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for Education

Evaluation of Step Up to Social Work, Cohorts 1 and 2: 3-years and 5-years on

Research report

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Social Science in Government

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Executive Summary

The origins and development of Step Up to Social Work

Step Up to Social Work (SUSW) grew from a government initiative in 2009 to address what were believed to be a number of weaknesses in the prevailing approach to recruiting and preparing intending practitioners for a career in social work, and particularly in child and family social work. Social workers were believed to be under-prepared for the rigours of practice in this highly demanding setting, and once in practice to be likely to leave the workforce relatively quickly (Social Work Task Force, 2009). Problems of both recruitment and retention were identified; and it was considered at the time that a new targeted approach to attracting potential recruits to the profession and preparing them effectively for the demands of practice with children and families was required.

The Step Up to Social Work qualifying programme was developed, accredited and implemented very quickly, accepting its first intake of recruits in September 2010, with an accelerated 18-month route to the point of qualification with a Master's degree and entitlement to apply for registration as a professional social worker. Earlier evaluations suggested that the programme had delivered largely positive outcomes, in terms of the expectations of programme participants, partner agencies, and educators (Baginsky and Teague, 2013; Smith et al., 2013). The delivery model itself offered specific benefits in terms of enhanced partnership working between employing agencies and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), and in the capacity to embed participants more effectively in their intended work settings. Whilst some issues remained to be addressed, such as the lack of diversity in ethnicity, social class and gender among the early programme cohorts and some difficulties in ensuring the programme consistently met the requirements of a generic qualification in social work the early impressions overall were favourable.

Questions remained to be addressed, though, concerning the sustainability of the programme, its capacity to adapt to changing circumstances, and the issue of retention. Retention could not properly be answered at the point of qualification, even though a very high proportion of those recruited to the first two cohorts did complete the qualifying requirements and move into practice in child and family social work. The present evaluation was thus commissioned to address some of these longer term questions, with a specific focus on retention and progression of Step Up to Social Work graduates; their perspectives on how well the qualifying programme had prepared them for their continuing careers in social work; the reasons for leaving of those who had decided to seek alternative careers; the perceptions of employers on the preparation and progress of their Step Up to Social Work recruits; and the potential comparison between the careers of this group with social workers qualifying by other, traditional university-based routes.

The approach to the evaluation

The evaluation itself was based on a mixed methods design in order to obtain both longitudinal information about career pathways and progression of Step Up to Social Work graduates (and comparators); and a range of qualitative evidence about the nature of their early career experiences, the extent to which they felt prepared for practice, and how they were perceived by their employers. This has enabled us to gain a substantive picture of both what their early career trajectories looked like; and at the same time, some very useful insights into their own perceptions and feelings about making the transition into practice and what the positive and negative aspects of this might be.

The evaluation was carried out over a two-and-a-half year period (April 2015-Sept 2017). It began with the compilation of a database of the first two cohorts of Step Up to Social Work (SUSW) graduates three years after gaining their qualification. For Cohort 1, we were able to establish the status of 141 of the 161 participants (88%) who had graduated from the SUSW programme and entered child and family social work in 2012. We obtained verified contact details for 118 (73%) of these. For Cohort 2, we established the status of 183/212 (86%) who had graduated in 2013; contact details were obtained for 164/212 (77%).

SUSW graduates with contact details were invited to respond to a comprehensive online survey of their motivations for seeking social work as a career, their goals and aspirations, progression in the profession, self-efficacy, job satisfaction, role conflict, stress and intention to leave or remain. In total, 61/118 graduates (52%) responded from Cohort 1 and 60/164 from Cohort 2 (37%).

In order to compare their views and experiences with social workers who had graduated from conventional university programmes, two comparison groups were recruited. Most were recruited through local authorities who were engaged in SUSW regional partnerships, and these were topped up with graduates recruited via the alumni offices of three universities. These groups were matched with the SUSW graduates at the same stage in their careers; these are referred to as “comparators”. Most of the comparators (70%) had completed post-graduate degrees, equivalent in academic standing to SUSW; the remainder had Bachelors’ degrees in social work. The response rates from these convenience samples is estimated as 37 per cent. Overall, these comparators are likely to be broadly comparable in terms of academic qualifications and/or agency experience as SUSW graduates.

Respondents to the first survey from Cohort 1 and their comparators were followed up again in 2017, five years after qualification; 41/61 (67%) of SUSW graduates and 31/49 (63%) of comparators replied. These relatively small sample sizes should be borne in mind when interpreting the findings.

Sixty-three semi-structured interviews were conducted with graduates drawn from both SUSW cohorts and comparators currently practising in child and family social work at approximately the same time points. Interviews were also conducted with seven SUSW graduates who had left this field of work, and sometimes the profession itself. Finally, interviews were conducted with 14 representatives of employing agencies with experience of the SUSW programme and its graduates.

Overview of evaluation findings

At this point, some five years after the first cohort of Step Up to Social Work graduates completed their qualifying programmes and moved into practice, we are able to reflect on what is by now an established feature of the social work landscape. Fast track qualifying programmes in the profession have nonetheless been viewed with some scepticism. Concerns have been expressed that these programmes may equip students with a 'bag of tools' rather than a comprehensive education for professional practice; that they may exacerbate retention problems by recruiting ambitious high calibre graduates who spend little time in front-line practice before moving into management or out of the profession altogether; that they will reduce the ethnic and class diversity of the workforce; and that they disadvantage students on traditional universities who have to struggle with little or no financial support (Cooper et al., 2016). This is an opportunity to take stock.

We can conclude that on several of the key indicators, as determined by the scheme's originators, there are certainly positive signs. The retention rate, that is, the proportion remaining in child and family social work three years after qualification, was 85 percent for Cohort 1 and 80 per cent for Cohort 2. Five years after qualifying, the proportion of those from Cohort 1 remaining in child and family social work was still 73 per cent. In comparison, in 2016, the percentage of teachers remaining in post three years and five years after qualifying was 74 per cent and 69 per cent respectively (DfE, 2017). There are no exactly comparable statistics for child and family social workers in general, but the percentage who had been in the service of their current local authority for five years or more in 2015 was 52 per cent (DfE, 2017). These figures suggests reasonably good prospects for a substantial proportion of SUSW graduates remaining beyond the eight year average length of a social work career (Curtis et al., 2010).

Also pertinent to these figures, earlier studies have shown that Step Up to Social Work has a relatively high conversion rate, with 82 per cent of those completing the first iteration of the programme going on to take up social work posts after qualifying (Baginsky and Manthorpe, 2014, p. 13), compared to a figure of 67 per cent for those following mainstream undergraduate or postgraduate routes to qualification (Skills for Care, 2016, p. 14).

In addition, progression for many Step Up to Social Work graduates appears to have been at least as good as they expected and they score well on a validated measure of

self-efficacy in child and family social work. Employers, too, are highly complementary about practitioners qualifying by this route, and their enthusiasm for the scheme is striking.

We should not, however, overstate the gains identified. Step Up to Social Work is a demanding and specialised route, which is perhaps more likely to attract entrants with a particular interest in pursuing this career pathway; at the same time, they are also well-served in terms of funding and hosting arrangements compared to students on conventional qualifying programmes. Despite this, graduates following these other routes were also found by this evaluation to have made good progress in their careers; and they scored only slightly less well on the measure of self-efficacy in child and family social work. It is important not to convey the impression that there is a gulf between social work practitioners following different qualifying routes, and this is certainly not the way they see themselves, or each other. Importantly, too, very few of the differential findings were statistically significant, so this is another note of caution against the temptation to draw overly simplistic messages from the survey evidence reported here.

As well as some differences, our overall findings also indicate key areas of common ground, such as the possibility of a 'typology' of orientations to careers in social work. Findings also identified a range of 'coping' or career management strategies used by practitioners to manage heavy workloads and the high levels of associated stress.

Summary findings

Retention

At both three and five years following qualification, Step Up to Social Work graduates were likely to remain in child and family social work. The retention rate three years after qualification was 85 percent for Cohort 1 and 80 per cent for Cohort 2. Five years on, the retention rate for Cohort 1 had reduced to 73 per cent.

There was a significant degree of movement within the profession, with more than half of those responding to the repeat survey (five years post qualifying) having changed jobs in the previous two years. Nonetheless, on average Step Up to Social Work graduates had been in their present post for 27 months, and almost three-quarters were still in child and family social work at this time. Current job roles were varied, and there was considerable evidence of movement between posts, although this was as likely to be for personal or family reasons as it was work-related.

There was also some evidence from the survey findings of a greater continuing commitment of Step Up to Social Work graduates to child and social work over time, with a greater proportion of them expressing a desire to remain in this area of practice in the

future. Broadly, then, the evaluation indicates that the Step Up to Social Work programme was successful in recruiting participants who were committed to pursuing a career in child and family social work, and enabling them to achieve this goal, at least in the early stages of their careers.

Progression

In terms of their career progression, most Step Up to Social Work graduates considered that they have got on at least as well as expected in the first three years of their social work careers; and this was also largely the case for the comparison group at the same point.

After five years in practice, this pattern still held good for the first cohort of SUSW graduates. Around a quarter were beginning to see themselves as future managers, and the great majority still saw their future careers as being in social work in one form or another; there was little difference between SUSW respondents and comparators in this respect. A majority of respondents in both groups indicated that they felt that their qualifying programmes had prepared them effectively for career development in the initial stages.

SUSW graduates were rather more likely than comparators to see themselves as managers in child and family social work; comparators, on the other hand, were more likely to see themselves as specialist practitioners.

Interview findings suggested a 'typology' of career expectations amongst respondents from both groups, with some actively looking to advance into managerial or specialist roles ('strivers'); some expressing an active and continuing commitment to their current role in frontline practice ('doers'); and some expressing a degree of uncertainty as to their future career direction ('seekers'). This is an important area for further exploration and understanding because it has clear implications for both practitioners themselves, and those responsible for overseeing and enabling career development.

Practitioner Experiences

Both survey and interview evidence demonstrated that around thirty percent of these early career social workers from both groups were experiencing clinical levels of stress. Workload pressures and associated stress do not necessarily translate into the 'intention to leave', as confirmed by some of the 'coping' or self-management strategies revealed through the interviews.

Survey findings showed that respondents generally remained satisfied with their jobs over time, between cohorts and in both SUSW and comparison groups. In particular, they were generally 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with their relationships with fellow workers; with the nature and variety of the work they were doing; having challenges to meet; being

able to use their initiative; and with their own accomplishments. These are all 'intrinsic' factors of satisfaction with the job.

Future intentions were strongly influenced by 'extrinsic' factors related to job satisfaction, such as job security, income, flexibility of hours of work, the physical working conditions, the quality of management and supervision and opportunities to progress; the only negative factor was excessive hours of work. The interviews substantiated that working environment and quality of management and supervision do play a substantial part in determining this outcome, whether experienced positively or negatively. These findings confirm what we would intuitively expect to be the case, and offer further support for the importance of both ensuring that practitioners' working environment is as conducive as possible to good practice; and that child and family social workers should be very well prepared for what they are getting into.

Comparative Findings

The evaluation findings suggest no major points of distinction between SUSW graduates and comparators following other qualifying routes, and this is how they themselves would see things in the main. Where there are differences, these do seem to stem from the point of recruitment, where Step Up to Social Work candidates were rigorously selected, embedded with potential future employers and provided with an explicitly targeted learning programme focused on child and family social work. These preparatory factors may account for the slightly more positive findings recorded in terms of self-efficacy; but the comparators fared as well in all other respects. This offers some support for specifically targeted recruitment strategies as offered by Step Up to Social Work, but more significantly points to the value of wider adoption by other qualifying routes of tighter and more deeply-embedded partnership working (as intended with the recently implemented Teaching Partnerships).

Career Strategies

The evaluation has also shed light on key aspects of social workers' early career pathways, offering the potential for developing a clearer understanding of their 'orientations' towards their work. It also illustrates strategies they use to manage and plan for the demands of their working lives. We suggest that practitioners fall broadly into three categories - those who want to '*get on*' in their jobs, and probably move into management or specialist areas of practice; those who want to '*get by*' and more than that, remain in frontline roles contributing to effective services for children and families; and those who are at least considering '*getting out*', whose experiences may have been more uncomfortable, and who have come to question the value of their present role (to themselves, at least). The career management strategies adopted by practitioners also have distinctive features; with evidence of the conscious adoption of mechanisms to

manage pressures of work, alongside more purposive exploration of 'escape routes' which may result in those concerned leaving the profession at some point.

Employer Perspectives

It is also important to note in summarising our findings that our interviews with employers revealed that their views of Step Up to Social Work are overwhelmingly positive. The agencies involved with the programme are uniformly enthusiastic about the opportunities it provides to work closely with regional partners and educational providers; they appreciate the close working relationships built up between educators in academic and practice settings; they have welcomed a more active role in recruitment of potential child and family social workers; they view transitions between the programme and qualified status as easier to manage; and they consider their recruits to be of a consistently high calibre, and distinctively 'practice ready' for a career in frontline child and family practice settings.

Summary conclusions

The evaluation has demonstrated a number of positive features of Step Up to Social Work over time, up to the point where its recruits have been in practice for five years. First, they have stayed, in child and family social work in large numbers. They are very highly thought of by their employers; they have progressed well, and demonstrated a clear sense of confidence and purpose in their work, and in the main, have managed the undoubted pressures of contemporary social work practice.

This was also largely the case for the graduates of the conventional university-based programmes who feature in this study; the majority are staying in the profession, they are satisfied with their current jobs, and they appear to be doing well, too. Where there are differences, these may be associated with the 'tailored' nature of the Step Up to Social Work route, which gives recruits a clearer and in some ways more direct and welcoming route into child and family social work. In particular, job finding on qualification is easier because they already have a foothold in their sponsoring local authority and are familiar with the working environment.

Overview and Aims of the Evaluation

This evaluation was commissioned by the Department for Education in 2015, as part of a series of studies into the implementation and impact of the Step Up to Social Work qualifying programme. The objectives set out by the Department for Education specified the overall aim for the study of assessing the effectiveness of Step Up to Social Work as a route into practice in child and family social work. Subsidiary goals were identified as:

- locating and recruiting as many participants as possible from the first two cohorts, so as to create a reliable database of programme graduates;
- finding out the destinations, current roles and levels of responsibility of these graduates at three and five years after completion of the qualifying programme;
- obtaining the views of graduates on their likelihood of staying in social work, their career plans and the factors influencing their views;
- obtaining their views on the extent to which Step Up to Social Work had prepared them for a social work career;
- where Step Up to Social Work graduates had left the profession, obtaining and analysing the reasons for this; and
- providing an objective assessment of how retention and progression rates of Step Up to Social Work graduates compare to those following other entry routes into child and family social work.

The expectation was that the findings of the evaluation would enable the Department for Education to make informed policy decisions about: the 'value' and 'effectiveness' of Step Up to Social Work as an entry route to child and family social work, and the delivery models associated with the first two cohorts of the programme; the delivery of future iterations of the programme; and the longer term strategy of developing 'accelerated high calibre' routes into the profession; as well as creating a stronger evidence base to inform subsequent decisions by local authorities about taking part in Step Up to Social Work.

The longitudinal and multi-dimensional nature of the evaluation task in turn necessitated a methodological approach which incorporated a variety of research questions, data sources and analytical strategies, producing an integrated overview of the continuing impact of Step Up to Social Work. For these reasons, a mixed methods approach was adopted, including both quantitative and qualitative elements (see Chapter 4). These are able to provide both a broad picture of the changing patterns of the early careers of programme graduates and a sense of their own perceptions and motivations as they negotiate career pathways. The subsequent analysis is thus able to integrate these diverse aspects of the study and draw out robust conclusions relevant to the initial questions set out for the evaluation.

Background to the Study

Step Up to Social Work was initiated in 2009 with support from government ministers in response to prior concerns about recruitment and retention of effective practitioners in the field of child and family social work. The average working life for social workers at the time was found to be less than eight years, compared to 16 for a nurse and 25 for a doctor (Curtis et al., 2010). Although the picture has changed somewhat in terms of recruitment since that point in time, average annual turnover of local authority child and family social workers remains at a concerning level - 15 per cent in September 2016, for example (DfE 2017, SFR 16/02/2017). The strongest single predictor of actual turnover is known to be expressed intention to leave, defined as “very likely to be looking for a new job in the next year” (Carpenter et al., 2012). At the end of the first year in employment, for participants on the Newly Qualified Social Work programme 2010-11, 13% stated that this was the case and this was close to the 16% rate of turnover reported by employers at that stage (Carpenter et al., 2012).

