered can raise issues of a personal nature for students. Placements provide students with excellent learning opportunities, but again dependent on the nature of the work which the student is engaged in, placements can pose students with a variety of personal and ethical difficulties.

Exit routes

This course leader explained that this HEI was keen to arrange transfers for any student who made the decision not to continue with the social work programme and reported that these arrangements were easier with the advent of the degree level qualification, as students were able to transfer between degree programmes in a way that was not so easy on the DipSW.

The degree was introduced to raise the standards in qualified practice and the emphasis on quality of practice requires that students who do not meet the practice requirements should not proceed to a professional qualification. The fact that social work qualifications were subject to general degree expectations, and that universities were eager to maintain completion rates there was increased need for students who were achieving at academically to have an opportunity to transfer to a route to an alternative qualification, commonly known as an exit route. Also, there was some speculation that lowering the age of students on social work courses might mean that some commenced training without practice experience and that might lead to a greater number wanting to transfer out of social work courses once they became aware of the demands of professional education and practice.

All case study sites provided detailed information in terms of the exit routes available and level of qualification it was possible to obtain at various points throughout the course. Emphasis was placed on ensuring that students who
requested a transfer, or who were not meeting the required practice standards, were enabled to leave the course of study with an academic qualification in recognition of the number and level of credits obtained at that point.

In all sites, there was a clear emphasis that a professional qualification could not be obtained if students did not satisfy particular requirements of the course. This created tension between the requirements of the HEI, whose interests are served by ensuring as many students progress or complete as possible and those of the professional regulatory body who must ensure the standards of the profession are maintained. Information was provided in course handbooks with regard to procedures in relation to the termination of a student’s training because of unsuitability for professional practice. These are invoked in accordance with university and GSCC codes of practice. An example from one site illustrates that this pertained to postgraduate as well as undergraduate awards:

We also wanted to make sure that students who are not successful in obtaining the full social work qualification are able to receive a university academic qualification. Although this cannot be a social work qualification it is a formal recognition of the students’ academic achievement.

(Case Studies)

Examples of different exit routes used in the case study sites were postgraduate diplomas in social work for those who had passed practice placements and completed all assessed work satisfactorily with the exception of the dissertation and degrees in social welfare for those who had not passed their practice placements and thus would not be able to qualify as a social worker.

Leavers

Responses were received from 10 students who had withdrawn from their social work degree programme (from six of the nine HEIs who distributed Early Leaver self-completion questionnaires).

All the respondents were white women; four were under 20 years of age and the oldest was 27. Three were on postgraduate programmes, 7 were undergraduate. Five had left in their first year and five in their second. The only postgraduate in her second and final year was considering returning to complete her programme after a break. Another postgraduate had plans to start a postgraduate social work programme at a different HEI. Among the undergraduates, one had definite plans to transfer somewhere else, and another hoped “to go back to uni when I have saved enough money” – in both cases to qualify as social workers. Thus, six of the 10 seemed to have made a definite decision not to study social work.

From the pre-coded ‘reasons for leaving’, the pattern of replies from the 10 respondents was as follows:
Decided that Social Work was not the right career for you 4
Health problem (self or family) 2
Financial reasons – could not afford to continue studying 2
Found it too difficult to combine study with family or caring responsibilities 2
Failed formal academic assessment (as distinct from Practice assessment) 1
None of the above 1

Both the students who reported that it was ‘difficult to combine study with family/caring responsibilities’ also had another reason.

Difficulties with practice placements were mentioned by four of the 10 students as a factor in their decision to leave. A strong complaint of lack of support from teaching staff was made by some, and students reported feeling stressed and under pressure. Students were asked whether they had been invited to ‘a formal interview... to offer you advice or guidance for the future’ when they decided to leave. Two said they were not offered such an interview, but four had decided not to take up the invitation.

HEI staff views on student withdrawal

One programme leader commented that good staff-student relations, along with knowledge of available resources, could minimise student withdrawal or failure. There is a strong perception among HEI social work staff that they have professional responsibilities to act as guardians to the profession (Wray et al. 2005). Four main reasons for students’ leaving were discernible from teaching staff’s comments:

- Professional unsuitability/safety to practice issues
- Personal reasons (health, family, relationships, financial)
- Concluding that social work was the wrong career
- Academic weakness

In light of this combined data about student progression, this chapter next turns to the work environment of graduate social workers. As Chapter One observed, one of the main reasons for the new degree was a vision that a three year programme with greater emphasis on practice placement and a national curriculum ‘would produce social workers more acceptable to the social work business’ (Harris 2003, p.116).

Local authority aspirations and expectations

This section draws on replies received to an online survey of directors of social services departments in England (Children’s and Adults services) and interviews with employers in the case study sites (n=15). The construction of the questionnaire for the online survey was based on the findings of a small number of face-to-face unstructured interviews, undertaken in summer 2006, with 7 directors of social services (children’s and adults’) or their nominees, a
charity and an employment agency. They identified a range of ‘qualities’ important for newly qualified social workers, and discussed other matters relating to recruitment and the workforce. The key points from these findings were used to compile the online questionnaire (see Technical Appendix) circulated at the end of July 2006 to Directors of Social Services in England. The sampling frame for the survey consisted of the email addresses of all members of the then Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS), as published on the ADSS website. All those responding had recruited ‘newly qualified social workers … on to your staff within the last three years’, defined as ‘those who finished their training up to two years before coming to work for you’.

The survey closed in November 2006, after two reminders to the potential respondent group. A total of 47 replies were received from the potential 150 respondents. The survey was designed to provide ‘benchmark’ data, so that when the survey is repeated in two or three years’ time, when larger numbers of graduates of the new degree will have entered the workforce, any changes in opinion can be determined. There was no 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 this social work qualification. This means that the results do not offer any direct comparison between DipSW and new degree students.

Findings from the Directors

Satisfaction with the quality of newly qualified Social Workers (mainly DipSW)

Over half of the 41 respondents to this part of the survey were satisfied with the quality of newly qualified staff recruited in the last three years. Fewer than one in five were dissatisfied; the remainder being neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Table 11.3  Directors’ satisfaction with newly qualified social workers (Online survey of employers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfaction level</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly satisfied</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly dissatisfied</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very dissatisfied</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Stated</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Perceived strengths and weaknesses of newly qualified Social Workers

Respondents were asked to say, for each of a series of qualities (skills and abilities, knowledge, values and personal qualities), how they rated the newly qualified social workers they had recently employed, in terms of:

- Excellent
- Adequate
- Disappointing

Respondents were then asked to select, from the same list (skills and abilities, knowledge, values and personal qualities), the three qualities they considered most important for newly qualified social workers to bring into the workplace.

Table 11.4 sets out the findings from both questions side by side, to highlight comparisons.