A systematic review of retention in child welfare by Webb and Carpenter (2012) evaluated individual and organisational theories and research evidence and identified push and pull factors which predicted retention. Commitment to the profession along with both intrinsic and extrinsic job satisfaction were found to be important factors in retention. Conversely, work-related stress was strongly associated with staff intention to leave. At an organisational level, social workers’ perceptions of support from their employer, good quality supportive supervision and opportunities for continuing professional development and career progression were all important for retention. Poor salaries, high workload and excessive paperwork were associated with leaving. Interventions aimed at supporting newly qualified staff through mentoring and supervision were effective in promoting retention.

An analysis of data from over 1,000 participants in the NQSW pilot programme one year into employment (Carpenter et al., 2015) supported the findings of the review. The statistical predictors of intention to remain or leave were gender (women more likely to remain), satisfaction with package of support and supervision from their employers, intrinsic and extrinsic job satisfaction and stress. But notably, two-thirds of intending leavers wanted to stay in child and family social work. A follow-up study of a sample of this group who went on to complete the Early Professional Development Programme two years later found that the most significant predictors of intention to leave were stress and low extrinsic satisfaction with pay and physical conditions (Carpenter et al., 2012).

Whilst there was considerable concern about both retention and the level of unfilled vacancies in 2009, the Social Work Task Force (2009) report also revealed dissatisfaction with the level of ‘practice readiness’ of newly qualified social workers amongst employer agencies. Questions were thus raised not just about the number of available recruits to the profession but also about the extent to which those who were qualifying were

equipped with the skills and attributes to move directly into this challenging area of practice with vulnerable children and families. In addition, existing partnership arrangements between education providers and social work agencies were also viewed as problematic in some instances.

The framework informing the development of the Step Up to Social Work programme thus combined the objectives of: improving the relationships between educators and service providers; strengthening the role of employers in shaping social work education; attracting a wider pool of recruits to the profession with high potential; and ensuring the delivery of high quality and specifically tailored learning opportunities to enable these candidates to be reliably practice ready at the point of qualification. At the same time, the idea of initiating a 'fast track' entry route proved attractive as a means of speeding up the process of redressing the shortfall in the existing workforce; whilst at the same time offering the incentive to potential recruits of moving into paid employment more quickly than would otherwise have been the case.

Eight regional partnerships and two 'lead' universities were recruited to develop and implement the programme, which was expected to meet the required professional standards for admission to the social work profession, and to provide a master's level academic qualification. This latter element has subsequently been modified (from Cohort 3 onwards), enabling qualification in fourteen months, but with a diploma rather than a master's degree. The programmes of study initially developed by the two lead universities had to negotiate the challenges of meeting the professional requirements of the accrediting body (the General Social Care Council at the time), providing a generic education programme and making suitable practice learning opportunities available, within a compressed timescale, and for delivery within a matter of months of being commissioned as programme providers. This inevitably created some challenges and led to some compromises, as earlier evaluations have identified (Smith et al., 2013; Baginsky and Manthorpe, 2014).

The first cohort of 185 recruits to Step Up to Social Work began their studies in September 2010, of whom 168 completed in March 2012; the second cohort of 227 started in February 2012, with 214 completing by August 2013. Two previous evaluations reviewed the development, organisation of the programme (Smith et al., 2013); and the experience of Step Up to Social Work participants (Baginsky and Manthorpe, 2014). These evaluations provided insights into the qualifying phase of recruits' experience, drawing conclusions which were broadly positive. Recruits to the qualifying programme found it challenging but rewarding; a very high proportion completed the programme and moved on to posts in child and family social work; employers spoke positively of the quality of participants and the effectiveness of partnership arrangements; and programme delivery appeared to be robust and relevant to the learning needs of the recruits. Concerns were identified, though, over the relative lack of diversity amongst participants, about the capacity of the programme to provide a genuinely generic learning experience;

about some aspects of the educational provision; and about organisational failures in some cases. Thus, whilst first impressions remained reasonably positive, there was a recognised need to address outstanding questions, to do with sustainability of a 'good start', retention and career progression, and the extent to which Step Up to Social Work might make a distinctive continuing contribution to enhancing the social work workforce.

Methodological Outline

The methodological approach adopted for the evaluation is grounded in the objectives set out in the specification of the study, set out above. In order to address the discrete elements of the specification, a number of distinct methods were adopted, which address each key question respectively, whilst also providing the basis for an integrated analysis. They draw on previous methodological developments, and prior studies of related topics (Carpenter et al., 2011; 2012; 2015; Smith et al., 2012; 2013), supplemented by specific techniques, such as those developed to retrospectively identify and track longitudinal study samples (Hackett et al., 2013).

Six workstreams were initially specified, as follows, and these were implemented with some slight adjustments in the course of the evaluation:

Ascertaining destinations of SUSW graduates and locating comparators

In order to determine what had happened to Step Up to Social Work graduates, the evaluation used contact details of graduates who had given permission to the Department for Education to be approached for evaluation purposes. We supplemented these with information provided by SUSW programme partnerships, participating universities, and drew on a range of social media and internet sources (LinkedIn, Facebook, 192.com) and informal contacts ('snowballing') to provide confirmation of current status and whereabouts.

Further confirmation of current status was obtainable from the Health Care Professions Council (HCPC) register of social workers, and this assisted with the task of tracking our initial respondents two years later.

It began with the compilation of a database of the first two cohorts of Step Up to Social Work (SUSW) graduates including whether or not they were employed in child and family social work three years after gaining their qualification. For Cohort 1, we were able to establish the status of 141 of the 161 participants (88%) who had completed the SUSW programme and obtained verified contact details for 118 (73%), who were still working in child and family social work. For Cohort 2, the equivalent figures were: status established, 183/212 (86%); contact details, 164 (77%).

If contact details were available, SUSW graduates were invited to respond to a comprehensive online survey of their motivations for seeking social work as a career, their goals and aspirations, progression in the profession, self-efficacy, job satisfaction, role conflict, stress and intention to leave or remain. In total, 61/118 graduates for whom contact details were available (52%) responded from Cohort 1 and 60/164 from Cohort 2 (37%).

In order to compare their views and experiences with social workers who had graduated from conventional university programmes, a comparison group was recruited. Most were recruited through local authorities who were engaged in SUSW regional partnerships, and these were topped up with graduates recruited via the alumni offices of three universities. These groups were matched with the SUSW graduates at the same stage in their careers; these are referred to as “comparators”. Most of the comparators (70%) had completed post-graduate degrees, equivalent in academic standing to SUSW; the remainder had Bachelor's degrees in social work, predominantly from universities with relatively high entry requirements in terms of exam grades. Because conventional courses are generic, the university alumni samples included graduates who had gone into adult social care; however not many of these responded. (The overall response rate from these convenience samples was estimated as 37 per cent – this is an estimated figure because in some cases intermediaries such as former course providers were asked to forward requests to participate). In general, these comparators are likely to be broadly comparable in terms of academic qualifications and/or agency experience as SUSW graduates.

Respondents to the first survey from Cohort 1 and their comparators were followed up again in 2017, five years after qualification. In this instance, only respondents to the initial survey were invited to participate; 41/61 (67%) of SUSW and 31/49 (63%) of comparators replied. These relatively small follow up sample sizes should be borne in mind when interpreting the findings.

Ascertaining career pathways

For this element of the study, a series of online surveys was carried out, to obtain information at different points in time (3 and 5 years post-qualification) on current roles, career progression and trajectories of Step Up to Social Work graduates. These surveys were designed to complement the qualitative element of the study and to provide a basis for estimating retention rates over the early stages of our respondents' social work careers.

The survey findings were initially analysed using SPSS, using the accepted criteria of validity and statistical significance, and further interpreted by the research team in accordance with the overarching mixed methods approach to analysis.

Obtaining views on career plans and commitment and influencing factors

A total of sixty-three in-depth, semi-structured interviews were carried out with both initial cohorts of Step Up to Social Work graduates and comparators in order to ascertain their views on their progression and continuing commitment to child and family social work. Here, the aims were both to identify discernible patterns in career development and also to ascertain the extent to which at these points in their career respondents could still identify the contribution of their qualifying programme to their continuing development as practitioners. Repeat interviews were undertaken two years later with eight SUSW graduates.

Thematic analysis was conducted, using Nvivo, supplemented by close reading and researcher triangulation of findings by members of the evaluation team.

Obtaining views on quality of qualifying education and career progression

This aspect of the study was informed by the components of the participant survey which incorporated a previously validated measure of self-efficacy in child and family social work (Carpenter et al., 2015). It also provided insights into the extent to which respondents felt that they were performing well in their jobs and progressing as expected in their careers. This tool, alongside the responses obtained from employer interviews undertaken under the same workstream, provides a good proxy estimate of the quality of work being carried out by Step Up to Social Work graduates.

Obtaining views of leavers

Qualitative interviews were carried out with seven Step Up to Social Work graduates who had begun to practice in child and family settings but subsequently left this area of practice. Some had moved on to other social work or related roles, whilst others had left the profession altogether. The aim of these relatively unstructured interviews was to explore the experiences of this relatively small group, and their reasons for leaving, as well as possible factors which might have encouraged or enabled them to stay in social work. These interviews were intended to identify any potential recurrent features of Step Up to Social Work which might be problematic.

Comparative findings based on the early career experiences of graduates of conventional programmes

Both survey and interview elements of the study were designed to include an equivalent number of respondents, who were currently working in child and family social work at an equivalent point in their careers. This aspect of the study was intended to examine the possibility that experiences and career progression might be different for the two groups,

and if so, to draw out possible explanations for this. The tools were applied in exactly the same way to both groups, although it did not prove possible to recruit a sufficient number of comparators to differentiate clearly between those qualifying at undergraduate or postgraduate level.

Where differences in responses or outcomes are identified, possible explanations are offered, but usually with qualifications as to the extent to which they are generally applicable, given the wide range of experiences of those undertaking social work qualifying programmes, fast track or otherwise.

Ethical considerations

The methodological approach proposed for the evaluation was subject to ethical review and approval by the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Applied Social Sciences at Durham University. In particular, the study had to take account of the need to guarantee anonymity to participants currently or previously in post, in order to avoid the risk of any critical comments being attributable and thus having a potential effect on working relationships or career prospects. It was also necessary to ensure that contact data was safely stored, and only shared with participants' agreement. Where agencies and universities could have been identifiable, any distinguishing features have been removed.

We are also clear that ethical use of these findings is also an important consideration, so the results of the evaluation need to be both acknowledged as nuanced, and viewed in context, in order to ensure that they are capable of utilisation for the achievement of the wider benefit of improvements in social work education and practice.

Survey participant characteristics

Reflecting the preponderance of female graduates in the profession, over eight out of ten respondents three years after qualification were women, as shown in Table 1. Consistent with the first evaluation report on SUSW (Smith et al., 2013), participants in the programme were disproportionately white; this was also the case for the comparator group. The majority of respondents in both groups were aged between 25 and 34. SUSW is an all post-graduate level programme. The proportion of comparators with postgraduate qualifications was 78 per cent for Cohort 1 and 59 percent for Cohort 2. At this stage, nine out of ten cohort 1 respondents and comparators were working in children's social care. For cohort 2, the figure was 84 per cent for SUSW graduates, but 62 per cent for comparators, nearly a quarter of whom were working in adult social care.

The demographic profile of Cohort 1 respondents five years after qualification (Table 2) did not vary substantially from that at three years, bearing in mind that there were fewer respondents and that they were of course two years older.

Table 1 Demographics of survey respondents three years after qualification

Demographic characteristic		Cohort 1				Cohort 2			
		SUSW		Comparators		SUSW		Comparators	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Gender	Female	51	84	42	86	54	90	27	77
	Male	10	16	7	14	6	10	8	23
Ethnic group	White	56	93	47	96	56	93	33	92
	Black/Minority Ethnic	5	7	2	4	4	7	3	8
Age group	25-29	20	33	14	29	12	21	6	17
	30-34	20	33	16	33	28	50	10	29
	35-39	9	15	5	10	7	13	<5	11
	40+	11	18	13	27	9	16	15	43
Qualifying degree level	Undergrad.	--	--	11	22	--	--	15	41
	Postgrad	61	100	38	78	60	100	22	59
Current employment	Children's Social Care	57	93	41	84	51	84	23	62
	Adult social care	<5	--	5	10	2	3	9	24
	Other	<5	--	3	6	7	12	5	14
Total		61	100	49	100	60	100	37	100

Table 2 Demographics of survey respondents five years after qualification (Cohort 1 only)

Demographic characteristic		SUSW		Comparators	
		N	%	N	%
Gender	Female	36	89	28	90
	Male	5	12	3	10
Ethnic group	White	40	98	29	94
	Black/Minority Ethnic	1	2	2	6
Age group	25-29	12	29	9	30
	30-34	12	29	10	33
	35-39	9	22	<5	10
	40+	8	20	8	27
Qualifying degree level	Undergrad.	--	22	6	19
	Postgrad	41	100	25	80
Total		41	100	31	100

Interviewees

Telephone interviews were conducted with 21 respondents from the SUSW Cohort 1 programme and 21 comparators with approximately the same length of experience post-qualifying. These interviewees were all volunteers from the respondents to the first evaluation survey. This round of interviews was completed between July and November 2015. Each interview was audio recorded and on average lasted just over 45 minutes.

The two groups were equivalent in demographic terms, except that the comparators included six aged forty years or over, compared to just one SUSW graduate. There were 18 women and three men in each group. Twenty in each group were white and two BME. Over two-thirds of all interviewees were employed as main-grade social workers; the remainder had been promoted to senior social work positions. Four SUSW graduates were then working for voluntary organisations or the NHS and one for an agency. All but one of the comparators was working for a local authority.

A similar series of interviews was undertaken with the SUSW Cohort 2 and comparators, this time with 21 respondents in all (11 from SUSW, ten women and one man and 10 Comparators, six women and four men.). These interviews were completed between October - November 2016 (SUSW) and between January - February 2017 (Comparators). Almost all were aged between 26 and 45; all were white. Three quarters were main-grade social workers; two SUSW graduates and three comparators had been promoted to senior positions. Over half in both groups were employed by a local authority, not including two agency workers. The remaining four were working for voluntary organisations or the NHS.

Between December 2015 and May 2016, 14 Employer interviews, thirteen women and one man, were completed with representatives from six different SUSW partnerships in different parts of the country. Three had management roles, five worked in workforce development, three were SUSW regional coordinators and three were practice educators. All interviews were voluntary and participants were either self-selecting or suggested interviewees. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes, were audio-recorded and the majority were conducted over the telephone at the interviewees' convenience.

A further round of interviews was completed with a sample of the original Cohort 1 interviewees in July and August 2017. From the original sample of 21, eight SUSW graduates (2 male, 6 female) were interviewed again.

Finally, a small group of seven leavers from the SUSW programme were interviewed, four from Cohort 1 and three from Cohort 2. These interviews were conducted as and when a positive response to our request for an interview was received. Two were working for a local authority in a non-social work post, one was a police officer and one was a teacher. Two graduates were taking a career break and another had moved abroad.

Methodological summary and limitations

As indicated above, the framework developed for the study provides a ready basis for the thematic integration of findings obtained from different elements of the study. Key findings generated by the quantitative survey analysis, for example, such as retention patterns, can readily be related to aspects of the qualitative interview material which are indicative of differing career orientations amongst respondents. On this basis, the study allows us both to describe emerging careers in social work, but also to outline possible explanations for the trends and variations identified.

There are a number of potential limitations to the methodological approach adopted which should be acknowledged here.

First, in spite of considerable efforts to using a variety of sources, it was not possible to trace all the SUSW graduates. In estimating retention rates we have assumed that those we were unable to locate are most likely to have left the profession. Some of these, who were still on the Health and Social Care Professions (HCPC) social work register, may have taken a career break or maternity leave. For the survey, it is certainly plausible that those who could not be contacted, or declined to take part, were more likely to be 'leavers' or may have had rather more negative perceptions of the programme.

The interview samples were quite substantial and all those who initially volunteered to be interviewed were included. These may have included a higher proportion of satisfied participants, although we offered guarantees of anonymity in order to enable those wishing to do so to express critical opinions freely. Further, despite attempts to recruit a larger number of leavers, the number responding to requests to take part has been relatively small. Although leavers' comments are largely consistent with findings from other elements of the evaluation, they cannot be given undue weight.

Second, the comparator group represents a small proportion of those qualifying through a varied range of mainstream routes and going on to practice in child and family social work. Seventy per cent of respondents had postgraduate qualifications, whereas 64 per cent of newly qualified social workers in 2010-12 graduated from an undergraduate programme (Skills for Care, 2016). While the comparators are a reasonably good match with the SUSW programme, they are not representative of all conventional programmes. So it is important not to generalise too readily about those who follow this pathway into practice or their very different qualifying programmes.

Third, the evaluation relates to the first two cohorts of Step Up to Social Work graduates, although employer responses may not have differentiated between these and later cohorts. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the programme was subsequently reduced in length from 18 months to 14 months, and the research element was removed as an integral requirement. We are unable to comment here on the possible effects of that change.

And, finally, the presentation of findings in aggregate form may tend to understate variations *within* the Step Up to Social Work programme and the experiences of participants. Like any such initiative, it is not delivered in uniform fashion everywhere, and whilst we have tried to give a flavour of some of the differences, these may not be quite so apparent here as they no doubt have been for those 'on the ground' (see also Smith et al., 2013).

Findings: Retention

We have taken a three-fold approach to understanding the dynamics of the early careers of social workers recruited by way of Step Up to Social Work. This has included the development of a detailed database of recruits' status at three years (Cohorts 1 and 2) and five years (Cohort 1) following qualification; questionnaire data on recruits' career moves to this point, and their future career intentions; and interview findings relating to the factors which have encouraged them to remain in the profession, the reasons behind their current intentions, supplemented by insights provided by those who have left child and family social work.

Survey findings: SUSW graduates, retention rates at three and five years after qualification

An important concern about fast-track schemes social work is whether their graduates are retained in the profession or leave, possibly using it as a stepping stone to another career (Croisdale-Appleby, 2014; Narey, 2014). For both SUSW cohorts, we obtained current details of their work status three years following qualification and for Cohort 1, at five years as well. We drew on information provided by the Department for Education, employers and universities who had been responsible for providing the SUSW programme and fellow SUSW participants. We were also able to supplement and provide additional verification for this information internet sources, including LinkedIn, Facebook and 192.com. Finally, we checked the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) register of social workers. It is not possible to practice as a social worker in England without registration, so if a graduate was not on the register they were considered as having left the profession in England. Registration takes place every two years; however, it is possible for practitioners to remain on the register if they stop working during this period. We identified a small number of graduates who were on the HCPC register but not apparently practicing. Once people have been out of practice for two years, they have to re-register if they want to return.

Table 3 shows the number of trainees on the first two cohorts of the programme, the number known to have graduated successfully and entered child and family social work, and their employment status three years later. Overall, we traced 306/373 graduates (82%). We were unable to trace 20 graduates (12%) from Cohort 1 and 29 (14%) from Cohort 2.

The retention rates are based on the number of graduates confirmed as practicing as registered social workers in both local authorities and the third sector, as a proportion of those entering child and family social work three years previously. As shown in Table 3, the retention rate three years after qualification was 85 percent for Cohort 1 and 80 per cent for Cohort 2. Five years on the retention rate for Cohort 1 had reduced to 73 per cent.

Table 3 SUSW Graduates Cohorts 1 and 2: Status at three years and five years after qualification

Status	Cohort 1	Cohort 2
Trainees on the programme	185	227
Graduates entering child and family social work	161 (87%)	212 (93%)
Not known/unable to trace	20 (12%)	29 (14%)
Traced 3 years on and status confirmed	141 (88%)	183 (86%)
Confirmed Leavers after 3 years	24 (15%) ¹	14 (7%) ¹
Retention after 3 years (confirmed as practising in child and family social work)	137 (85%) ¹	169 (80%) ¹
Retention after 5 years (confirmed as practising in child and family social work)	118 (73%)	

¹ (% of all graduates)

Career goals and aspirations

Aside from the evidence of their current status, the survey also sought to determine possible 'next steps' for those responding. At both three years and five years after qualification, Cohort 1 SUSW and comparators respondents were asked – in terms of their career goals/aspirations – where they saw themselves in three years' time. Three out of ten respondents from both groups saw themselves in the same or a similar post in child and family social work (Table 4). SUSW graduates were rather more likely than comparators to see themselves as a manager in child and family social work; comparators were more likely to see themselves as a specialist practitioner.

Table 4 Cohort 1 three years after qualifying: Respondents' goals/aspirations in three years' time

Career goals/aspirations	SUSW		Comparators	
	N	%	N	%
Same/similar post (in child and family social work)	20	32	16	33
Specialist practitioner (in child and family social work)	15	23	16	33
Different post in social work (e.g. adult social care)	1	2	4	8
Manager in social work	13	21	4	8
Alternative career (outside social work)	5	8	5	10
Prefer not to say	2	3	1	2
Other	5	8	3	6
Total	61	100	49	100

After five years, only a quarter of the 72 respondents from both groups saw themselves still in the same job three years later (i.e. eight years after qualification). Thirteen aspired to be a specialist practitioner and 15 to be a manager. Four expected to be in another field of social work, such as adult social care and nine envisaged an alternative career outside social work. The remainder preferred not to say or gave another response.

As will be evident from the discussion of a 'typology' of career orientations below, this pattern of responses reflects the stated aspirations of those interviewed in the course of the evaluation.

Intention to leave

At each iteration of the survey carried out for the purposes of the evaluation the questionnaire included a section on retention and respondents' intention to leave social work; so for both cohorts and relevant comparator groups, we have been able to obtain some idea of the stability of social workers' commitment to their current roles. This is important because 'intention to leave' stated as 'very likely' is the best indicator of the respondent actually moving on from her/his current position, to another social work post or to leave the profession. In this study we asked those who said they were intending to leave whether or not they intended to remain in social work.

On the first occasion the survey was administered, approximately one third of those responding (SUSW Cohort 1 and Comparators) responded that it was 'fairly likely' and one-fifth 'very likely' that they would be actively looking for a new job in the following year. However, three-fifths also stated that they would still be seeking to remain within child and family social work.

Just over half of Cohort 2 SUSW graduates reported that they were likely to leave their current job in the next year (one-third 'fairly likely' compared with less than one-fifth 'very likely'), with two-thirds of these nonetheless wanting to stay in child and family social work; two-thirds of the comparators stated that they were likely to leave (two-fifths stating this was 'very likely'), with fewer than half wanting to remain in the children's social work sector. Note that the overall numbers are small and the difference between SUSW and comparators is not statistically significant.

Here, then, there is perhaps some sign that a targeted recruitment strategy such as that established through Step Up to Social Work may result in a workforce that remains committed to the area of practice into which they were specifically recruited over time.

Interview findings: future expectations of remainers and leavers' reflections

Further evidence on current plans and expectations was gained from the interviews with SUSW graduates and comparators. Consistent with the survey findings the majority of those interviewed still intended to be in social work in two years' time. Whilst some graduates were seemingly content with their current employer and position, others anticipated moving local authority in the short to medium term while staying in the social work sector. The same sentiment was largely reflected in the comparator sample, for example,

"I'll still be here [in 2 years]. I'll have finished my two years post-grad...so hopefully I'll be here and getting more complicated family work. [You remain committed to social work?] Oh Yes, absolutely.

Many of the SUSW graduates did not consider that their early experiences as newly qualified social workers had been significantly different from expectations but acknowledged that you cannot truly understand the pressures, the workload and nature of the job until immersed in it.

In contrast to SUSW graduates, comparators' views widely varied across the sample. Many were very positive and stated that the reality of social work exceeded their initial expectations. Others had initially been affected by '*fear of what child protection would be like*', '*lack of confidence*', '*responsibility*' and '*time pressure and balance*'; but these fears were allayed once in the practice setting. A handful of respondents were quite negative: they highlighted high levels of stress which were difficult to cope with, and workload and

administrative constraints which hindered their attempts to implement best practice in their role.

Interviewees were asked whether their views of the sector and their chosen career had changed since being in employment. Whilst the realities of the job were foremost in people's responses (i.e. high caseloads, difficult working conditions, high levels of stress), some interviewees did comment on their increased appreciation and frustration with the impact that extrinsic factors (e.g. political, structural, organisational factors) had on their ability to do the job.

"I think I'd always questioned the kind of societal attitude of social work. I was never a believer in that. So I think, no, my perception of social work hasn't changed. I suppose I'm just more aware really of some of, kind of the system failures, more of the impact of like political drives on the things that we do. It's about more on, kind of a structural and organisational level and I'm more aware of how political it is."

In terms of changes in opinion about the role of a social worker, several SUSW interviewees expressed, in one way or another, a greater sense of respect, awareness and in some cases, pride in undertaking social work. Nevertheless, there were some who indicated that they were still dismayed at public and in some cases other professionals' perceptions of social workers.

"I think I've gained more respect for social workers, the hard work they do and how little they are valued by society...and then I feel depressed"

"your mistakes are always the things that are talked about...you face criticism on almost a daily basis"

"being involved in social work and knowing the complexities of it has probably changed my opinion of it...probably more respect and more knowledge of the work and skills and everything you need to be able to do the job"

In line with SUSW interviewees, comparators often expressed pride and feelings of a great sense of achievement in respect to being involved in social work. For many, social work changed their self-perception in terms of their impact and role. Some, however, were discouraged by all the stress and initial idealization of the profession.

"I think that social work is not a career, you know, it's a vocation. It's literally you... The expectation is you will just do everything. He will just stay until the job's done. And if that means that cuts into your evening, that's what has to happen. And it's sort of like an unspoken expectation, so it becomes more of a vocation"

"I think I am a bit more realistic about it all and a bit more realistic about actually what we're able to do within the limits of our role. I mean years before I did my social work degree, I always said to my social work friend I'd never be a social

worker, they don't get any thanks. It felt like an awful job I couldn't do it myself and then I ended up here. I must have changed to some degree."

There were among both groups of interviewees, SUSW and comparators, a number of individuals who suggested that their future plans included carrying on their career in the voluntary sector, agency work or academia.

"I'm not opposed to going out of [Local Authority] Social Work temporarily in terms of working maybe for a voluntary agency or doing some project work or something but certainly social work or a similar type of role, definitely, [I'm] really committed."

Those who were considering leaving the profession often cited 'push factors' which related to a combination of extrinsic and intrinsic factors such as the stress of the role/job, desire to achieve a better work life balance, disillusionment and dissatisfaction.

"I've had a few conversations with my partner about, you know, just going to jack this in and you know, actively look for jobs outside of social work.... Things have got better now that my manager situation, my manager has been sorted out, and I suppose I had a bit of a wait... But I think if a good job opportunity came up, I mean, I think I'll do something about it".

"To be honest... I'm thinking about... I mean, up until I left, eight, seven, six months pregnant, I was still working stupid hours. Ridiculously stressed. It took me a long time to get to a point where I was calm again and have rested. Basically, stepping out of it, I realised how unhealthy it was. How stressed I was. What it was doing to me, my health and my friends and family and things like that. I have to really think about whether I want that. Yes, to be honest, I think I probably won't be in social work [in two years' time]".

Those who had experienced working in a voluntary sector or agency post acknowledged an array of factors which they considered differed from their original posts in local authorities. Whilst it is difficult to generalise from such comments due to individual circumstances, it does appear that several areas of work (working culture, work life balance, pressure and risk, rewards, personal and emotional well-being) are considered to be more beneficial outside of local authority settings.

"[in] the voluntary sector] 35 hours means 35 hours...although we do assessments they're not done in the same fashion, more pause for thought"

"as an agency worker it's not looked down upon so much is you leave at five o'clock"

"LA is so high pressure, in the voluntary sector they're very risk averse"

Similarly, the seven SUSW graduates who had left child and family social work (the 'leavers') who were interviewed for this evaluation cited a number of push factors which

remainers had identified as having a significant bearing on their decision to stay within or leave the profession.

It was apparent that both personal and organisational factors played a role a decision to leave local authority child and family social work. Personal factors often related to their perception of a mismatch between their own personal expectations, values and conscience and the role which they were being asked to carry out: *'I just had a gut feeling that child and family social work was not for me, the degree of power and control didn't feel right to me'*. Another commonly cited reason for leaving was to 'restore or protect personal health and well-being': *"I got my life back [when I left]"* or to better accommodate personal arrangements, such as less travelling, or being closer to family.

Leavers also commented on negative aspects of organisational culture in local authorities ranging from personality clashes with colleagues and management to oppressive practices, lack of autonomy, frustration with bureaucracy and a feeling of failing children and families because of a lack of resources and support.

Leavers' reflections on the SUSW programme itself, and being prepared for practice, were largely in line with views articulated by remainers; some were complimentary about the SUSW programme whereas others were more critical. From our sample of seven leavers, only one had chosen not to practice social work at the point of qualification, whereas the remainder had entered the profession and accepted posts in child and family social work. With such a small sample there does not appear to be any pattern in terms of the time at which they chose to leave their post. There is often a complex interplay of reasons which contribute to someone's decision to leave. Some graduates were more resilient than others and remained in the profession in spite of very negative experiences. Others, less resilient, described apparently less serious situations which had led them to question their positions. What is striking are the different thresholds of tolerance, resilience and mechanisms for coping that people possess, irrespective of the fact that they have participated in a rigorous selection process and undertaken a comprehensive training programme. In view of this, retention is affected by a myriad of factors, some of which can be considered static (i.e. providing thorough preparation for practice, conducting rigorous selection processes) and some which will always be dynamic and context-specific (i.e. work-based setting and experiences, individual disposition).

Retention: Key points

Over the early years of their careers, a large majority of Step Up to Social Work graduates as well as the comparators in this study stay in child and family social work. If they do leave, it is as likely to be for personal reasons as it is to do with dissatisfaction with their experience as social workers. There is some evidence, however, of horizontal movement within the range of child and family social work roles: geographically, between agencies, between settings (into adoption and fostering and leaving care, for example), and between sectors (into voluntary or independent organisations).

The survey data and the interviews taken together, suggest, not surprisingly, that Step Up to Social Work graduates appear somewhat more likely to remain committed to child and family social work over time than those qualifying from generic programmes, although this difference is not shown to be statistically significant.

Interview responses appear to show a range of orientations to social work practice amongst both Step Up to Social Work graduates and comparators. In the main, these underlined the continuing commitment of practitioners to their chosen specialist area of work, but there were also reports of experiencing high levels of stress and other dissatisfactions which did appear to affect the intention to remain for some respondents. This acknowledged area of concern would merit further dedicated study.

Findings: Early Career Experiences and Perspectives

Beyond the question of retention, the evaluation sought to establish in rather more depth the nature of child and family social workers' early career experiences, and the extent to which they might be informed by prior expectations, preparation for practice (including their qualifying courses), and 'in work' influencing factors, such as the nature and quality of supervision.

Survey findings: preparation, experience of the role, supervision, stress

The survey questionnaire included items to elicit respondents' views on the extent to which they felt well-prepared for practice, how they rated the support and supervision provided by their employing agencies, levels of job satisfaction, and whether or not they were experiencing negative effects related to their work.

The survey provided an opportunity for respondents to complete a free text box on the extent to which they felt their programme had prepared them for a career in social work. Most SUSW graduates considered that their qualifying programme had prepared them well to undertake the role of a frontline practitioner.

"I feel that the Step Up course was a very good platform for my career development as I felt more prepared than students from other courses when entering child protection".

"It provided me with valuable experience of frontline practice amongst skilled social workers".

Practice learning contributed to the sound career base they believed they had acquired:

"Good practice learning placements. Good exposure to statutory work. Opportunity to develop written skills and critical analysis as well as critical reflection".

Some, however, were critical of the extent to which the SUSW programme had prepared them for their future careers.

"I do not think the programme prepared me in terms of further progression; as the focus was completing an MA in 18 months there was limited discussion of life beyond the course".

"Although it gave me an insight the real learning came once my career begun"...

Five years on, responses were more equivocal, perhaps understandably in view of the passage of time. Once again, though, the grounding in a specialist area of practice was recognised as a positive advantage to have at an early stage of one's career.

“[It] did prepare me for front line practice better than the usual degree route and in turn that allowed me to develop personal skills such as resilience in the workplace in order to progress”....

Comparators also expressed a range of views about the preparation offered by their programmes, with some effusive comments offered:

“It [the course] gave me a good grounding in understanding the context of social work and I therefore find additional training easy to absorb. Now that I feel comfortable in my role I’m better placed to think about career progression”...

Others, though, were more critical:

“My course gave me little preparation for career development. I gained some insight into this through placement but not through university teaching”.

Views on the adequacy of preparation offered by both SUSW and conventional qualifying programmes were mixed. However, some SUSW participants felt that there was more of an expectation from employers that their career pathways had been mapped out.

“I had the sense that because the organisation had invested in our [SUSW] training and development and was aware of what skills we had, then we were being supported to further our career development... with an appropriate regard to our skill set”.