**Table 11.4: Directors’ views on the ‘qualities’ of newly qualified social workers (online survey of employers)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Excellent N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Adequate N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Disappointing N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Not stated N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Important (three)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skills and abilities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective engagement with service users and carers</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High standards of literacy in report-writing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytical abilities</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamworking</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to prioritise their workload</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-professional working (with colleagues in Health, Education, etc)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group working with service users, carers, community members</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning for specific outcomes for service users as a result of Social Work intervention/s</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating independence for service users, giving them control over their lives</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with diverse communities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring and evaluating the impact of interventions</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Their legal powers as Social Workers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Underpinning theories about social problems and disadvantage  
Local Authorities – functions, responsibilities, structures  
Availability of specific local services, resources, etc. for service users and carers  
Evidence-based practice  
The GSCC Codes of Practice  

Values and personal qualities  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualities</th>
<th>5 11 28 60 10 21 4 9 2 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiasm for their work as a Social Worker</td>
<td>30 64 13 28 - 0 4 9 5 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to the best interests of service users and carers</td>
<td>30 64 13 28 - 0 4 9 4 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural sensitivity</td>
<td>16 34 24 51 3 6 4 9 - 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking responsibility for (taking ownership of) their own decisions</td>
<td>3 6 28 60 12 26 4 9 3 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiative and resourcefulness in helping service users and carers resolve their problems</td>
<td>4 9 27 57 12 26 4 9 5 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping with stress and pressure</td>
<td>2 4 29 62 11 23 5 11 3 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-confidence</td>
<td>3 6 31 66 8 17 5 11 - 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability, flexibility</td>
<td>6 13 33 70 3 6 5 11 3 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in continuous learning</td>
<td>16 34 23 49 2 4 6 13 1 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognising the importance of internal procedures and policies</td>
<td>5 11 28 60 8 17 6 13 1 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 11.4, the qualities among newly qualified social worker recruits receiving most praise ('Excellent') from Directors were:

- Enthusiasm for their work as a Social Worker  
- Commitment to the best interests of service users and carers  
- Information technology  
- Interest in continuous learning  
- Cultural sensitivity  

None of the remaining ‘qualities’ attracted more than 10 ‘Excellent’ answers.

The main qualities viewed by Directors as ‘disappointing’ among newly qualified social workers included the following:

- Monitoring and evaluating the impact of interventions  
- Analytical abilities  
- High standards of literacy in report-writing  
- Knowledge of Local Authorities (functions, etc)  
- Planning for specific outcomes for service users as a result of social work intervention/s  
- Knowledge of evidence-based practice  
- Knowledge of their legal powers as social workers  

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Taking responsibility for their own decisions 12  
Initiative and resourcefulness in helping service users/carers resolve their problems 12  
Group working 11  
Coping with stress and pressure 11  
Knowledge of underpinning theories about social problems and disadvantage 10  
Knowledge of availability of specific local services, etc. for service users/carers 10

As Table 11.4 shows, two qualities were viewed as most important:

- The ability to analyse a case or situation, going beyond merely describing it 20  
- Effective engagement with service users/carers, i.e. being able to communicate clearly and empathetically 20

As noted above, the levels of ‘Analytical abilities’ among newly qualified social workers were considered ‘disappointing’ by over half the directors, despite its perceived importance among respondents. ‘Effective engagement with service users and carers’, on the other hand, was rated highly, in line with its perceived importance as a social work skill.

‘Planning for specific outcomes…’ and ‘Knowledge of evidence-based practice’, while perceived as slightly less important, were qualities with a relatively high level of disappointment among Directors, and therefore represent areas that might be improved with the new degree. As Chapter 10 has reported, this study has been able to consider the first of these ‘desirable’ qualities in some depth.

**Attitudes**

A series of attitude statements was developed for the online survey, and directors were asked to say to what extent they agreed or disagreed with each (see Table 11.5). Some statements drew on the interviews with directors; others reflected themes and topics identified as of interest to the evaluation.

**Table 11.5:** Agreement with statements about social work education and training by sample of Social Services Directors (online survey of employers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Agree strongly</th>
<th>Agree slightly</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Disagree slightly</th>
<th>Disagree strongly</th>
<th>Not stated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>These days, better quality candidates apply for our unqualified staff vacancies, than for our qualified social worker vacancies</td>
<td>7 15 16 34</td>
<td>7 15 21 2</td>
<td>7 15 21 2</td>
<td>5 11</td>
<td>4 11</td>
<td>2 11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Agree strongly</th>
<th>Agree slightly</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Disagree slightly</th>
<th>Disagree strongly</th>
<th>Not stated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The new social work degree will increase the status of the profession</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The new degree will mean higher standards of social work practice</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectfulness to service users and carers is improving among social workers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a serious shortage of qualified social workers</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life experience is essential for successful social workers</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The level of stress associated with jobs in social work seems to be decreasing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is not enough emphasis in social work practice these days on therapeutic methods of intervention</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too many social workers are over-cautious in their assessment of the risk of harm to service users or others</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over half of respondents agreed that the new degree ‘will increase the status of the profession’ – in line with policy aims and the views of social work students and educators – and very few disagreed. Slightly fewer agreed that the degree would mean ‘higher standards of social work practice’; again, levels of disagreement were low. Agreement was high about there being a serious shortage of qualified social workers currently and views that there were better candidates for unqualified posts may reflect these shortages and the legacy of status problems that directors considered that the new degree was successfully addressing. There was overwhelming disagreement with the suggestion that job-related stress might be decreasing. However, only three respondents had picked ability to cope ‘with stress and pressure’ as one of their top three in importance of the attributes of social workers.

Fewer than half of respondents felt that ‘respectfulness to service users and carers’ was improving but a small minority disagreed. These findings, however, need to be set alongside the fairly high ratings of ‘effective
engagement’ skills among newly qualified social workers, which were perceived to be very important to practice.

There was a fairly high level of agreement that ‘life experience is essential for successful social workers’, in line with the views of students and teaching staff. Agreement among respondents about the reduced opportunities for social workers to offer ‘therapeutic methods of intervention’ was also high. They also reported a current tendency for social workers to be risk adverse, reflecting widespread comments about the impact of the blame culture on practice (Department of Health 2007). This picture of the reality of practice resonates with other reports of the challenging environment that faces newly qualified social workers amongst others (Blewett et al., 2007).

Local authority involvement in education, training and recruitment

A range of possible education, training and recruitment activities was presented to directors, and they were asked whether they:

- Do not want to do this at all
- Do this well
- Could do this more, or better.

Table 11.6 presents the results for this last category.

Table 11.6: Local authorities’ views of potential to undertake more/better activities around social work training (online survey of employers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>‘We could do this more, or better’(N=47)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualified Social Workers on your staff giving (occasional) lectures/ seminars to students at University/College</td>
<td>30 64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide ‘Shadowing’ for Social Work students</td>
<td>23 49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Induction programme for newly-qualified Social Workers</td>
<td>21 45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited initial caseload for newly-qualified Social Workers</td>
<td>18 38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in Careers’ Fairs for students</td>
<td>16 34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsor unqualified staff to qualify as Social Workers by paying their salaries while they are studying</td>
<td>13 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closer supervision for newly-qualified Social Workers than for more experienced recruits</td>
<td>11 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage staff to gain a PQ award in Practice Education (including the Practice Teaching Award)</td>
<td>11 23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Very few respondents felt they could do more/better in terms of student placements, but more acknowledged that they could provide additional shadowing opportunities – which students themselves rated highly in terms of learning potential (see Chapter six). The majority (70 per cent, n=33) of Directors responding believed that they were doing ‘well’ in terms of recruiting new staff from among students undertaking a placement in their department, but almost a quarter reported that they could do this more or better.

Induction programmes, and limiting initial caseloads for newly-qualified social workers, were identified by around half of these employers as activities they could do more or better to ease the transition into the workplace. Since this survey such measures have been agreed (see Totterdell et al., 2002 and Smethern and Adey, 2005 for description of the impact of this in the teaching profession). About a quarter felt that they ought to improve supervision of their newly-qualified staff and this looks set to be a potential outcome of the proposals for newly qualified status. Sixteen Directors felt that their participation in Careers Fairs could be improved. Most claimed to be doing this ‘well’, although others rejected the idea.

Around a quarter said that their local authority could do more or better in terms of sponsoring existing staff ‘to qualify as Social Workers by paying their salaries while they are studying’. Only two Directors said they did ‘not want to do this at all’, the rest reporting they were already doing this ‘well’. Research funded by the Department of Universities, Innovations and Science will be reporting later in 2008 on the subject of the benefits and costs of Grow Your Own or employment based social work training and will consider what types of employer support have growth potential.

**Social work education – generic or specialist?**

Directors’ opinions on whether social work education should reflect the organisational divides of children’s and adults’ services were divided:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly in favour of generic Social Work education</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately in favour of generic Social Work education</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately prefer separate programmes for Adults and Children</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly prefer separate programmes for Adults and Children</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This chapter concludes with a discussion of partnerships between HEIs and employers to consider the underpinning systems and relationships that affect social work education and its engagement with employers.
Partnership working

One of the emphases of the new degree was partnership working, not only in relation to the creation of constructive working arrangements between HEIs and employers, but also in terms of the greater emphasis placed on inter and intra-professional collaboration (see Chapter Six and Seven). This section concentrates on HEI and employer relationships, noting first that these had been the focus of earlier reforms to social work education, and partnership with social work agencies had been an idea developed in the 1970s by the CCETSW (see Payne 1994, p.59). As Harris (2003 p.117) summarises, accountability to social work employers for educational provision has framed the social work tasks increasingly.

A related aspect was the employability of social workers. As one said:

*I think we’ve produced eminently employable competent social workers.*

(Case Studies, Practice learning Co-ordinator, Time Two)

Related to this was the acknowledgement of the benefits of partnership working between programmes and employers, and one product of this was seen as ‘a good reputation’ that might be of mutual benefit.

HEI staff at the case study sites detected greater interest in social work education among local employers:

*I think agencies are taking it more seriously - that’s down to self interest through wanting to recruit staff and traineeships, so they are looking more and more at what sort of learning opportunities are they providing and are wanting to deliver under their key performance indicators, so I think agencies are taking it seriously. I think it [the degree] has been marketed as more employer friendly. And I think agencies, particularly statutory agencies, see it as more agency friendly. I think they feel as though it’s more relevant to their needs than the old diploma.*

(Case Studies, Practice Learning Co-ordinator, Time One)

Employers interviewed in the case study sites declared their support for the degree status of the profession, which is in line with views expressed by employers taking part in the online survey. One viewed this as:

*Fundamental when we are increasingly working alongside other degree educated professions in, for example, Primary Care Trusts.*

(Case Studies, Employer 4)

As interviews with employers in the case study sites illustrated, many had views about social work training and practice, and the need for a new qualification which was *fit for purpose*:

*Social work needed to step up its game!*

(Case Studies, Employer 4)

Some employers hoped that the degree would enhance the skills of social workers, particularly their written skills.
The need for social workers to be better able to ‘hold their own’ in professional encounters (Employer 10) was widely reinforced. Some viewed the degree as a ‘much better product than the diploma’ (Employer 7) and spoke positively about the benefits of a graduate workforce for the profession. However whilst there was consensus regarding the need to raise the status of the profession, one respondent (Employer 6) felt that improving the pay and conditions for social workers could also be an effective way of improving the quality of the workforce. Conversely, this informant thought that introducing the degree would not in itself raise the status of social work but that social workers would ‘need to prove that they are doing a better job, and that they merit elevated status’ (Employer 6).

Other employers reported that social work has changed much and that ‘it is not what it was years ago’ (Employer 13), which again supports the online survey findings about the greater levels of stress in the workplace and the reduced opportunities to exercise therapeutic skills. This employer also commented that social workers have to work with complex family scenarios where issues of care and control are paramount and difficult decisions have to be made. Her view was that altruistic motivations such as ‘I want to help people’ that she had encountered among students were now insufficient (though the student survey demonstrates that altruism rarely exists in isolation).

**Student expectations**

Table 11.7 shows that, in looking to their future employment, data from the student online survey confirmed that most respondents to the online survey thought that the new degree would have a positive impact on the quality of social work services generally and the quality of new recruits.

**Table 11.7: Student views of the impact of the new degree (online survey, cross sectional data)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>First years (UG/PG)</th>
<th>Second years (UG)</th>
<th>Final Year (UG/PG)</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Kw Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More professional social work services</td>
<td>1648</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>708</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased supply of better social workers</td>
<td>1361</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>601</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduates moving away from profession</td>
<td>648</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two tier profession</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1799</strong></td>
<td><strong>761</strong></td>
<td><strong>373</strong></td>
<td><strong>2933</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over 90 per cent (n=1648, 708 and 338 respectively) of students in all years felt that the degree would mean there would be ‘More professional social work services’.
services’, and over three quarters predicted an ‘Increased supply of better social workers’. These views remained fairly constant throughout students’ time on the course. However, increasing proportions of students across each year of the course indicated that they felt that the new degree could mean that ‘Graduates would move away from the profession’ (36, 44, 50 per cent; n=648, 335 and 185 respectively) or could create a ‘Two tier profession’ (17, 21 and 26 per cent; n=311, 160 and 96 respectively). Both of these increases were statistically significant, using the Kruskal-Wallis non parametric test for k independent samples (p<0.001).