Current work experience

The survey also focused on aspects of the current work experience, including role clarity and role conflict, job satisfaction, their experience of supervision, attitudes and perceptions, and dealing with the expectations of the job. This offers very helpful insights into the potential relationship between environmental factors (such as working conditions and relationships), attitudes, subjective experiences and orientations to the work itself. Previous research has shown that these factors are likely to affect the retention of child and family social workers (Carpenter et al., 2012, Hussein et al., 2014).

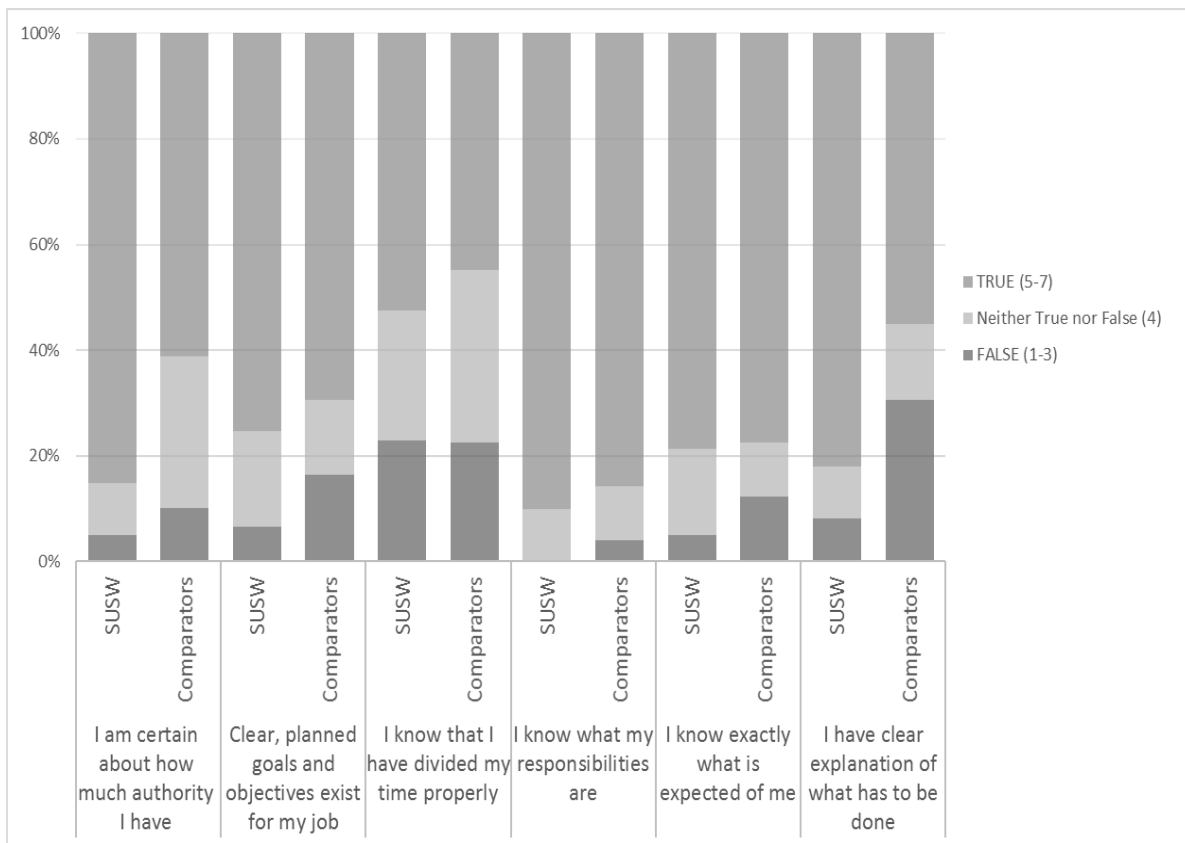
On validated measures employed in the survey, three years after qualification both SUSW graduates in Cohorts 1 and 2 and their comparators were generally quite clear about their roles, most were positive about the supervision received and were generally satisfied with their jobs. Conversely, around a quarter of respondents reported a high degree of role conflict and three in ten were experiencing clinical levels of stress.

Role clarity

Role clarity (Rizzo et al., 1970) includes having clear, planned objectives and responsibilities in your job and being certain about how much authority you have. Role clarity is an important outcome for social workers, particularly at an early stage of their careers. It is measured by a standardised scale comprising six items which are scored a seven point Likert scale, which ranged from 'very false' (=1) to 'very true' (=7).

Results for Cohort 1 are shown in Figure 1. Respondents were "quite clear" about their roles. Almost all respondents were clear about their responsibilities. Conversely, they were least likely to be clear about their time management. There was a small, statistically significant difference ($p < .05$) between the mean total scores for SUSW graduates and comparators. This was accounted for mainly by SUSW graduates being clearer about how much authority they had and feeling that there was clear explanation about what they were expected to achieve. At five years on, the SUSW graduates retained a small statistically significant advantage in role clarity scores ($p < .05$). However, this difference was not replicated in Cohort 2, where no statistically significant differences were detected.

**Figure 1 Cohort 1 role clarity three years after qualification
(SUSW=61, Comparators=49)**

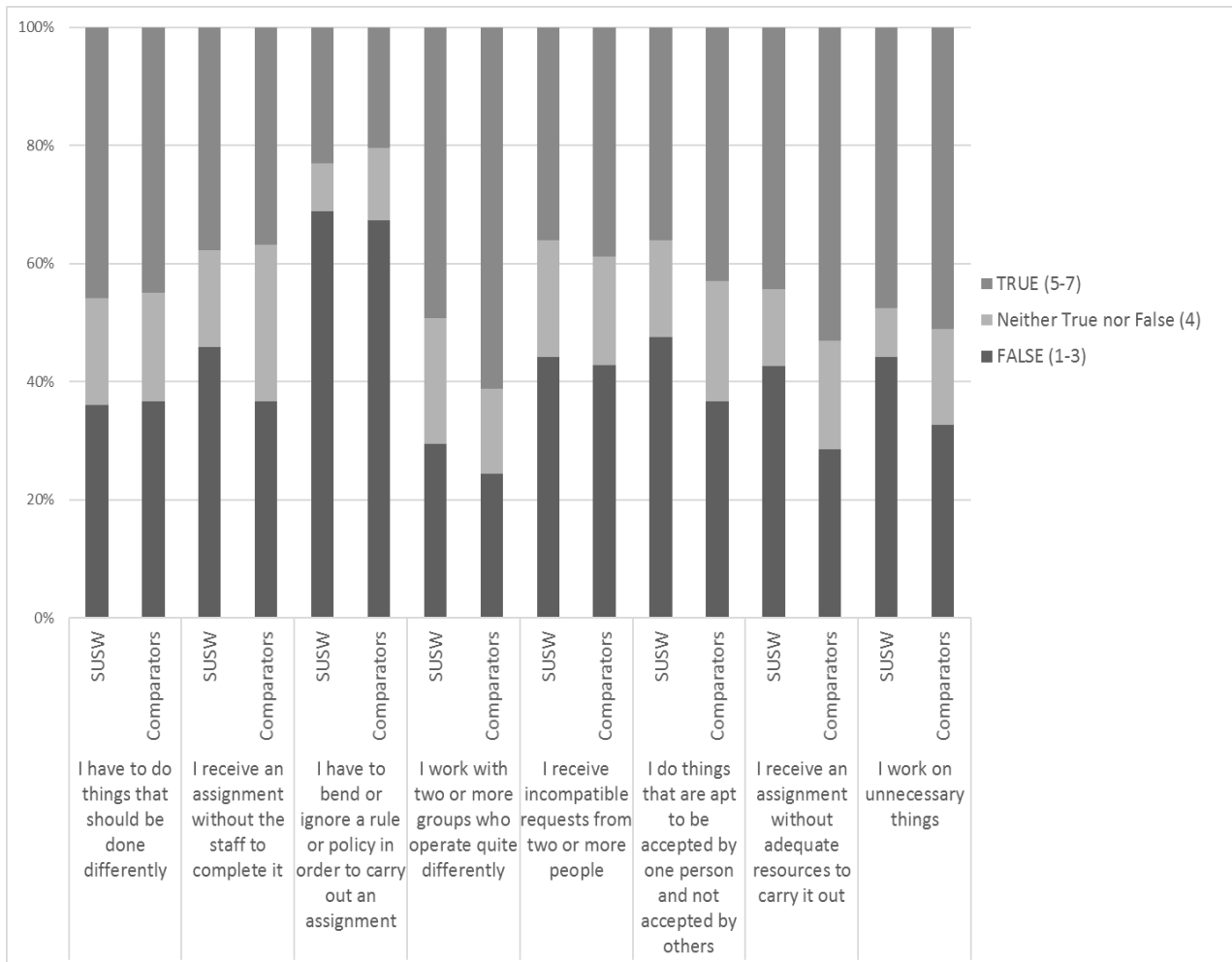


Role conflict

Role conflict on the other hand, is a less positive outcome. It arises from competing demands, inadequate resources, incompatible requests, and disagreement at the level of management. Like role clarity it is measured using a seven-point Likert scale. Results for Cohort 1 three years after qualification are shown in Figure 2.

Almost half the respondents endorsed three or more role conflict items, notably “having to do things which should be done differently”, “having to work with two or more groups who operate quite differently” and “receiving an assignment without adequate resources to carry it out”. Findings were similar for Cohort 2 participants at the same stage in their career; there were no statistically significant differences between mean ratings for SUSW and Comparators. Follow-up of Cohort 1 participants at 5 years showed no significant differences between groups or over time. The mean total role conflict scores were very similar to those recorded by 674 NQSWs at the end of their first year of employment (Carpenter et al., 2015).

Figure 2 Proportion of respondents reporting false, neither true nor false, or true for role conflict items three years after qualification by survey group
(SUSW=61, CG=49)

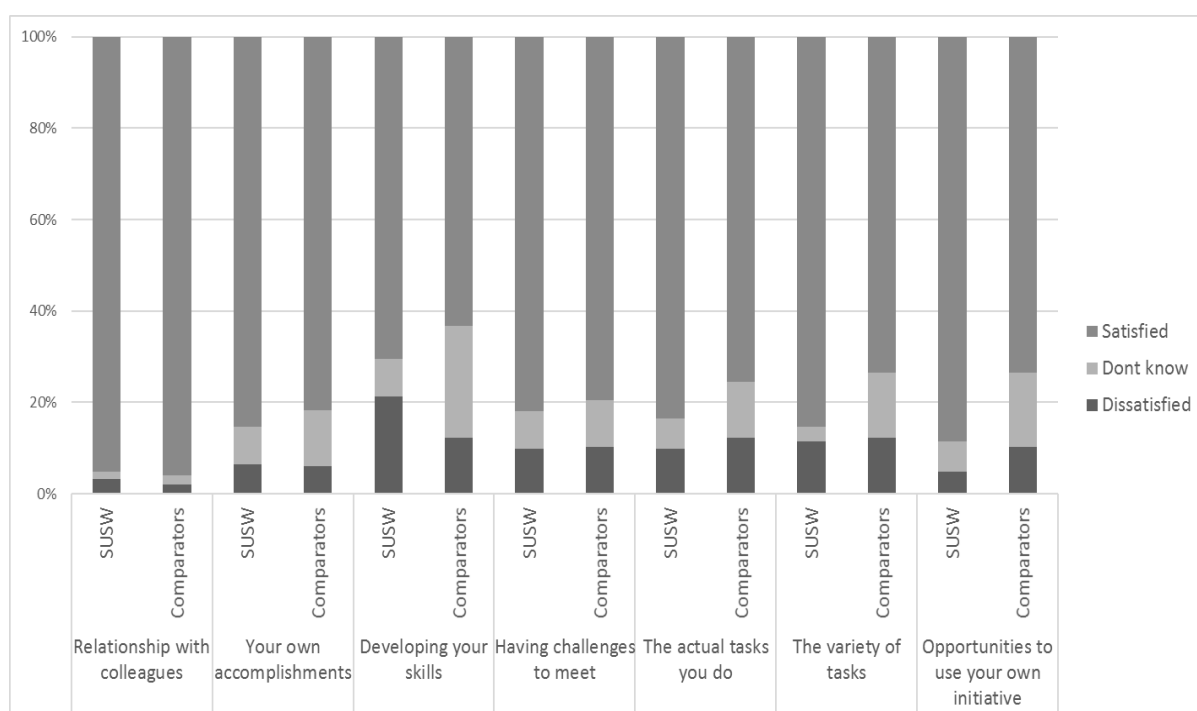


Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction was assessed by the Job Satisfaction Scale (Dyer and Hoffenberg 1975). This is a well-established scale used across a wide range of occupations. It comprises 17 items relating to intrinsic and extrinsic elements of job satisfaction. Job satisfaction was measured using a five-point scale; very dissatisfied=1, dissatisfied=2, don't know=3, satisfied=4, very satisfied=5. Job satisfaction has two main components: intrinsic job satisfaction refers to satisfaction with the nature of the job itself, the nature and variety of tasks, your own accomplishments, opportunities to use your own initiative, having challenges to meet, and relationships with fellow workers. Extrinsic job satisfaction refers to pay and working conditions, flexibility and number of hours of work, ease of travel to work, the quality of management and supervision, opportunities for advancement, and job security.

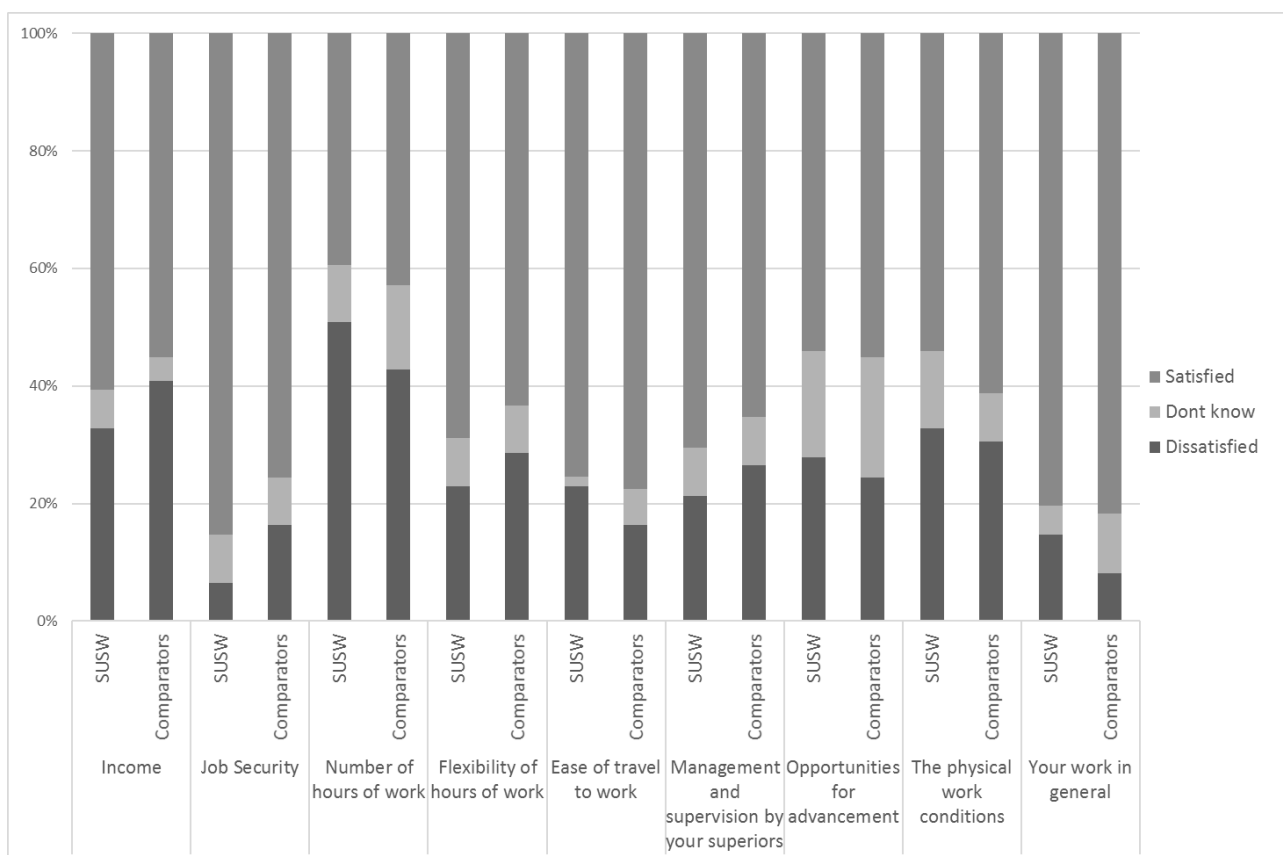
As shown in Figure 3, the great majority of respondents in Cohort 1 in both groups reported that they were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with their relationships with fellow workers; with the nature and variety of the work they were doing; having challenges to meet; being able to use their initiative; and with their own accomplishments. Findings were similar for Cohort 2 participants at the same stage in their career; there were no statistically significant differences between mean ratings for SUSW and Comparators. Follow-up of Cohort 1 participants at 5 years showed no significant differences between groups or over time. These ratings were very similar to those made on the same measure by 947 NQSWs one year after qualification (Carpenter et al., 2015).