**Intention to practise as a social worker**

Respondents to the online survey were asked, ‘After you graduate, do you expect to take up employment as a social worker?’ Figure 11.1 shows that almost without exception respondents to the online survey thought they would probably or definitely take up employment as a social worker. This is a very important finding as earlier research with DipSW awardholders (Lyons et al., 1996; Wallis Jones and Lyons, 2003) suggested that very few newly qualified social workers did not go on to practise as a social worker. This compared well with other professions such as teaching (Smithers and Robinson, 2001) but it was not known how this would alter with the introduction of the degree. However, concerns were expressed that with the degree, more social work students might leave to work in other fields of graduate employment. Figure 11.1 suggests that this fear may be unfounded but future research would be needed to see if intention to practise is reflected in the proportions actually taking up paid employment.

**Figure 11.1:** Intention to practise as social worker on graduation (online survey)

![Figure 11.1](image-url)

Question not asked in shortened Phase Seven survey.
Choice of area of work

Respondents to the online survey were asked ‘At this stage, which of these areas [of work] do you favour?’ Table 11.8 shows that, consistent with research undertaken in Scotland (BRMB Social Research, 2005) respondents seemed to want to keep their options open in terms of the service group with whom they would choose to work. This can be seen by comparing the number of responses with the actual number of respondents.

Table 11.8: Student choice of service users group with whom they would like to work (online survey)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service user group</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3/Final year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>Phase 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s services (generic)</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>811</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children with physical disabilities</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults with physical disabilities</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children with learning disabilities</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults with learning disabilities</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults or children’s mental health</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older people</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of responses</td>
<td>1279</td>
<td>3435</td>
<td>1166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base N</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>1362</td>
<td>443</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question not asked in shortened survey for Phase Seven respondents. Percentages total more than 100 as respondents could choose multiple options.

Discussion

This research has found that students studying the new degree are highly likely to qualify and that there is strong evidence that the policy objective of increasing the number of graduates from social work programmes has been achieved. Overall, previous educational qualifications were not associated with progression but students on postgraduate programmes were more likely to qualify than undergraduates. The data on classifications of degrees were not available to the research team and, in any case, cannot be compared to the DipSW, which was largely unclassified.

There is some evidence that progression is variable by student characteristics and significant differences in progression were observed among students from black and minority ethnic groups and those with reported disabilities. Ongoing work by the GSCC and a project funded by the Department of Health is taking this matter forward.
Evidence from a very small sample of students who chose not to continue their social work programme and the views of HEI staff revealed a range of reasons for failure or withdrawal. There is evidence of the use of Exit Routes to facilitate some of the leavers transferring to other courses. However, this area could be strengthened further if relevant awards in social care were available if such awards were to be seen as a valuable alternative to those students for whom social work training is not appropriate. This might make transfers more easily acceptable and is something the GSCC may be considering or could consider.

Data from the 2006 online survey of Directors of local authority social services departments provided benchmark information about their perceptions of desirable qualities of newly qualified social workers and their views of recently recruited social workers, most of whom will possess the DipSW or have qualified outside the UK, rather than as yet being in possession of the new social work degree. A further project, a part extension of the current research, funded by the Department of Health, will follow up students who participated in the online survey to see how the degree prepares them for social work practice and how it meets their expectations, and those of their employers and the service users and carers with whom they work. This will explore the question central to this current research of how well social workers have been prepared by the degree. Local authority social services directors hold a variety of views about newly qualified social workers, relating primarily to diploma students, which can be compared in time to their opinions of new degree social workers once sufficient graduates enter the workforce.

This survey of employers also revealed that opinion about separate qualification routes for adult and children social workers is mixed but this is in contrast to HEIs where support for generic qualifying training in almost universal. It is the hope of most programmes that the new qualification will be given the time to ‘bed down’ and be seen in conjunction with the new post qualifying training framework (see Chapter Six). Social work is complex and education and training needs a length of time (qualifying and post qualifying) comparable to other skilled professions to develop fully the skills necessary to meet the needs of a range of service users and carers (see Chapter Ten). Employers and training organisations need to work in partnership to achieve a joint approach to understanding the complex process of social workers’ education and development. There is support from both employers and HEIs for the proposal of a newly qualified status for new entrants to the profession (announced towards the end of the evaluation) which, if adopted, should facilitate joint working locally on the arrangements to be put in place for graduates making the transition from student to worker.
Chapter Twelve: Conclusions and Recommendations

The degree provides an opportunity to build on the best of education and training, and to transform social work’s status and position. It provides an opportunity and a responsibility to forge a new professional identity, one of which practitioners, managers, clients and carers can be proud. It remains to be seen how changes in the education landscape will impact on practice and the management of practice.

(Preston Shoot, 2004, p.690)

Summary

The development and implementation of the new Social Work degree took place in changing contexts and were influenced by a range of policy initiatives. This evaluation took place over a period of three years and the findings inevitably relate not only to the original requirements (DH, 2002) but also to the changes that have taken place during the process of implementation. This conclusion therefore briefly outlines the mechanisms for implementation and the policy developments that influenced the implementation of the degree. It then gives an overview of the findings of the evaluation discussed in detail in the body of the report and summarises the research team’s recommendations in the hope that these will foster discussion and debate.

Introduction

There are both intended and unintended outcomes of introducing any change. To understand an evaluation of a policy change it is important to understand the context of the change and to evaluate that change against the stated policy intentions, but also to identify unintended consequences and explore what has influenced those. However, as Pawson (2006) points out, it is never possible to isolate all the contributory explanatory elements in policy implementation. It is therefore necessary to recognize the manifold contributory factors.

A further complexity of evaluating policy implementation identified by Pawson (2006) is that in many cases the requirement to have results involves having to assess the outcomes before the policy has had time to ‘run its course’. This evaluation is unusual in that it has been a longitudinal study over a three-year period. This provided the opportunity to work with stakeholders in the early stages of the implementation of the new social work degree, and followed one cohort of students through the completion of the degree. However, this means that while it might be possible to anticipate the impact of the change in the qualifying level for social work, there is no firm evidence based on students’ performance in the workplace.

The policy contexts for both social work and social work education have been in a state of flux since the beginning of the evaluation. There have been imperatives for change even before the students graduated with the social work degree. For example, over the period of the evaluation separate local
authority Children’s Services and Adult Social Care Departments have replaced the generic social services departments set up in the early 1970s. Thus, the major employing organisations and stakeholders in social work education have undergone fundamental change at the same time as the new degree has been implemented. To understand the findings of this evaluation it is therefore necessary to consider the study and its outcomes in its complex context of policies relating to social work, social work education, and higher education more generally.

Finally, when identifying the intended and unintended outcomes of the introduction of the social work degree it is important to acknowledge that it was not a single event, a one dimensional policy change. Three inter-related strands of change operated and had consequences for the way that the evaluation assessed the impact of the new social work degree. These are:

1. The introduction of a degree level qualification meant that learning, teaching and assessment had to meet the requirements of a degree level qualification as outlined by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for higher education, the Benchmark Statement for Social Work, as well as any specific requirements of the Department of Health, GSCC and Topps (now Skills for Care) This had implications for the process of implementing the degree in higher education.