**Figure 3 Cohort 1 Intrinsic Job Satisfaction three years after qualifying
(SUSW=61, Comparators =49)**



A majority of respondents were also satisfied with many of the extrinsic aspects of job satisfaction, notably job security, flexibility of hours and ease of travel to work (Figure 4). Nevertheless, around half were dissatisfied with the number of hours they were required to work; between three and four out of ten were dissatisfied with their income; and three in ten were dissatisfied with their physical working conditions. There were no statistically significant differences between SUSW graduates and comparators in either cohort and no differences between ratings at three years and five years for Cohort 1. Overall, eight in ten respondents reported that they were satisfied, or very satisfied with their "work in general". This was exactly the same proportion as for 1,184 social workers who responded to the survey of NQSWs one year into employment (Carpenter et al., 2015).

**Figure 4 Cohort 1 Extrinsic Job Satisfaction three years after qualifying
(SUSW=61, CG=49)**



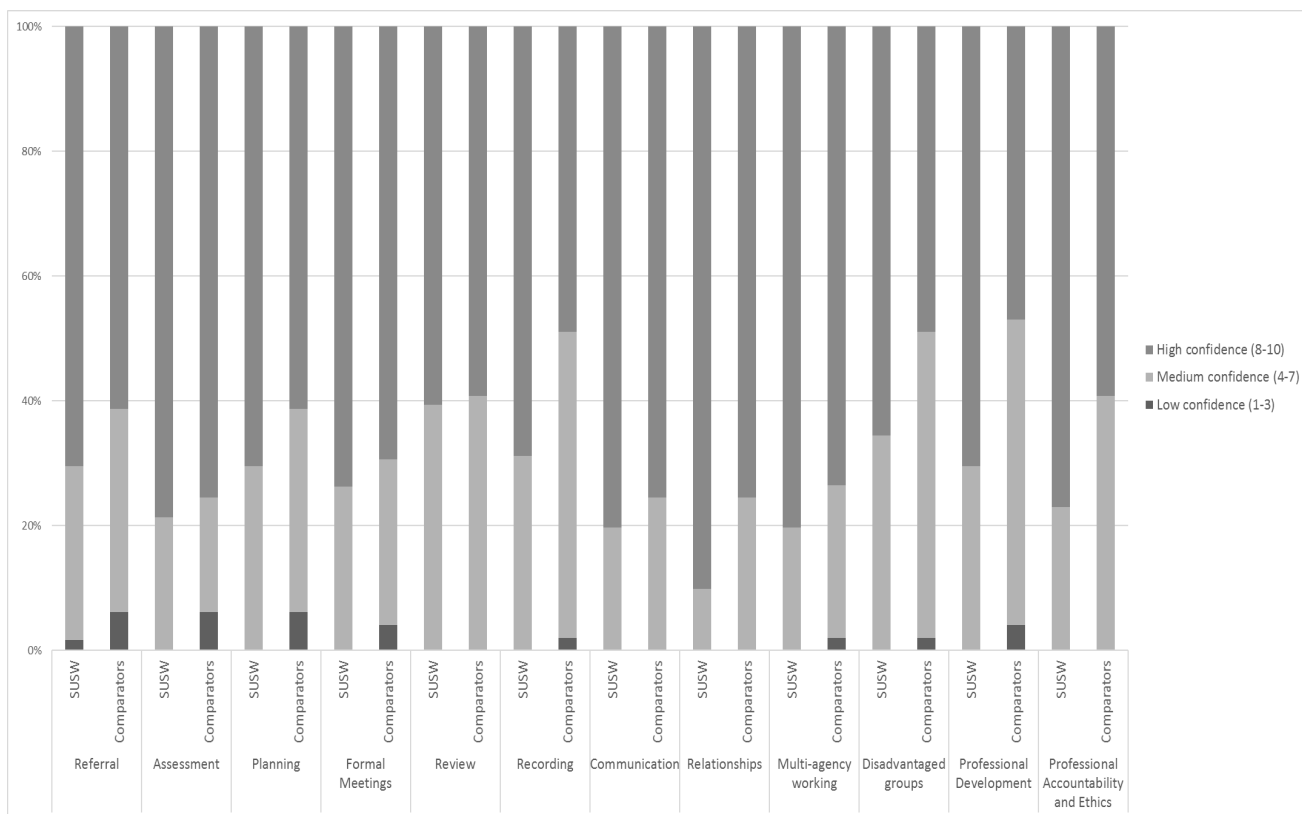
Self-efficacy, stress and intention to leave

Respondents were asked to rate their confidence in core activities in child and family social work, including assessment, care planning, recording and multi-agency working. This measure was derived and validated by Carpenter et al. (2015) from the set of outcome statements developed by the Children’s Workforce Development Council, following extensive consultation with employers and practitioners.

Three years after qualification, both Cohort 1 SUSW graduates and their comparators reported a high level of self-efficacy for all items. Most respondents rated themselves as “very confident” or “extremely confident” on all items (Figure 5). SUSW graduates scored slightly higher than comparators on two of the twelve items, “case recording” and “professional accountability and ethics”; this was reflected in slightly higher mean total score SUSW graduates (M=97.6) vs. comparator group (M=92.0), $p = .02$.

Figure 5 Proportion reporting low, medium, and high confidence bands in self efficacy items three years after qualification

(SUSW=61, CG=49)



Results for Cohort 2 SUSW graduates and the comparators at three years showed similarly high levels of self-efficacy. This time, however, there was no statistically significant difference in the mean total scores for each group (SUSW graduates (M=95.2) vs. comparator group (M=89.2, $p = 0.139$).

After five years, SUSW Cohort 1 graduates reported a small advantage over their comparators in two more items, “case reviewing” and “maintaining and creating relationships with children and families”. This resulted in an overall statistically significant difference in the total self-efficacy scores for SUSW graduates (M=102.2) vs comparator group (M=95.0), $p = .015$.

Comparisons of self-efficacy scale items between 3-years and 5-years for SUSW graduates revealed statistically significant increases in mean total self-efficacy scores overall ($p = .001$). This was reflected in increases for: referral, assessment, planning, formal meetings, review, recording, multi-agency working, and professional accountability and ethics. No significant differences were found for the comparator group.

Overall, these self-efficacy ratings were a little higher than those reported by participants at the end of successive cohorts of the Newly Qualified Social Worker programme (2008-11). There the mean total scores for 530 graduates ranged from 91.1 to 94.5.

Respondents' levels of stress were measured using the GHQ-12, a validated and well-established self-report instrument. At three years after qualification 18 (28%) of Cohort 1 SUSW graduates and 14 (29%) of comparators were above the threshold for clinical levels of stress. (This is defined as significantly severe that a GP consultation would be advisable.). For Cohort 2 SUSW graduates at three years, the proportions were very similar: 20 SUSW graduates (33%) and 11 comparators (30%) had a score above the threshold. Differences between groups were not statistically significant. Similarly, there were no statistically significant differences between three year and five years scores for graduates in either group. For comparison, the NQSW surveys between 2009-11 found from 33 per cent to 40 per cent of respondents were above the clinical threshold one year into employment (Carpenter et al., 2015). Studies of stress among similar occupational groups using the same measure have reported similar figures: for example, nurses, ambulance staff and hospital consultants (around 30-32%); civil servants in London (27%); military personnel (31%) and police officers (40%) (Goodwin et al. 2013). Goodwin and colleagues noted that research on these occupational groups consistently finds higher proportions of employee stress than general population studies which typically show between 14 and 17 per cent above the same threshold.

In order to provide greater depth to the findings on job satisfaction and intention to leave, a multivariate analysis was carried out on these aspects of the survey responses. In most cases, though, variables identified were not statistically significant. Nonetheless, 3 years after qualifying, the analysis indicated that being female, and a greater sense of role clarity, and 5 years after qualification, a greater sense of role clarity predicted enhanced self-efficacy. There was no consistent evidence of differences in self-efficacy between Step Up to Social Work graduates and comparators, though.

Regarding the intention to leave, at both three and five years post-qualification, respondents from both SUSW and comparator groups were less likely to state that they were likely to be actively seeking an alternative job when their levels of job satisfaction based on 'extrinsic' factors (such as pay and conditions and the quality of supervision provided) were higher. On the other hand, although job-related stress was strongly linked to the likelihood of seeking alternative employment at the three year point, this effect had disappeared by five years after qualifying. This is perhaps a surprising finding, or combination of findings, but may be correlated with evidence from our interviews on 'coping' or career management strategies; that is, longer serving practitioners may well develop specific skills in managing or bracketing off particular pressures or stresses associated with their work. Whether this is to the ultimate benefit of those with whom they are working is another question for further investigation, arguably.

Interview findings: Career management strategies, preparation and influencing factors

Transition from student to newly qualified social worker

Many felt that the programme, and their statutory placement opportunities, had given them a good grounding for practice leading to a smooth transition from student to qualified practitioner. Others suggested that there had still been a 'huge gap' to overcome at the end of the course in order to become, and feel like, a professional social worker.

"I certainly didn't cover everything in my final placement. It did feel like quite a big step up from student and that final placement to then being a qualified social worker and having my own case load"

There are a range of personal and programme-related reasons that can impact upon the transition phase for SUSW students. That said, a fair proportion of SUSW graduates generally had positive transitions to their newly qualified role, whereas for comparators this was rarely the case. None of the comparators in this study had taken posts where they had had placements. Those interviewees who had not felt ready to hold a qualified post after graduation reported high levels of stress in their new role.

[T]he workplace is vastly different [to the qualifying programme]. And the expectations are different. I think, truly, the only way to survive as a social worker is to cut some corners, which I never expected to.... I'm so overloaded....

On the SUSW course, factors such as whether the graduate held their newly qualified post in the same team in which they undertook their final placement clearly influenced graduates' responses to the question of whether they felt sufficiently prepared for practice. For some, staying in the same team gave them confidence and a sense of being valued and capable of taking on a full caseload. Whereas for others, staying in the same team led to additional pressures to 'hit the ground running' due to them being well known to the team and having experience of its practice and culture, as such they were expected to take on more complex cases, even though their newly-qualified status was supposed to protect them.

"I suppose there was [a jump] you know in terms of I knew the area and I knew the people and the system, so that was all good. But I think then what happens is because you know that, people forget that actually you're only just recently qualified...you start to get child protection cases almost immediately"

"I remember reading about being newly qualified and about the first year being about keeping your head above water. I didn't feel like that at all. I felt like the transition was quite smooth...you're getting used to higher caseloads and more responsibility, but it didn't feel like it was a massive jump"

Nevertheless, nearly all interviewees agreed that there was a point usually within 12-18 months where they felt competent in their role, described by one, as *'the point at which you don't feel like you are going to make an enormous mistake and you notice you are not the one always asking questions in your team meetings'*.

Views amongst the SUSW cohort were mixed in relation to whether Step Up to Social Work graduates were different from their social work counterparts progressing through other qualification courses. Whilst some considered that there were differences in terms of the standards of written work and critical reflection, others denied such suggestions arguing that irrespective of course and training all NQSWs are effectively *'in the same boat'* once they start their social work careers.

When reflecting on the nature of SUSW programme, comparators saw SUSW graduates as outstanding social workers with a very strong background in practice provided by their course.

"They're more part of the system... because they'd worked in children and families' teams... they were more aware of the systems...."

Whilst there were a lot of positive aspects stated, some, however, thought that SUSW graduates were sometimes at an advantage in employment terms. Comparators saw the practical element of the programme to be of vast importance.

"The two 100-days of placement experience every day was invaluable from a learning point [of view]".

Whereas the practice-led learning was often stated to be beneficial for the social work qualification, it was sometimes argued that it might have compromised the theoretical element of the course. In line with this criticism, comparators expressed concern about the intensity of the SUSW programme and thought that it might lead to more generic and basic knowledge rather than deep learning.

"I got the impression that their [SUSW] course was perhaps slightly less academic and more practice based."

Influencing factors and work experiences

Discussions relating to influencing factors and work experience were varied and detailed. In some cases, interviewees were drawing upon five years of post-qualification work experience and discussing highly individualised experiences in relation to particular local authorities, managers, colleagues and cases. Clearly, interviewees used the opportunity within the interview to focus on both the positive and negative aspects encountered within their careers to date. One should not forget that post qualification experiences are affected by a wide range of factors beyond the scope and control of the qualification programme.

When considering the most significant influence on the SUSW graduates' careers to date, respondents typically mentioned one of two things; either their own personal commitment and drive or the influence and value of colleagues and peers who had either supported or shaped graduates in terms of developing their skills and practice.

"I think my influence is internal. I have a particular drive, a particular set of social expectations for myself, for social justice that developed from a very, very early age because of my cultural heritage, I think. It comes from just trying to make life a bit better for other people. Quite early on in my career I realised I wasn't going to change the world. But I've recognised that, for me, it's really important to just touch the life of one or two people".

"My manager has been has been the same throughout the three years, and ... she's helped shape my everyday practice for those three years. My senior manager... had knowledge in her field and I'd ask her advice. She was always available and very experienced".

"most professionals are selfless with their practice, they really care and want to make a difference"

Interviewees mentioned a myriad of things in response to the question, 'What is key to being successful in your role?' For example, the SUSW training course, partners and family members being supportive, being part of nurturing teams and having a manageable workload as well as individually being open to opportunities.

[What do you think's had an impact and made you successful?] "Definitely the training in Step Up....confidence and competence. Having a supportive partner We were very protected at X Authority, we had a caseload that was mostly manageable"

"I think knowing that senior colleagues are in support of you, that's important when things are, are difficult. I think having the opportunity to refer to supervision is definitely a big one. I think as well on a practical level, having a realistic workload. Because certainly there have been points where the workload hasn't been realistic and I think that does impact outcomes. Whereas if that balance is right, I think actually work can be more productive and more efficient".

Comparators highlighted the same factors in terms of relationships, opportunities for learning and open-minded approaches from team managers, as well as their own ability to influence their career and make choices which allowed them to challenge themselves.

"What my service manager did when she supervised me is she did it in a very solution-focused way and got me to answer my own dilemmas. And that is when I felt incredible."

Notably, several SUSW interviewees considered personal disposition to also play a part in success and in particular whether someone was 'suitable' for the job, in other words having certain personal attributes (i.e. resilience, commitment etc.) meant that they were well equipped to cope with the stresses and strains of social work. Further insights on personality types and an emerging typology of social workers are presented below.