2. Some changes brought about by the requirements of the Department of Health could have been introduced without raising the academic standard e.g. increasing the length of the course, increasing the number of practice learning days. In this evaluation it is important to note, where possible, which changes are specific to degree level learning and teaching and which are consequential on other related changes.

3. Raising the qualifying level to a minimum degree level qualification situated social work training in higher education more centrally in HEI systems than the prior qualification, the DipSW. This impacted upon the implementation in a number of ways e.g. resources; keeping in line with requirements in HEIs for timetabling, curriculum, lengths of terms/semesters, assessment schedules and procedures for progression. These have influenced the implementation.

Changing contexts

In addition to these caveats, it is also useful to take a brief look at the developments in background context for the introduction of the degree. The Introduction to this report (Chapter One) gives a full account of the policy initiatives and desired outcomes that led to the introduction of the new social work degree in England.

Social care policy

The first, and perhaps overarching change that has had implications for the evaluation was the joint workforce review, Options for Excellence, which was launched by Beverley Hughes MP (Minister for Children, Young People and
Families) and Liam Byrne MP, the then Care Services Minister in the Department of Health in the summer of 2005. The review team submitted interim advice to Ministers (May, 2006) and reported in October 2006. The advice set the context for workforce development now and into the future, and identified areas where attention had to be focused. The aim of the review was to develop a workforce able to deliver the vision for services outlined in policy documents such as Every Child Matters (2003) and Our Health, Our Care, Our Say (2006).

The report of Options for Excellence (2006) referenced the interim findings of the evaluation and acknowledged the role of the new degree in social work as one of the foundations of excellence for the workforce arising from the 2000 Care Standards Act:

> An improved status for the social care workforce through a new three-year social work degree course, the introduction of registration for social workers, and a national recruitment campaign for the social care sector as a whole.

(p.4)

While it acknowledged the necessity of waiting for the results of the evaluation of the degree it did make one recommendation for early action in its Vision for 2020:

> Build on existing good practice such as the involvement of service users and carers in the social work degree, induction, NVQs and expert witness programmes.

(p.32)

Meanwhile, as mentioned above, there had been major changes in the organization and administration of social work and social care services and the Department for Education and Skills (now the Department for Children, Schools and Families) took on responsibility for children’s services. The white paper Care Matters: Time for Change (DfES June 2007) outlined policies to ensure the messages from Every Child Matters were implemented. In this context, it addresses social work training and skills (p.127) by arguing the need to improve the skills, training, and support for children and family social workers and increase the capacity of social workers to support other social care staff and carers. To this end, it was stated that the Department would carry out consultations to:

> Explore with partners options for greater child specialisation in the social work qualifying degrees, at undergraduate and postgraduate levels and in post qualifying awards.

While this did not make any commitment to specialist degrees, or specialization within degrees, it did seem to be changing policy before the majority of social work graduates from the new degree had taken up post. However, its commitment to making the profession more attractive also led to the suggestion to explore a Newly Qualified Social Worker status that would give a guarantee of support, training, and induction to child and family social
workers. Such innovations do not necessarily negate the need for a generic first degree but might build upon it. However, such imperatives inevitably have implications for an evaluation that was commissioned to test out the effectiveness of a generic degree.

**Social work education**

It was explained above that one of the consequences of raising the qualifying level in social work to undergraduate degree meant that it had to meet the requirements in higher education at this level. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education sets out descriptors for different levels in higher education and has a Code of Practice with sections on admissions, programme design, practice learning, assessment and other aspects of higher education. To some extent, this was acknowledged by the fact that the QAA Benchmark Statement for an undergraduate degree social work (2001) was a major plank of the requirements for the new degree. Also, this was seen in the arrangements for the validation of courses, which required the General Social Care Council to accredit individual HEIs. However, as the degree progressed, tensions emerged between the adequacy of the resources needed to meet the professional requirements and the resources made available by the HEIs.

These examples are given to indicate that the evaluation had to try and distil which outcomes relate to the specific requirements of the DH (2002) and which are consequences that could not have been identified until the implementation was undertaken. Educators also continually evaluate the courses they deliver and are subject to annual monitoring and five year review both internally and by the GSCC.

The evaluation fieldwork was completed in the summer of 2007 when many courses were preparing for their five-year reviews by the GSCC and the original QAA Benchmark statement was being revised.

In addition to these reviews, major changes were occurring in the culture of social work education. Through the work of the Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee (JUC SWEC), the Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Social Work and Social Policy (SWAP) and the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) attention was being drawn to the need to enhance learning and teaching materials and to develop high quality tools for evaluation. A paper by John Carpenter (2005), drawing attention to the need for rigour in assessing the outcomes for social work education, led to the Outcomes for Social Work Education (OSWE) initiative. This initiative involves social work academics and service users and carers at specific HEIs working to develop process and mechanisms for the evaluation of social work education.

These developments were part of wider initiatives undertaken by academics to reflect on the processes of education and situate their teaching in the context of evidence based practice. This is demonstrated in the growing number of papers presented at the annual Joint Social Work Education
This attention to methodological rigour in the context of a growing evidence base is part of a wider strategy in social work education (JUC SWEC, 2005) to improve the capacity and capability of social work research. While such developments will contribute to improvements in learning and teaching for students and practitioners, they also have other implications for the introduction of the social work degree. In higher education, the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) assesses the quality of research outputs and has major implications for funding of those HEIs that participate. Success in the RAE is significant for the discipline of social work, not only for funding from the research funding councils, but also because it has implications for the quality of the evidence for social work practice. The continuation of social work as a HEI based discipline is dependent upon buoyant student numbers, especially since they provide income in excess of that of most other undergraduates, and to a lesser extent on good performance in the RAE. The initiatives described such as OSWE were able, in some cases, to bring together competing demands on social work academic staff and ultimately enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

Finally, as has been mentioned, the other pressure on higher education is the need to recruit high quality students and to fill places. The mechanisms and financial incentives described below to support the implementation for the new degree were enormously helpful in recruiting social work students. However, changing education policy put pressure on the arrangements almost as soon as they were in place. Changes in arrangements for fee levels introduced into higher education mean that HEIs could charge differential fees and students would be asked to pay ‘up front’ fees. The Department of Health had made a major financial investment in social work education and initially this was supportive to social work courses to enable them to increase their numbers, or indeed set up new degree courses (see below). Nonetheless, the overall funding package was understandably ring fenced and limited. The fact that some HEIs might demand higher fees, but funding for increases in fees was not available from the DH, meant that the future of social work in those HEIs might be threatened.

This section has given a brief overview of the changing culture of higher education during the period of the evaluation. It is provided to illustrate the complexity of evaluating changes brought about by particular policies when they impact upon a number of different organizational cultures and are implemented within a fast changing context. It also illustrates that policy evaluation has to identify both the intended and unintended consequences of the changes that are introduced.