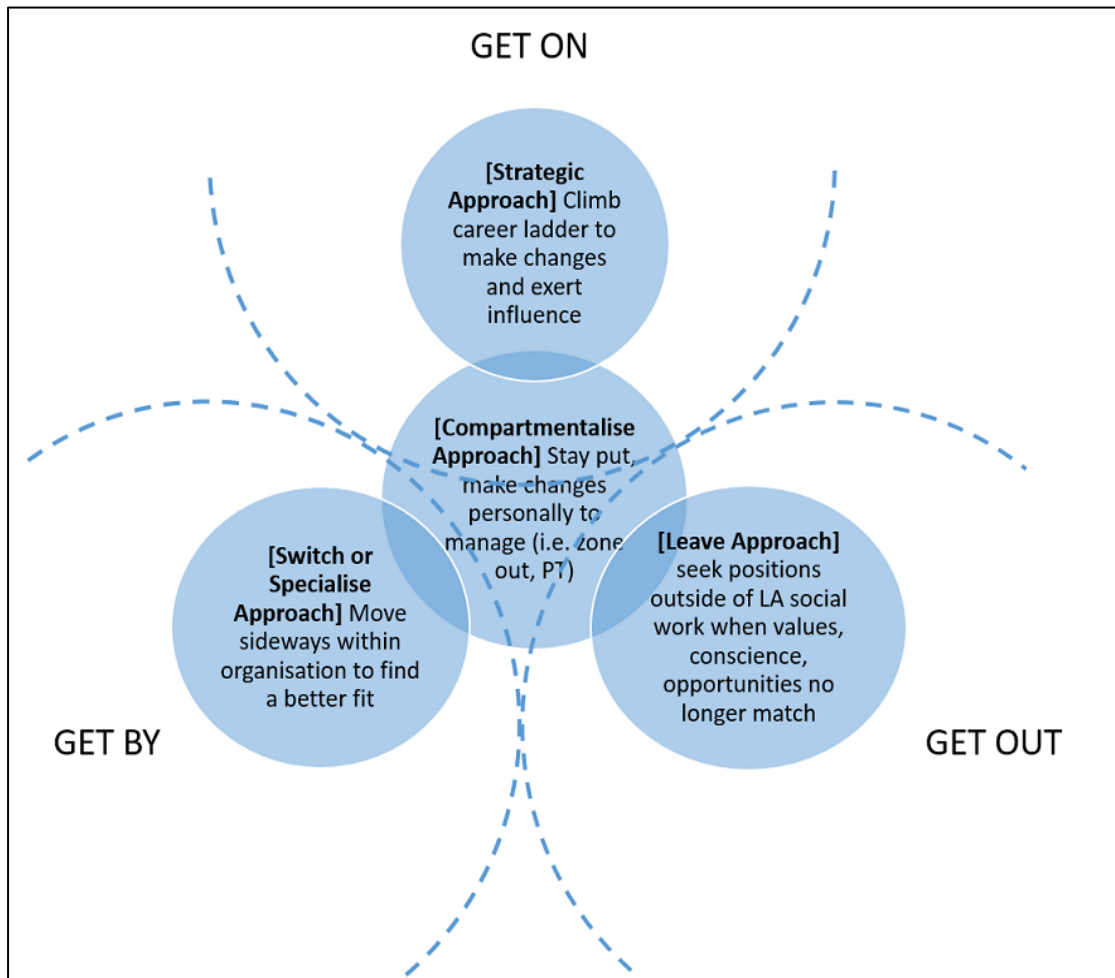
Coping strategies

Leading on from the discussion about personal 'fit' with the role of a social worker, several respondents talked of how they had made decisions on the basis of seeking either 'organisational-fit' (i.e. where the organisational culture is valued by the individual) or 'personal-fit' (i.e. allowing the individual to fulfil personal obligations outside of their job) in their roles. For some, this had meant searching for roles in particular teams (that were considered either more or less challenging) or making the decision to leave local authority work for voluntary sector or private work in order to develop as a practitioner or strike a balance with personal commitments.

"I knew at that point that LAC [looked after children] was something that I was passionate about and I could see myself going into it. But I thought that having the experience of Family Support work, through the court proceedings and managing child protection [was necessary]. I knew that was going to be difficult but I wanted to get that experience"

As reflected elsewhere in this report, individual retention in social work often relates to a complex mix of personal, emotional, cultural, organisational issues that blend to create a situation where someone is either able to cope or not. In other words, whether they *get on*, *get by* or *get out*. Talking to several individuals about their experiences we were able to identify a number of strategies that SUSW graduates adopt in order to manage their careers or as a means of coping with their job. These strategies can be conceptualised in different ways, and were referred to by one respondent as her '*avoidance, escape and exit thoughts*'. However, we have categorised them as 'Get on', 'Get by' and 'Get out' strategies which each incorporate a different approach in terms of coping with work, see Figure 6.

Figure 6 ‘Get-on’, ‘Get-by’ and ‘Get-out’ coping strategies



GET ON - focus is very much on progressing to the next challenge/role recognising that with more seniority potentially comes more autonomy and an ability to make changes or exert influence.

GET BY - adopt a way of working which means that it is easier to manage/cope (i.e. make personal changes, part-time working, zone out) or seek a position where individual ‘fits’ better (either personally, professionally or both) for example switch teams or move away from front line social work.

GET OUT - seek position outside current work setting when values, conscience or opportunities are compromised or no longer suit the individual concerned.

With regards to the early career experiences and perspectives of both the SUSW graduates and comparators, interviewees shared rich personal accounts of their careers. These support the survey findings and provide a useful insight into the life of a newly qualified SUSW graduate which often reflects a complex interplay among individual and contextual, organizational and social factors.

Employer interviews

The design of the Step Up to Social Work programme meant that in many cases, employers were more closely involved in its development and delivery than previously. Certainly, employer representatives recruited for our interviews were knowledgeable and 'involved' with the initiative, and they were able to reflect in some depth on the distinctive nature of the programme and, as they saw it, the Step Up to Social Work graduates, as well.

In the context of preparation and the initial phase of their experience as qualified employees, Step Up to Social Work recruits were identified by employer respondents as having very distinctive characteristics. Whether by virtue of their own qualities or the preparation provided by the programme itself, SUSW graduates were seen as much readier to move into practice than those following generic qualifying routes, which were less focused on statutory child and family social work. Underlying this, perhaps, is the deeper normative question of what *should* social work education and training aspire to achieve: schooled and effective performers in specialist delivery roles (Narey, 2014); or creative and problem-solving 'applied social scientists' (Croisdale-Appleby, 2014).

According to the employers interviewed, in comparison to other students, the SUSW graduates were said to have *"entered their ASYE year further along their learning curve than other NQSWs"* as a result of their training. Employers were complimentary about the students' readiness for practice which was said to have been underpinned by graduates having varied work backgrounds; being 'hosted' within local authorities and thereby given the chance *"to effectively do the job whilst still being a student"*.

"They're organised, they seem to know what they're doing, they get back to you. So, in terms of their own management, I would say they stand out".

"There's a bigger learning curve for [students from conventional programmes] on the ASYE. Whereas, with Step Up students they're coming in and already demonstrating at the first month that they're competent social workers."

Impressions of SUSW graduates at qualification

Interviews with employers who had participated in the Step-Up programme were asked to reflect on their impressions of SUSW graduates at the time they qualified.

Given the positive experience of students during training it is of little surprise that the majority of employers wanted to employ their students at the end of their studies. Several employers commented on the unique opportunity afforded to them by the programme of *'getting to know the students'* as a result of them *"operating in the local authority for 18 months"*. As a result employers were very clear about whether or not they wanted to employ the individuals concerned.

On the whole, impressions of SUSW graduates at the point of qualification were very positive. Some employers considered that several graduates were competent social workers straight away, whereas others were said to have reached competency within the first year, as expected by the NQSW programme and its successor, the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE). A notable remark was that *“SUSW seemed to phase students into their roles effectively”* which is a point that was reflected in the SUSW graduate interviews as well. Whilst there are individual differences of course, SUSW appears to employers to manage the transition from student to qualified social worker particularly well, allowing students to progress and take on challenging aspects of the social work task confidently very soon after qualification.

“Some of them are competent fairly straight away actually. You know, they’re competent, if you like. But I suppose it’s often in the first year really. Once they’ve done their first year and they’ve properly experienced everything within that team that they probably could, you know, in terms of maybe done the CP and had a taste of that, then I think that’s when they start to, you know, feel much more confident in what they’re doing”

“It [SUSW] phases in really well with the Assessed and Supported Year and it really prepares them for going into practice. It makes that link for them, you know, the theory to practice link for them, and it kind of gives them the space to think about and talk about handling that increasing not only workload, but level of responsibility, because I know a lot of our Step Up students talk about that.”

This is not to say that SUSW graduates do not have challenges to face as they make the shift from student to practitioner, as one employer put it *“they [SUSW graduates] still have to find their place within a team”*.

A further interesting point raised by a few of the employers was the extent to which SUSW graduates, given their academic abilities, are able to cope with the realities of the job and in particular workloads, resources and stress which may assist them in doing *“high-level work”*. Arguably, the issues of workload and resources face all NQSWs, yet employers who raised this point went on to suggest the expectations may be greater for SUSW graduates given that they are presumed to be competent, confident and familiar with internal LA procedures. This might mean that they were asked to take on higher workloads.

“I can remember, kind of had a few discussions with managers about...there were a couple of students, a couple of SUs their caseloads were far too high [risk], they needed to be brought down. And I think maybe that sometimes people forgot that they’re in their first year of practice. If think sometimes, especially if you are competent, confident, that you get on you know... the sort of person who doesn’t make complaints, you just kind of work hard, get through your work that people can

quite easily forget that that's a new qualified social worker"

Interestingly, one challenge identified by employers which may present itself to SUSW graduates related to the paucity of resources and actual reality of the job. Given the attitude and attributes associated with this group, there was a question as to how SUSW graduates would deal with perhaps doing just 'good enough' work as a result of the reality of the job, the high caseloads, additional responsibilities, emotional stress and/or being prevented from doing high level work as a result of a lack of resources.

"Because they are very academic, some of these people. They've done really well at their first degree, they've probably done really well on Step Up on, you know, their Master's. Not being able to do the best that they can... I think that's a massive lesson to learn. And it's hard for some of them. They get a bit depressed about it really, because they're just treading water"

"But it's just the real lack of kind of resources that that's going to be hard for them to deal with".

Although the employers' responses do incorporate elements of implied comparison between SUSW graduates and those recruited from other qualifying programmes, these should not be viewed as conclusive, given that the notional 'comparator' here is unspecific and does not capture the variety of differing experiences of those undertaking social work courses. Perhaps here it is sufficient to recognise that employers were highly complementary towards their SUSW recruits.

Findings: Progression

The evaluation has sought to assess the nature of ‘progression’ in the early career phases of child and family social workers, once again seeking to integrate findings from Step Up to Social Work recruits with those drawing on the experience of comparators from generic social work qualifying programmes.

Survey findings: Career history

Three years after qualifying, respondents to the survey were asked a series of questions about how their career was progressing, by identifying up to five jobs since they qualified with their social work degree. They were also asked to state whether this was a full or part time post and how long they were (or had been) in the post. Five years post-qualification, Cohort 1 respondents were asked if they had changed jobs in the previous two years and if so to identify their work history in up to three jobs (using the same criteria as the two years on survey full-time/part-time, length of employment, etc.).

Most of the first Step Up to Social Work (60 percent) cohort had moved directly into a child protection role immediately on qualifying, whereas the comparable figure was 40 per cent for those qualifying from traditional, generic programmes; relatively more from this group went into adult social care.

On average, three years after qualification, SUSW graduates in Cohort 1 reported having stayed in their first post for 29 months, compared with 20 months for comparators. Overall, six out of ten from both groups had had more than one social work post since qualifying (Table 5), with rather more of the comparison group reporting a promotion (33% vs. 41%), although this difference was not statistically significant.

Table 5 Number of posts in social work reported by Cohort 1 respondents three years after qualifying

Number of posts	SUSW Cohort 1		Comparator Group 1		Combined sample	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
One post in social work	25	39	17	35	42	37
Two posts in social work	24	38	17	35	41	36
Three or more posts in social work	15	23	15	31	30	27
Total	64	100	49	100	113	100

Note: differences not statistically significant.

For Cohort 1 and their comparators, nine out of ten (59/66) respondents overall were still working in children’s social care after five years, including 36/39 SUSW graduates (92%) and 23/27 comparators (85%). Over half (56%) of SUSW graduates compared with 80%

of the comparator group had changed their jobs within social work in the last two years, but this difference was not statistically significant. Half of those reporting a change of job in the previous two years stated that this was in frontline child protection.

Of those SUSW graduates from Cohort 1 no longer working in children's social care five years after qualification, one was working in a CAMHS inpatient setting, one with CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online protection Centre), and the other as a school teacher. Nine out of ten (46/50) of those who identified their current employment setting were still working for a local authority/council, including 26/28 SUSW graduates (93%) and 20/22 comparators (91%). Of those SUSW graduates no longer working for a local authority/council five years on, one was working for a private organisation and one for another employer.

The findings for Cohort 2 were very similar. Seven out of ten SUSW graduates (70%) compared with just under half of comparator group respondents (46%) report that their first job after qualifying had been in frontline child protection, with eight out of ten SUSW graduates (81%) reporting that this was a full-time position compared with over six out of ten respondents (65%) from the comparator group. Seven out of ten reported working for a local authority or council, and just under one out of ten report working for the NHS. Of those replying 'other' employer, two worked in a university and one was no longer in social work by the time of the survey.

On average, SUSW graduates from Cohort 2 had been in their posts for 26 months compared with 23 months for respondents from the comparator group. Around seven out of ten in both groups had had more than one social post since qualifying (Table 6).

Table 6 Number of posts in social work reported by Cohort 2 respondents three years after qualifying

Number of posts	SUSW Cohort 2		Comparator Group 2		Combined sample	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
One post in social work	17	28	12	32	29	30
Two posts in social work	23	38	12	32	35	36
Three or more posts in social work	20	33	13	35	33	34
Total	60	100	37	100	97	100

Note: differences between groups not statistically significant

Overall, subjective perceptions of career progression were broadly positive for all groups surveyed. Three years on, eight out of ten respondents rated their career progression as 'as good as expected' or 'better than expected'. There were no significant differences between SUSW and comparator groups, and the findings were very similar for both cohorts. Five years after qualification, SUSW graduates from Cohort 1 (eight out of ten) were more likely to report than comparator group respondents (six out of ten) that their career progression was 'As good as expected' or 'Better than expected'; this finding was statistically significant ($p=.009$).

Career goals and aspirations

Cohort 1 and comparators were asked about their career goals and aspirations three years hence.

As shown in Table 7, three years after qualification three out of ten respondents from Cohort 1 and comparators saw themselves in the same or a similar post in child and family social work three years later. Twenty-three per cent of SUSW graduates versus 33 per cent of comparators envisaged being a specialist practitioner. Conversely, more SUSW graduates than comparators saw themselves as a manager in social work (23% versus 8%). At this point, one in ten anticipated having an alternative career outside social work. Note that these differences between SUSW graduates and comparators were not statistically significant.

Table 7 Cohort 1 three years post-qualification: career goals/aspirations in three years' time

Career goals/aspirations	SUSW Cohort 1		Comparator Group 1		Combined sample	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Same/similar post (in child and family social work)	20	31	16	33	36	32
Specialist practitioner (in child and family social work)	15	23	16	33	31	27
Different post in social work (e.g. adult social care)	1	2	4	8	5	4
Manager in social work	15	23	4	8	19	17
Alternative career (outside social work)	6	9	5	10	11	10
Prefer not to say	2	3	1	2	3	3
Other	5	8	3	6	8	7
Total	64	100	49	100	113	100

Note: differences between groups not statistically significant

The picture for Cohort 2 (combined sample), three years after qualification was a bit different (Table 8). Only 14 per cent saw themselves in the same or a similar post three years later; 41 per cent aspired to be a specialist practitioner and just 15 per cent hoped to be a manager. Once again, around one in ten aspired to an alternative career. There were no statistically significant differences between SUSW graduate and the comparators.

Table 8 Cohort 2 three years post-qualification: career goals / aspirations in three years' time

Career goals / aspirations	SUSW Cohort 2		Comparator Group 2		Combined sample	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Same/similar post (in child and family social work)	10	17	4	11	14	14
Specialist practitioner (in child and family social work)	27	45	13	35	40	41
Different post in social work (e.g. adult social care)	3	5	2	5	5	5
Manager in social work	9	15	6	16	15	15
Alternative career (outside social work)	5	8	6	16	11	11
Prefer not to say	0	0	2	5	2	2
Other	6	10	4	11	10	10
Total	60	100	37	100	97	100

Note: differences between groups not statistically significant

Returning to Cohort 1 (combined sample) at five years post qualification, a quarter of the 72 respondents from both groups saw themselves in the same or a similar post in child and family social work three years later. Thirteen aspired to be a specialist practitioner and 15 to be a manager. Nearly one in five (18%) anticipated having left child and family social work: four expected to be in another field of social work, such as adult social care and nine envisaged an alternative career outside social work. The remainder preferred not to say or gave another response.

Interview findings: Progression and a career typology

Findings from the interviews about career progression since qualification matched those from the surveys. The majority interviewed were satisfied with their progress suggesting it was *'as good as expected'*. A handful of SUSW graduates acknowledged having progressed quicker than expected into senior and principal roles and related this predominantly to having supportive managers; chances to engage in further training or take-on additional responsibility as well as the availability of job opportunities within their own authority. Very few interviewees indicated that they were dissatisfied with their career progression to date. For those who had not progressed as quickly as expected this appeared to be largely due to circumstances beyond their control within their respective authorities or due to personal circumstances.

"I could see my peers from Step Up kind of moving up through that process and even though I wasn't necessarily sure about where I wanted to end up, I wanted to at least be having the opportunity to kind of do that further education, kind of professional education. So, yes, I suppose at that point [at previous LA employer] I felt that I wasn't moving as quickly as I thought and not getting the seniority that I thought I would".