**Mechanisms to support implementation**

As has been referred to above, the introduction of the degree level qualification was supported by a number of mechanisms to both facilitate the implementation of the degree and to improve recruitment to the social work workforce. Some of these would have brought about change in the delivery of
social work education even if the qualifying level had not been raised to an undergraduate degree. In order to put the outcomes of the evaluation of the degree into context it is therefore important to identify these mechanisms and to describe how they affected the process with both intended and unintended consequences.

1. **Provision of fees and bursaries for undergraduate social work students.** Postgraduate students had always received a bursary, and this was continued. However, bursaries for undergraduate students were important as the minimum qualification for social work changed from being a non-graduate two-year course to a three-year undergraduate degree course. Concern was expressed that this might be a deterrent to some potential students, especially from groups that were not represented in higher education more generally. Bursaries were important as they made studying social work at undergraduate level viable for people with commitments and who might not have received support because they were affected by means testing. As a degree with a practice component, it makes demands on students who undertake part-time employment to supplement their funding. It also meant the social work degree might be attractive to students who might consider other vocational courses such as nursing or teaching at 18 years of age.

In March 2006, soon after the introduction of bursaries the DH reviewed its policy on social work bursaries because of the changes to tuition fees in higher education. Bursaries to undergraduate students were increased but students had to pay their tuition fees and would be liable to repay them on entering employment and earning more than £15,000 per annum. As a letter from the Department in March 2006 stated:

*The social work bursary is intended to provide an incentive to students to train as social workers. This policy change provides a greater immediate incentive to students and greater choice. Students can choose to use the bursary to pay fees or they can use it in meeting costs and take out a fee loan.*

This financial incentive for students to undertake an undergraduate degree in social work was possibly reduced but, as Chapter Five of this report shows, the effect of this diminution of funding does not appear to have been significant.

2. **Provision of funding for extra student numbers.** As mentioned in the previous section, in order to aid the recruitment of students to the social work degree the Department of Health made available funding to the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) to fund extra student numbers. This was a significant source of support to social work courses as funding mechanisms in HEIs ‘capped’ or limited student numbers on undergraduate degrees in individual institutions. In order to support the transition to a degree level qualification and increase numbers this funding support meant that social work courses could apply for funding for their extra numbers and not be in competition with other subject areas within the HEI. The availability of this funding has meant that some HEIs have
3. **Funding for involvement of services users and carers.** Prior to the degree social work educators had been working with service users and carers in the delivery of qualifying education. In addition to the requirement that the new degree involved service users and carers in all aspects of educating and training social workers, finance was made available to facilitate this involvement. This has been widely appreciated and other funds have also supported this development (see Levin 2004).

4. **Skills Lab Funding.** This was allocated directly to HEIs and was intended to support innovations in the process of learning and teaching in the area of skills development. Audit of these funds was undertaken in the annual reporting mechanism to the GSCC Education Support Grants Department.

5. **Extensive investment in practice learning.** This included funding for agencies to provide practice learning opportunities and the work of the Practice Learning Taskforce (succeeded by the Learning Resource Networks) to support the provision of practice placements. One contentious issue that emerged for courses was the funding of travel to practice learning opportunities. With the changes to the bursary in September 2006 a flat rate for travel to placements was introduced that was seen to disadvantage, for example, students who undertook placements in rural areas and needed to travel further than average, while giving advantages to others, those with placements nearer to their HEIs. This meant that the pattern of placement availability would be crucial for some.

6. **Increase in the status of practice learning.** The provision of practice learning opportunities became a Performance Indicator for statutory social services departments which acted as an important incentive to these agencies to provide the required number of placements to meet increased demand. This Performance Indicator has now been withdrawn (2007).

7. **Facilitative role of the GSCC.** Annual monitoring reports, five yearly course reviews and other mechanisms are used by the GSSC to identify issues that required further attention. The GSCC has also undertaken work on student progression (Hussein *et al* 2006), on disability and good character requirements, and completed an audit of a sample of social work programmes to look at teaching in the Children and Families area (Blewett and Tunstill 2007).

8. **Support from organisations in the social work education and development field.** The Higher Education Academy subject centre for Social Work and Social Policy (SWAP) provided workshops on aspects of delivering the
degree and set up networks for groups (for example, those undertaking external examining roles). The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) supported the development of material related to curriculum requirements (e.g. communicating with children; law teaching). These represent substantial resources. SCIE has recently undertaken an independent evaluation of the depth and extent of the reach of its products to its stakeholders, including social work students and social work educators (2007).

Findings of the evaluation

The following is a synthesis of the detailed findings reported in the body of this report. They relate both to the specific DH requirements for the delivery of the degree, but also acknowledge the ways in which some of the contextual changes identified above have impacted on the process and outcomes of raising the qualifying level for social work to an undergraduate degree.

1. There are more students on qualifying courses and greater diversity in some groups among the student cohorts to date. This would indicate that policy initiatives to attract more suitable students to the social work profession have been successful. Funding mechanisms to support the increase in places in HEIs have also had an impact.

2. The decision to remove the minimum age for entering the workforce has led to greater numbers of younger people being attracted to social work education. The evaluation indicates that there were some initial resistance to the suitability of younger entrants to the profession but progression and retention rates suggest that this policy initiative has had a positive impact on the number of recruits to both the degree and the profession.

3. There has also been an increase in the diversity of applicants to social work education, mainly in terms of the proportions of Black African students. However, male students and those from Asian backgrounds remain under represented. This suggests that more work is needed to address particular areas of diversity, in order to attract students from all backgrounds and to ensure the social work workforce represents society, particularly given the differential progression rates for students from black and minority ethnic groups.

4. On the basis of progression and retention rates to date and stated career path intentions of current students, the degree is likely to lead to an increase in the number of qualified workers joining the workforce. This indicates that raising the qualifying level has not deterred applicants and that the success of social work education in facilitating the academic progress of students from non traditional academic routes has continued. The contribution of social work education in addressing issues of social exclusion in the professions remains substantial and meets policy aims of raising the skill levels of the UK population.
5. A very high proportion of social work students are satisfied with their experience of higher education.

6. The bursary has been an important factor in attracting applicants, but selection procedures are stringent and involve innovative ways of testing eligibility and suitability. Rigorous selection processes, which involve service users and employers in different ways, have identified suitable candidates for the degree, thus allaying fears that unsuitable applicants might be attracted by the possibility of a bursary. Social work education is unique in the UK and internationally in its inclusion of people using services in its selection for professional training. Increases in application numbers have meant that HEIs have also been able to be more selective about whom to accept on courses.

7. As in previous awards, a mix of altruistic, personal motivation and more job-related motivations remain strong factors in the decision to undertake social work training among those who have successfully gained a place. Black students tended to have more job-related motivations, possibly suggesting a view of social work as offering a career in which discrimination is less likely than in other professions.

8. Social work educators are delivering the Department of Health requirements for the degree. The QAA Benchmark Statement in Social Work was seen to be helpful in setting out the components of undergraduate social work education. Further, HEI staff perceived an increase in academic and practice standards of students.

9. There are differential developments in meeting the requirements of the degree. For example, some courses are testing varied models of inter-professional education and arrangements for students to achieve computer literacy. These two areas were problematic overall and work continues to address the difficulties encountered.

10. Courses have different arrangements for delivering the curriculum but there are mechanisms for ensuring core generic learning and providing opportunities for specialist learning.

11. There have been innovations in assessment, especially in the area of Assessed Preparation for Direct Practice, as well as in the range of assessment methods. Assessed Preparation for Direct Practice has been effectively used to prepare student for practice and to identify potentially unsuitable students in order to protect service users and carers. Overall, about three quarters of students are highly satisfied with their assessment.

12. The increase in the number of practice learning days, the funding arrangements and the work undertaken on developing practice placements have had positive impacts on the variety of practice learning opportunities in the voluntary, statutory and independent sectors. However, concerns raised by HEI staff and students identify a need for extra monitoring and support for some independent sector
placements, in order to ensure that students are able to benefit from their placement to the required level of skills and to undertake the right kinds of tasks.

The existence of practice learning as a Performance Indicator for statutory agencies (which has now been withdrawn) and the daily placement fee for independent agencies were thought to have been particularly important in ensuring the supply of practice learning opportunities to meet the initial extra demand for placements. These incentives demonstrate the effectiveness of financial inducements and potential non-financial penalties within higher education and service providing agencies.

13. Given the separation of local authority contexts for Children’s Services and Adult Social Care, which was one of the major policy changes accompanying the implementation of the degree, accessing the required number of placements working with both groups was an unforeseen challenge, which has largely been met by HEIs.

14. Increases in the numbers of students and in the number of practice learning days and the further integration of some social work courses into higher education systems (which involves standardising timetabling and so on) has meant that there are some pressures on the curriculum, timing of assessments and resources. It was not clear whether social work educators had received sufficient institutional support in return for the substantial funding that social work education now brings to many HEIs and the extent to which social work education enables HEIs to meet their targets of student completion, diversity and employability.

15. There are particular challenges for postgraduate courses given the requirement for students to spend 200 days on practice placements, out of two academic years. Despite this, social work postgraduate courses are popular, recruit well, and there is very little withdrawal or failure. In the light of greater proportions of young people entering higher education on a variety of courses, postgraduate social work may remain a key route into the profession.

16. The increased number of days on placement has placed greater emphasis on practice learning. The quality of placements was seen by staff and students as being a critical factor in the overall quality of the course and as a tipping point in terms of withdrawal, which illustrates how the policy aim of a practice focussed professional qualification, has been implemented.

17. Employer views on the new degree confirmed those of other key stakeholders that degree status was welcome. Employers provided information about their expectations of newly qualified social workers, for example, the need for empathy with service users and carers and abilities to communicate in person and on paper. Their experiences of recent non-degree students will be invaluable in charting trends in employers’ confidence in degree students as they enter the workforce.
18. Degree level studies in social work with a practice learning component produces demands on students on both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, particularly for people with parenting and caring responsibilities.

19. There is evidence from the administration of the vignettes that there are changes over time in the way that students conceptualise practice. Students were seen to become more holistic, drew more on policy, legislation, and theory, and were clearer about their role as social workers. In addition, students’ final responses to the vignettes were judged by the researchers to demonstrate that students had broadly reached the ‘competent’ stage of professional development, the stage deemed appropriate for social work graduates. These changes demonstrate knowledge accumulation from both classroom-based and practice learning.

20. The requirement for service user and carer involvement in the delivery of the degree has universal acceptance. There is evidence of good practice in recruiting, resourcing, and organising networks of service users and carers and acknowledgement that there are opportunities for further development in this area. Modules have been developed in conjunction with service users and carers that are innovative.

21. Despite the fact that there is no longer a requirement for the award to be delivered in partnership between HEIs and agencies there is continuing enthusiasm among academic staff and practice agencies for the degree and demonstrated potential for HEIs and employers to work together around workforce planning and strategies. This enthusiasm is associated with the view of all stakeholders that the degree has increased the status of the social work profession.

22. The degree has acted as a catalyst and has facilitated reflection, innovation, and changes in social work education.

23. The impact of the degree will not be known until qualified students have been in the workforce for some time (comparisons could then be drawn with, for example, the Marsh & Triseliotis study, 1996). This increases the potential value of the follow-up studies of new graduates and employers as they enter the workplace that have recently been funded by the Department of Health, Children’s Workforce Development Council, and the GSCC.

Limitations of this study

The methods of this study are outlined in Chapter Two and explained in detail in the Technical Appendix of this report. Both of these outline that, as in all evaluations, there are limits to knowledge gained. Specifically the limits to the evaluation include: limits in national data’s comprehensiveness about social work education. While this applies to previous years, in the main it is still the case that data may be over general or confused. We recognise this, for example, in respect of possible under-reporting of disability among social work
students in the GSCC data and confusions over terms such as sponsored and seconded which relate to employment based routes.

Secondly, there are limits to the data collected by this evaluation, in particular the low responses rates to the online survey of students and the survey of employers. The low response rate of final year students was a particular disappointment. In addition to checking the representativeness of the sample of students against national data on student characteristics, we attempted to address these limitations by comparing the results across each phase of data collection.

The survey of employers was undertaken at a time when very few of them would have employed a social worker with the new degree and so their observations relate to recently qualified students in possession of the former qualification or a qualification gained outside the UK.

The in-depth study of the six case study sites also presents some limitations to the generalisability of the study. While respondents were most generous with their time, the second vignette exercise was completed by students at a particularly stressful time of their final year, where they were possibly more occupied with assessments deadlines. This affected the willingness of many to take part in the second vignette exercise. Moreover, it may have affected the responses of those who took part in terms of the depth and time they dedicated to their answers given that completing the vignettes was optional. Nonetheless, as the Technical Appendix observes, these challenges were recognised and a range of adjustments were made to the study to compensate. This is the first time that a longitudinal approach has been used in social work education about perceptions, expectations and knowledge acquisition and it is the first study to the best of our knowledge to use synthetic cohorts for social work students. The richness of the data when combined is considerable, unique to social work education in the UK and provides a significant resource for the wider higher education research community, especially that section which is concerned with professional programmes.

**Recommendations**

This evaluation has shown that it is possible, through a combination of incentives, to attract greater numbers of applicants to social work education and to provide places for them in HEIs and placement or practice learning opportunities.

1. We recommend firstly that this trend is not destabilised. Risks of destabilisation emerged in the course of this study and are at several levels. We recommend that a) those planning the social work workforce in the long term need to continually assess its market position in relation to similar professional training which largely draws on a similar pool of applicants, b) that HEI providers are given some level of commitment that the investment in social work programmes will continue to be supported by funders and that changes are negotiated with them, c) that social work education is not disadvantaged in its efforts to maintain good quality
placements by changes in the organisational settings of social work, that it is able to give some assurances of predictability and of support to practice assessors, and that urgent discussion is held should the effect of the withdrawal of a Performance Indicator target for placements lead to a shortfall of placements or their greater use by other professions. We therefore recommend that the new degree is only reorganised in the light of clear evidence that it is not meeting its objectives and we do not believe that there is valid or reliable evidence available at this time to make major changes.