Similarly to SUSW students, comparators were generally satisfied with their professional development three years in after obtaining their degree and highlighted the opportunities available for future career progression.

Career-planning

Career goals for some SUSW graduates were explicit whereas for others they admitted to having no specific plan in place:

"I kind of said that five years after graduation I'd be in a manager post and I've literally just applied for a consultant social worker post. So I'm kind of on the right track"

Whilst individual career plans differ, as would be expected, conversations highlighted a number of factors which impact upon career planning: for example, having the opportunity to broaden one's experience and skillset and the availability of opportunities for advancement within existing teams.

With regards to career trajectories and career planning SUSW interviewees could be classified into one of three groups in terms of their future social work career plans: Actively looking to advance within their current organisation; holding steady in their current position or at a crossroads; and assessing all options".

"When I go back [from maternity leave] I would be looking to move up" [Actively looking to advance]

"Although I don't know how long I'll be doing this role, I have no plans to go anywhere at the moment" [holding steady]

"Secondment or something like that, I think I'd just like to broaden my skillset rather than necessarily keep advancing" [assessing all options]

Comparators' future plans were still largely within the social work sector. Acknowledging their personal commitment to social work, interviewees often focused on broadening their horizons beyond their current employer.

Perceptions of progression and management roles

Clearly two of the three career planning strategies (Actively seeking and Assessing all options) necessitate a move from one's current position or role. As indicated in the survey results, not everyone interviewed harboured ambitions to progress up the career ladder. When discussing progression this was not always talked about in terms of taking on a more senior post. Some of those interviewed from the SUSW course desired more specialised routes or roles in the future:

"In the medium to long term it's a bit more sketchy in that I love the direct work that I do. So yes I would like to take on more managerial roles and responsibilities but I don't want to leave the direct work, so it seems to me it would probably mean going into like a reviewing officer role so that I've still got that contact but equally it's a step up"

"It's more kind of therapeutic work, that's the kind of work, something that I wanted to explore"

Progressing to a management role received mixed responses among SUSW respondents. Perceptions appear to have been informed by their positive and/or negative views and experiences of managers and management in their present and previous posts. Whilst graduates recognised the potential opportunities that might be afforded by taking on a more senior role, these were compared to the realities of doing the job and in particular the challenges, commitment needed and levels of experience required:

"It's more about developing myself as a useful being rather than progression and success in the way that our society measures it. If I felt that it would be useful to the service and the children who we serve then I might be open to it [management] in the future.....but I'm also quite realistic about it. I have my own children and I need to ensure that I bring them up properly first before...it's very easy to get sucked into these kind of roles, and I'm aware that my current manager works until 11pm every night and I'm not prepared to do that with a young child"

"A lot of people I know had ambitions of entering management positions by this point but I've always been very clear that I wanted to have a lot of experience before I even considered moving into management because I really don't think you can be... In my own experience of managers, you need to be experienced and know what you're doing and have a good grasp of the role before you can sort of manage other people"

"When I see some of the decisions being made by managers, and them having to make the sort of decisions, I suppose, under pressure, or with lack of resources, or just because that's what they've been told to do or whatever, I don't know how well that would sit with me in having to be that person who operated like that. So it's not

just about losing contact with the family, it's at a managerial level. You're then responsible for even more risk, because you're carrying the risk of your workers".

Nevertheless, several SUSW graduates had progressed into senior posts and roles as the survey results demonstrated.

Barriers to progression

Two main types of barrier in terms of one's career in social work were noted: personal barriers and organisational. Personal barriers related largely to individual career choices or issues which meant that they had not be able to progress as desired (i.e. wanting to, or needing to care for a family, family member or other conflicts of interest). Whereas organisational barriers were often associated with physical, procedural or cultural barriers such as internal restructuring, job progression thresholds, management instability and resourcing issues which have an impact on team cohesiveness and working conditions.

Whilst not categorised as a distinct barrier, work stress and the experience of difficult working conditions were mentioned frequently within interviews among both SUSW and Comparators' interviewees. The majority of those interviewed had experienced, or continued to experience difficult working conditions (i.e. time taken off work, had cause to reconsider their positions). Whilst workplace stress associated with the social work profession is not a new finding it was interesting to note how often it was raised as a potential barrier to career progression and retention amongst interviewees. This reflects the sentiment of a number of graduates that irrespective of training course, once qualified everyone is at the mercy of the same demands and pressures.

"I think sometimes this career as a career can be emotionally overwhelming.... I think that is something that affects people remaining in it for the long term"

"As a manager I see it in my team and how it's just continuous stress after stress and I'm not seeing any improvement at the moment"

However, whilst discussing barriers to progression and reflecting on the high retention rates amongst the SUSW cohorts, employer interviewees reflected on the resilient, realistic and ambitious nature of graduates. When combined with a rigorous recruitment process and intensive course this was said to have created a situation where *'people understood what they were getting into'* and were therefore believed to be more likely than those on generic programmes to stay in child and family social work.

A typology of social work graduates

Our analysis, which had up until this point been thematic, was expanded to include a cross-sectional analysis to determine whether there were any patterns in SUSW

graduates' and comparators' responses to certain questions. What emerged was a clearer demarcation between 'types' than we had expected, common to both SUSW graduates and comparators. This led to the identification of three coherent profiles, which we have termed: 'Strivers', 'Doers' and 'Seekers'.

Table 9 Strivers, Doers and Seekers: illustrative comments

	Striver	Doer	Seeker
Motivations and ambitions	<i>'I want to become a senior practitioner within the next year or so'</i>	<i>'I did always have this sort of interest in people who seemed to be going through difficult times'</i>	<i>'I didn't really think too much about what my long term plan would be'</i>
Experience of the qualifying programme	<i>'If you expect to be spoon-fed and expect that to be enough, I think you'd be disappointed'</i>	<i>'One of the positive things... was, that they would bring in speakers who were working in the field'</i>	<i>It probably didn't prepare me for quite how difficult some of what I've had to deal with has been, in terms of child protection and the hostility...'</i>
Influencing factors and work experience	<i>'Absolutely everything I might come across, I was dealing with. That was huge for me in terms of thinking I would be able to manage'</i>	<i>'[The team has] always been really supportive and welcoming... and if I ever have an issue, I know I can speak to people... or gain support from them'</i>	<i>'I was like, wow, what on earth is going on here? And I just didn't feel protected. And then I was in court on my own, stuff like that... it was horrific'</i>
Commitment to social work	<i>'I've had a lot of brilliant training... by continuing with education and learning... that's really helped to keep me interested... to think about moving forward rather than just carrying on'</i>	<i>'I hope [I'll still be in social work in two years' time. I'll probably be] in a reasonably similar position to that I am now'</i>	<i>'We had a visiting lecturer... and I remember him saying... all these negative things.... And now, I definitely understand the frustrations'</i>

As Table 9 illustrates, the typology aims to capture where this group of practitioners saw themselves at this point of their social work careers and over the next few years. We

acknowledge that this does only offer us a picture over a limited time frame, so we cannot infer anything about the permanence or fluidity of these orientations.

Whilst we have observed that this typology is analytically well-grounded, it would be disingenuous to suggest that all interviewees were as easily categorised as each other. Neither would we wish to claim that the typology has any predictive capacity in terms of interviewees' career preferences. Nevertheless, our analysis has revealed a notable degree of consistency and coherence in respondents' remarks in relation to key themes.

In brief, the following vignettes map out a series of characteristics and attitudes associated with the three 'types':

Strivers

This group could be characterised collectively in terms of their confidence and ambition. They have tended to move into social work because they see it as a positive career move. These individuals are eager to progress; and they believe they are 'doing well' currently. They felt that their social work qualifying programmes were helpful, essentially because the practice learning opportunities enabled them to gain early insights into the professional role. They believe that they are responsible for their own learning and should not necessarily expect overly close supervision or direction in pursuing professional development. They aspire to progress in their careers, either by going into management or by increasing practice specialisation, and sometimes they feel held back by the constraints of their existing work settings. They welcome a challenge, and see this as being an integral part of the social work profession.

Doers

For this group, the job is everything. They generally have more prior experience than others before entering the profession; and this might be the basis for their continuing desire to do well as practitioners but not to progress to more senior management roles. Like 'strivers' they value the practice elements of their prior learning, but they see the value of university-based teaching which enables them to make connections between theory and practice. They 'put-up' with working conditions and management behaviour which they see as less than ideal, essentially because of their underlying commitment to doing right by children and families; and they gain a considerable sense of internal reward from their achievements in practice. They are committed to professional development because they want to improve their ability to offer a good and effective service.

Seekers

Our third group are not dissatisfied with their career choice, but their commitment is more conditional, and their future aspirations are not as clear as for the other two groups. They are the most likely to find fault with either their qualifying experience, or the quality of

supervision and support provided since qualification. They seem rather more dependent on support from colleagues in more senior roles; and they are also more sensitive to the pressures of the job. They are similarly concerned at a perceived lack of public respect for social workers; and overall, they are uncertain about what is best for them professionally. They are not necessarily thinking of leaving social work, but they did not initially appreciate the scale of the challenge involved in becoming a child and family social worker.

Our emerging typology raises questions about the nature and robustness of social workers' commitment (or lack of commitment) to their role, and the extent to which career development pathways and organisational practices are able to sustain, reinforce or reignite their belief in what they are doing. A number of questions remain. Are these categories fixed or can people move between types? Is there an interplay between experience and type; are individuals guided by prior experience, personal qualities or organisational factors? What are the implications of this analysis on organisational practices and the management and supervision of child and family social workers? Further work is required to consider these questions and to compare findings to other studies (e.g. Burns, 2011, Boyas et al., 2013) which suggest typologies to guide professional development in children's social work.

Employers' views on progression

As in other aspects of their perceptions of Step Up to Social Work graduates, most employers were also highly positive about their potential to progress into senior roles as a result of a combination of desirable personal skills and experiences. Some interviewees who felt it was still a little too early to say with any certainty that SUSW graduates would be the future managers of services, whereas others suggested that those with previous experiences in other careers may well be targeting senior positions:

"Let me think of who. Let me think of who they are. Yes, I can see all of them potentially team managers, whether they want to do that is another matter of course but"...

"I think some are probably better equipped and have come from other professions and would probably have an eye on management from, just from the conversations I've had. Because if they've been a senior teacher or they've, you know, they've held management positions elsewhere, you can imagine them probably wanting to move into management, you know, in the longer term".

Similarly, SUSW graduates' familiarity with their host authorities, the nature of the training relationship and commitment to teams potentially contributed to relatively quick advancement:

“..because they’re already so well prepared and are already tied into their local authorities, they have moved up the kind of hierarchy very quickly. Some of the students from Cohort 1 are now senior social workers or team managers. That’s because they’re very well trained, really passionate and keen about making a difference in social work”.

No employers identified any specific challenges to SUSW graduates progressing, other than stress and burn-out which was a perceived risk to all social workers. However, employers’ views on the extent to which the programme advantaged SUSW graduates’ progression were mixed. Some interviewees argued that progression depends entirely on the individual, whilst others suggested that as familiarity with the SUSW programme increases, it would be viewed favourably by prospective employers. Some interviewees observed that opportunities for promotion varied depending on the stability of teams in the local authority. However, from the perspective of the individual social worker, a lack of opportunities to progress could potentially cause unrest, depending upon the disposition of the individual concerned. Moreover, this demonstrates how measuring the number of promotions achieved is not a simple indicator of opportunities to progress; personal and professional factors play a significant role in a person’s career trajectory.

For employers, progression was linked to retention within their local authority. They recognised their responsibility for keeping newly qualified staff they valued highly. Several believed that the design of the programme, specifically the ‘hosting arrangements’, greatly aided retention. Graduates joined a local authority at the outset, completed their training and post-qualifying training in the same authority which assisted with integration and thereby had a propensity to remain.

Retention is associated with the employee’s perception of the organisation’s commitment to them. Many managers sought to retain SUSW graduates by facilitating their development so that they were eligible for senior posts in the organisation rather than seeking employment elsewhere. Similarly, we were also told of team managers identifying opportunities for progression elsewhere in the local authority so as to avoid losing staff altogether.

Employers commented that staff’s reasons for leaving posts were often associated with personal circumstances, such as to reduce travelling times and move closer to home. It was however, noted that organisational factors such as poor supervision, inconsistent management or restructuring could also cause unrest and lead to dissatisfaction.

Concluding Analysis

Comparisons with Newly Qualified Social Worker research

The findings of this evaluation can be viewed in the context of earlier studies of recruitment, retention and progression in child and family social work, and other studies of these phenomena drawn from the wider literature. As we noted at the outset, the Step Up to Social Work programme was implemented to try and address previously identified problems in attracting and keeping high quality practitioners in this particular field of practice. Prior evidence of the extremely limited timespan of social work careers, even compared to other highly challenging public service roles has clearly concretised recurrent concerns (Curtis et al., 2010), and represents one key benchmark against which the programme has to be tested. Similarly, however, concerns have been raised widely about 'quality', both in terms of the attributes of recruits to the profession and their preparation for practice in the form of pre-qualifying programmes (Social Work Reform Board, 2010; Croisdale-Appleby, 2014; Narey, 2014).

Previous research for the Department for Education (Carpenter et al., 2012) studied three cohorts of newly qualified social workers over the first year of their employment and participation in the Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) programme, the precursor to the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment. This demonstrated significant increases in self-efficacy in child and family social work associated with greater role clarity and the receipt of good quality supervision. As in this study, the social workers expressed a high level of satisfaction with the intrinsic aspects of their jobs. However, only half were satisfied with their pay and only slightly more with the number of hours they were having to work and the opportunities for advancement.

In the present study we have noted high levels of stress in both SUSW graduates and comparators on generic programmes three and five years into employment. In the NQSW study, the overall proportion in each cohort expressing clinically significant levels of stress at the end of the one year NQSW programme was between 33 per cent and 41 per cent, higher than in the present study (Carpenter et al., 2012). However, this is likely to reflect the additional pressures in a transition year, plus the demands on the NQSW programme itself.

At the end of the NQSW programme, between 35 per cent and 47 per cent in each cohort indicated that that they were likely or very likely to be looking for a new job in the following year; employers' data showed retention rates were between 85 per cent and 91.5 at this stage of their career. The much larger numbers in the NQSW study (over 1,000) enabled a more detailed exploration of factors underlying intention to leave. As in the present study, the key factors were satisfaction with pay and working conditions (extrinsic job satisfaction) and stress; women were more likely to remain as were those reporting higher

intrinsic job satisfaction and satisfaction with the overall package of training, supervision and support from their employer.

Outcomes and achievements

The remit of this evaluation was to ascertain current roles and career progression of child and family social workers qualifying via the Step Up to Social Work route; whilst also gaining an understanding of the future intentions of this group of practitioners and their retrospective views of the efficacy of the programme in preparing them for practice. Additional aims set out included seeking to assess how retention and progression of Step Up to Social Work graduates compared to those qualifying by other routes; and ascertaining the reasons for leaving the profession of those who had chosen to do so. As we have explained previously, the wide range of questions included under this umbrella prompted the evaluation team to develop a mixed methods approach, which, in turn, has provided us with a basis to account not only for *what* are the outcomes for Step Up to Social Work graduates, but also *why* the patterns observed have arisen.

Following the structure of earlier chapters, we will focus here firstly on the findings on retention, before moving on to consider current roles and progression, and then concluding with some observations about what we have learnt from the comparative element of the study and the contribution of the programme in general.

Retention

Retention rates for those completing the first two iterations of Step Up to Social Work and entering child and family social work are high. The retention rate three years after qualification was 85 percent for Cohort 1 and 80 per cent for Cohort 2. Five years on the retention rate for Cohort 1 had reduced to 73 per cent. We were unable to obtain directly comparable figures in the present study, although both our survey and interview findings suggested that between three and five years after qualifying, the Step Up to Social Work graduates were at least as likely to stay in the profession as those from our comparator group. In addition, calculations by Skills for Care (2015, p. 44) suggest that 53 per cent of all social work graduates qualifying in 2012, and 58 per cent of those qualifying in 2013 (equivalent to the qualification dates of SUSW Cohorts 1 and 2) had gone on to take up social work jobs six months after qualifying. When considering those qualifying at postgraduate level, who are more directly comparable to SUSW graduates, these figures were 61 per cent (2012) and 62 per cent (2013). Despite these relatively modest conversion rates, Skills for Care also note that over 80 per cent of graduates were in employment six months after qualifying, and that a substantial proportion of those not going into social work posts were in health or social care jobs at this point. Indeed, it may well be that the kind of career trajectory intended and pursued by social work graduates in general is rather different from those following a highly specialised route such as SUSW.