2. We concur with the support for a ‘newly qualified status’ for social workers. We base this view on professional parity; on the likely need for the increasing numbers of graduates who have no or limited work experience in social work to consolidate their learning; for the need for support among new graduates as expressed by other research (Gupta and Blewett 2007); from our interpretation of students’ opinions and responses in this Evaluation and others (Fook et al, 2000) that at the end of their studies, students can only be expected to reach a competent, rather than proficient or expert level; and in response to the calls made by employers for greater opportunities for newly qualified social workers to be better inducted and supported in work that they acknowledge as stressful. In our view, the greater number of graduate social workers permits room for this development, and may ensure that the extra supply is not followed by rapid turnover. We note the growing skills shortages of the UK workforce and greater competition among employers for graduates. Social work graduates are now more likely to be mobile as they are younger, they are demonstrably IT competent, and they possess a study and work record that has attractive elements of literacy, research, numeracy and professional self-management. Such graduates are in short supply.

3. We do not recommend substantially more research into social work education, contrary to the recommendations of most studies, although the further work, which has been commissioned on the performance of graduates as they enter and develop in social work will be valuable (See below). Instead, we recommend that unprecedented opportunities for data collection and their analysis be used effectively. These apply to a) HEIs and their substantial data sets, b) to the GSCC and Skills for Care, c) to Higher Education monitoring systems and those of central government (particularly DIUS), d) to social work across the UK where different models of professional training could usefully be compared. Greater sharing of data (anonymised) and data sets, specific attention to priorities for analysis and avoidance of data duplication would well serve policy makers, researchers, data collectors in HEIs and elsewhere. However, we do recommend that there is inquiry about the position of men in social work. While this might include elements of research, we think that debate is needed about the effects of gender imbalances in a profession that has demonstrable success compared to most other professions in meeting other elements of diversity and equal opportunities agendas.
4. The image of social work often reflects the public view of people who use social work services and is therefore difficult to influence. In this context, the trend of rising applications to the profession, from applicants with a good range of entry qualifications, and the high rates of course completion are nothing short of remarkable. We recommend that positive public perceptions (in some quarters) are maintained and that opportunities to foster these are taken up by stakeholders, policy makers and government, as well as people using services, whose views of their social workers are demonstrated by research and consultation to be highly supportive in the main. Central policy aspirations to address social exclusion, defend human rights, and promote active citizenship need to portray social work as welcome in these endeavours in order to sustain the applications, motivations, and the retention of new degree students and graduates.

5. In light of the evidence presented in this report and comparisons of social work education with a) other professional training, b) other higher education provision, c) other policy levers to address issues of diversity and social exclusion, social work education in England performs well and meets targets. We recommend that social work educators, higher education communities and policy makers make greater use of the learning from this discipline in considering interlocking policy goals and targets. While no one would conclude that social work education does not face challenges in meeting the dual aims of graduate quality and diversity agendas, it has substantial experience in this aspect of pedagogy.

6. We recommend greater attention to quality issues in placements and, in light of government recommendations that poor quality providers of social care will not be commissioned (Putting People First, DH 2007), we recommend that agencies that are receiving funding for placements must at least be able to demonstrate good value. Placement shortages are not the sole responsibility of HEIs but they do have responsibility to ensure that students benefit from the substantial investment in their training. Programmes should not recruit students if they cannot provide enough quality placements and local agreements about workforce development need to address quality issues robustly. The evidence from this evaluation is that practice assessors feel well supported in the main by HEIs. We recommend continued monitoring of this subject and advise that student opinion and experience is well represented.

7. We recommend that the involvement of people with experiences of using services and carers is continued, fostered, and developed, but that responsibilities for this are more transparent. There appeared to be room for confusion about roles and purposes, as well as outcomes. Levels of responsibility appear now to be centred on individual programmes but in the light of increased interprofessional learning, this needs to be considered within HEIs. There appeared to be several funding streams available for some activities and none for others; we recommend that investments are pulled together and made more equitable so that individual HEI staff are more confident in negotiations and partnership activities with the aim of improving student experiences. Making clear the
amount of resources available for involving people with experience of using services over a longer period would make it possible for HEIs to plan for the longer term and develop projects to increase the capacity of people using services and carers to contribute in ways that are even more valuable. The high levels of involvement of people with experiences of using services and carers in social work education compares well with other professions in the UK and beyond and we recommend that this informs public involvement activities in other spheres of service delivery and innovation.

8. The ‘business case’ for social work training is important because sizeable public funds have been invested in the new degree. While this was not an economic evaluation, the study shows that there has been substantial return or yield on this ‘investment’ in the short term. Financial levers and incentives have been used to develop HEI courses where none existed previously and to greatly expand existing courses. One-off investment, in terms of buildings and equipment, has been minimal and audited. We are still in the short term since new graduates are only now appearing in sizeable numbers. It will be important to ‘track’ these graduates’ career patterns and this work has already been commissioned by the DH and the GSCC. We recommend that any future work considering the costs (inputs) of social work education are considered in light of its outputs.

9. We also note the ‘moral’ case for the new degree and recommend that this too influences debate over the new degree and the profession more widely. We observed that motivations among students in social work continue to combine altruistic and instrumental characteristics, and that students are generally very realistic about the work they were entering. We recommend that the high demands of social work application processes be maintained, not least to offer assurances of suitability in a climate of cynicism and increasing distrust of professionals. We recommend that the literacy and numeracy criteria for applicants be maintained, not least because they enable HEIs to embark upon professional training without undue delay to receptive students. However, in the light of the problems reported with the computer/IT levels required, we recommend that this is reviewed, not least because it seemed unwieldy, too basic for many students but not supportive of those in need of IT skills. We also recommend that postgraduate routes for social work be maintained in the light of increased access to higher education for young people, not least because these routes appear to attract male applications more than undergraduate routes and that completion rates are extremely high.

10. Finally, we suggest that there appears to be no evidence to change the generic base of the qualification, which has some specialist input to meet the needs of employers, accepting that newly qualified social workers are at beginning competence in general and that the post qualifying framework is where specialist skills can be developed to meet the demands of the complex work of agencies. This research was funded by the Department of Health before the Department for Schools, Children and Families
assumed responsibilities in this area. However, the research has examined some of the evidence in this area suggesting that teaching about children and families features very strongly in social work qualifying programmes and that this has always been the case. Programmes in the new degree have built on former strengths to develop this further. This may need to be more consistently structured across programmes and best practice disseminated, for example, about child and family observations, but a strong base and wealth of experience exists already.
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