Having thus cautioned against crude comparisons, we can nonetheless conclude that retention rates for SUSW graduates are encouraging in light of these observations.

Although there are obvious limitations to the use of a measure such as 'intention to leave', this is believed to give some indication of the actual likelihood of someone leaving their current position. Whilst a higher proportion of SUSW graduates did say that they were considering looking for a job outside social work in the next year than comparators, this finding was not replicated with the second cohort; and when followed up five years after qualification, it was the comparators who expressed a greater likelihood of seeking to leave. In any case, though, the figures of those considering the possibility of leaving children's social work were not high, suggesting a degree of continuing commitment to the profession, supported of course by the relatively low attrition rate actually observed.

Significant in the context of retention are also the views of employers, who felt that the design of SUSW and specifically the 'hosting arrangements' greatly supported the prospects of recruits remaining with the agency following training, by giving them a chance to establish solid and lasting working relationships with those around them. Indeed, we noted that in some cases employers were prepared to make special efforts to keep SUSW graduates.

Experiences of the job

In broad terms, it seems that SUSW graduates adapt well to the demands of the social work role; they feel that they have achieved a high level of competence, and they feel 'suited' to the task, mirroring the responses of employers. They do slightly better than their comparators on measures of efficacy but they also share many common experiences and enjoy similar levels of job satisfaction and experience equivalent levels of work-related stresses.

For both groups, we have identified a pattern of career orientations captured schematically by the terms: 'getting on', 'getting by' and 'getting out'; and these, in turn, are related to a series of 'coping', or more appropriately, perhaps 'work management' strategies. These features of the social work practice terrain are perhaps also indicative of wider issues which are worthy of consideration by employers and policy-makers when developing workforce strategies for the profession. In the case of SUSW, however, we might conclude that some attempt has been made to address some key considerations, in this respect, such as effective matching of candidates with potential work opportunities, focused and targeted initial learning and induction, and then managed recruitment into supportive and welcoming team environments. Our SUSW interviewees repeatedly stressed the importance of the working culture and environment, recognising that this had a significant bearing on individual progress and successes, for example.

Progression

For most of the SUSW graduates surveyed, progression to this point in their careers (three years for the second cohort and five years for the first) had been as good as or better than expected, and this had remained fairly constant for the first cohort.

Comparators, though, had become less positive on this point, with two-fifths expressing dissatisfaction with their rate of progression after five years, which may, of course, be linked to a greater readiness on their part to look for a job outside social work.

A slight difference is observed, too, in the 'trajectory' of each group, with SUSW survey respondents being more likely to report recent promotions, and more likely to have received multiple promotions than the comparator group. The initial finding that comparators had received a greater number of promotions three years after qualification was not replicated two years later.

The perceptions of the early career social workers surveyed were also mirrored by employers' responses, where reference was made to SUSW graduates' potential to progress. The observation was made that some had come with experience of working at a senior level and were perhaps targeting management roles – they saw themselves as 'getting on' in the profession. But the employers also thought that the programme itself had provided its graduates with a good start, as they came into the working environment with a good understanding of how things work, and therefore better prepared to move on relatively quickly.

Making comparisons

We have not been able to establish as wide a basis for comparison as originally intended, due to the difficulty in recruiting sufficient numbers from undergraduate qualifying pathways. Consequently, the comparator group was largely formed from graduates of Masters' programmes and from BA graduates from a 'high-tariff' university. Nonetheless, the comparative element of the study has been informative. By and large, the differences between SUSW participants in the study and their comparators were not substantial. In only a few instances were differences identified using validated quantitative measures found to be statistically significant. Similarly in the course of our interviews, we were able to identify many of the same motivations, frustrations and career orientations in both groups.

There are signs, though, that the pathway being followed by SUSW graduates is somewhat different to that of other qualifying social workers. From the point of recruitment, they appear to demonstrate a higher level of commitment and clearer focus on child and family work compared to graduates of conventional generic programmes. They are conscious 'specialists', and the tailored learning opportunities and agency support offered to them help to maximise the gains available through building on this initial commitment. SUSW practitioners did not see themselves as different, and nor do

comparators. However, employers engaged in SUSW partnerships clearly do, and sometimes seem ready to make specific efforts to accommodate their professional development needs. There is a potential risk here, of stereotypical assumptions becoming established, and ultimately of unjustified preferential treatment being offered, because of the perceptions of Step Up to Social Work which are clearly held.

Contextual factors

The Step Up to Social Work programme, the context and future possibilities

In conclusion, we can probably draw out the inference that the Step Up to Social Work programme has achieved a number of its key objectives. It has provided a welcome additional source of highly regarded and capable child and family social workers, certainly from the employer perspective. As a route into a specialist area of statutory practice, it does appear to offer certain advantages, in the tailored nature of the programme, in the integration of different forms of learning (classroom and field), and in its capacity to recruit able and committed participants. These benefits appear to be sustained, too, with a relatively low attrition rate once recruits are in employment, evidence of confident and capable practitioners, and positive examples of career progression for those who seek it. SUSW has not proved as divisive as was perhaps feared, and this is reflected in the mutual recognition demonstrated in the course of our interviews with both SUSW participants and comparators.

On the other side of the coin, though, it is clear that the SUSW graduates are not immune to the stresses and pressures of child and family social work; and this is clearly a strong 'push factor' for those who are considering leaving. We cannot underplay the consistent evidence of a very substantial level of stress which is simply being absorbed and sustained by practitioners on a daily basis. This almost endemic aspect of the social work role clearly impacts on practitioners equally, irrespective of qualifying route or career pathway, and risks debilitating them, whatever strengths and qualities they bring to the role (Carpenter et al., 2012).

We draw attention here to several other considerations which offer further context to the evaluation. Undoubtedly, SUSW is a success in its own terms, and there is a strong case for maintaining this model of social work education. This comes at a price of course. Research by York Consulting for the Department for Education (2016) found that the costs to government per student were significantly lower for the traditional routes compared to fast-track routes, SUSW and Frontline. The cost for the undergraduate and postgraduate routes were £14,675 and £23,225 respectively, compared to £40,413 for Step Up and £45,323 for Frontline (Cutmore and Rodger, 2016); albeit this is offset by the higher conversion rate of Step Up to Social Work (entry into social work practice on qualifying).

We should also acknowledge some of the implications of operating a selection process which privileges certain characteristics at the potential expense of others (Smith et al, 2013; Maxwell et al, 2017). Over-reliance on targeted training routes may involve certain risks, including that of exclusivity, and this has implications both in terms of limiting the potential pool from which proficient social workers can be recruited; and for building in unintended forms of institutional discrimination.

However, aside from its undoubted positive achievements and the clear evidence of employer satisfaction with the practitioners it produces, there are also potential transferable benefits from the Step Up to Social Work model for other social work qualifying programmes, including effective recruitment procedures; the evidence that strong and well-resourced partnerships are able to enhance preparation for practice (the early experiences of the recently implemented Teaching Partnership model also offer encouraging signs; Berry-Lound et al., 2016); and that effective support for high quality placements produces high quality learning (Wilson and Kelly, 2010).

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Appendix 1: Survey Resources

Participant Invitation Letter

Dear

Developing careers in social work

I'm writing to invite you to take part in a research study to be undertaken by the Universities of Durham and Bristol, on career development, progression and retention in social work. The research has been commissioned by the Department for Education, but will be carried out independently of government.

We have received your contact details from your employer/former university/colleague, because you have been identified as a current social work practitioner who has recently qualified and completed your first year in practice as a NQSW in 2013/the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment in 2014. It is of course entirely a matter for you as to whether you choose to participate in the study.

Participants will be asked to complete an anonymised survey, which will explore your views about how well prepared you have been for practice, your progression and career goals, and will include a self-evaluation of your performance as a practitioner. None of the data generated will be used to identify any individual, although we believe that our finding will be of use in helping to shed light on how well qualifying programmes prepare social workers for employment in statutory settings, and the possible consequences for career progression and retention.

We hope that you will feel able to take the time to complete the survey and assist us with this study. We estimate that the survey will take no more than half an hour in total, and it is possible to complete it in stages. In order to take part you need do nothing at the moment, and we will contact you again shortly with details about how to join and complete the survey. If you would prefer us to contact you in future at a different email address, please let us know; and if you are not willing to take part in the survey, please reply to that effect.

Best wishes

(Evaluation Team)

Step Up to Social Work and Comparator Survey Invitation Letter

Dear

Developing careers in social work

I'm writing to invite you to take part in a research study to be undertaken by the Universities of Durham and Bristol, on career development, progression and retention in social work. The research has been commissioned by the Department for Education, but will be carried out independently of government.

We have received your contact details from your employer/former university/colleague, because you have been identified as a current social work practitioner who has recently qualified and completed your first year in practice as a NQSW in 2013/the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment in 2014. It is of course entirely a matter for you as to whether you choose to participate in the study.

Participants will be asked to complete an anonymised survey, which will explore your views about how well prepared you have been for practice, your progression and career goals, and will include a self-evaluation of your performance as a practitioner. None of the data generated will be used to identify any individual, although we believe that our finding will be of use in helping to shed light on how well qualifying programmes prepare social workers for employment in statutory settings, and the possible consequences for career progression and retention.

We hope that you will feel able to take the time to complete the survey and assist us with this study. We estimate that the survey will take no more than half an hour in total, and it is possible to complete it in stages. In order to take part you need do nothing at the moment, and we will contact you again shortly with details about how to join and complete the survey. If you would prefer us to contact you in future at a different email address, please let us know; and if you are not willing to take part in the survey, please reply to that effect.

Best wishes

(Evaluation Team)

Online survey – DfE Step up to Social Work Cohort 1 Time 1 Survey (March 2015)

Introduction

Welcome. Thank you for your interest in responding to this questionnaire. The Department for Education (DfE) has commissioned a team from Durham and Bristol Universities to conduct a longitudinal study of social workers, following on from professional qualification. We are interested in your retrospective views of your qualifying programme (whether this was a conventional route or Step Up to Social Work), and the extent to which it prepared you for your current practice. We are asking for information about your career history and plans and your continuing professional development. The questionnaire includes measures of self-confidence in tasks relating to social work with children and families, role clarity/conflict, job satisfaction and stress.

This survey is being carried out by the University of Bristol, and you've been asked to take part because you have completed your qualifying programme in the last three years. We hope you will also be willing to take part in the survey when we repeat it in two years' time. The survey should take about 15-20 minutes to complete.

Please work through the survey question by question. If you miss one of the questions, a red note will appear above it asking you to complete that question before moving on to the next page. You may review and amend your answers before submitting if you wish, but unfortunately you cannot 'exit' and return to the survey to complete it later.

Please note that we do not ask for your name as we do not link responses to individuals. Instead, we begin by asking you **four** questions which will help us to match your responses on the next occasion.

The information about your personal details will be stored securely on a password protected server at the University and will be anonymously processed by the researchers. Cookies, personal data stored by your Web browser, are not used in this survey.

Information needed to assign you a personal identification code for the follow-up survey

1. What are the **FIRST** two letters of your FIRST (given) name? e.g. If your first name is JAne, you should write **JA**.

2. What are the **LAST** two letters of your LAST name? e.g. If your last name is SmiTH, you should write **TH**

3. What is the **DAY** of your birthday? e.g. if you were born 19 May 1967 you would enter **19**

4. What is the **MONTH** of your birthday? e.g. if you were born 19 May 1967 you would enter **05**.
Note: Please make sure you enter the 0 as well.

Background information

Demographics

5. Gender

- Female
- Male
- Prefer not to say

6. Ethnic group

Please choose one option that best describes your ethnic group or background

- English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British
- Irish
- Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- Any other White background
- White and Black Caribbean
- White and Black African
- White and Asian
- Any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic background
- Indian
- Pakistani
- Bangladeshi
- Chinese
- Any other Asian background
- African
- Caribbean
- Any other Black/African/Caribbean background
- Arab
- Prefer not to say
- Other (*please specify*):

7. Age

Note: If you would rather not answer this question, please enter the number **0**

Qualifications and experience

8. Was your social work qualifying degree at

Undergraduate level (BSc)
Postgraduate level (PGDip/MSc/MA)
Other (*please specify*):

9. Are you a graduate of the **Step Up to Social Work** programme?

Yes
No

10. Name of your qualifying degree/programme?

11. Date qualified as a social worker?

Please enter as **MM-YYYY**, ie. if you qualified in May 2012 you would enter **05-2012**.

12. Date started post in social work?

Please enter as **MM-YYYY**, ie. if you started your post in September 2012 you would enter **09-2012**

13. Have you undertaken any further professional training courses/programmes (other than NQSW, ASYE) since completing your qualifying programme in social work?

Yes
No

If **Yes**, please tell us which one(s)

About your Social Work qualifying programme

14. How **important** were the following factors in your choice to study social work?

	Extremely important	Very important	Moderately important	Slightly important	Not at all important
a. Wanted to help people					
b. Wanted to work with children and families					
c. Help other people overcome discrimination and oppression					
d. Personal experiences in my life					
e. A stable job					
f. A springboard to another career					
g. Consistency with my political or ideological beliefs					
h. Having a positive personal experience of social work					
i. Having a negative personal experience of social work					
j. Funding was available for the course					
k. Long term commitment to social work as a career					
l. A decent salary					

15. Thinking back to your social work qualifying programme, how would you rate your qualifying programme in the following areas?

	Very good	Good	Neither good nor poor	Poor	Very poor
a. Quality of academic learning provision					
b. Preparation for practice					
c. Learning about the context of social work practice					
d. Learning about social work skills/methods for working with children					
e. Learning about social work skills/methods for working with adults					
f. Learning about social work values					
g. Understanding service user needs and perspectives					
h. Understanding organisations and systems					
i. Quality of practice learning					
j. Variety of practice learning					

16. When you finished your qualifying programme, how would you have rated yourself in the following areas?

	Well above average	Above average	Average	Below average	Well below average
a. Preparation for practice					
b. Transferable social work skills					
c. Working with children					
d. Working with adults					
e. Leadership and management skills					
f. Potential to achieve in a social work career					

Employment as a social worker

17. Do you currently work in?

Children's social care
 Adult social care
 Other (*please specify*):

18. Do you currently work for?

the NHS
 a Children's Trust
 a private organisation
 a voluntary organisation
 an agency
 Other (*please specify*):

19. Career history - The following grid of questions asks you to identify your work history in up to five jobs since you qualified with your social work degree. If you have only had one job in social work post qualification then all you have to do is fill out the section on **1st job after qualifying**. You are also asked to state whether this was a full or part time post and how long you were (or have been) in the post.

	Please select the main focus of your social work post for each job since qualifying											Was this is full time or part time post?		How long were you (have you been) in this post? (in months)
	Children in need	Frontline child protection	Adoption and Fostering	Looked after Children	Mental Health	Learning Difficulties	Disabled children	Youth justice	Substance misuse	Transition Services	Other (please specify)	Full time	Part time	
a. 1st job after qualifying														
b. 2nd job after qualifying														

20. What is your **current job title**?

21. Have you had any promotions since qualifying?

No
Yes

If **Yes**, how many?

22. How would you rate your career progression so far?

Better than expected
As good as expected
Not quite as good as expected

If **Better than expected** or **Not quite as good as expected** could you please tell us why?

23. In terms of your career goals/aspirations, where do you see yourself **in 3 years' time**?

Same/similar post (in child and family social work)
Specialist practitioner (in child and family social work)
Different post in social work (e.g. adult social care)
Manager in social work
Alternative career (outside social work)
Prefer not to say
Other (*please specify*):

24. **Career development** - In the space provided below could you please state the **extent to which your qualifying programme had prepared you for further career development**

Attitudes and Perceptions

Self-Efficacy Rating Scale

31. How confident are you that you can apply a wide range of knowledge and skills in child and family social work in the following:

	Please give a rating from 1 to 10 where 1 = "not at all confident"; 5 = "moderately confident"; 10 = "extremely confident".									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<p>a. Referral - Collect, accurately record and critically analyse all relevant information at the point when a referral is received or you assume responsibility for an existing case and take appropriate actions to identify and manage risks to children and promote their welfare of specific children, young people, their families and carers.</p>										
<p>b. Assessment - Carry out in-depth and ongoing family assessment of social need and risks to children with particular emphasis on parental capacity and capability to change. Use evidence-based tools and ensure active child and family participation. Draw on the contributions of other professional disciplines. Critically analyse all necessary information to produce assessments that comply with statutory, organisational and local multi-agency requirements maintaining a necessary focus on child protection.</p>										

c. Planning - Based on a critical analysis of a child's wide ranging needs, including health and education, plan and co-ordinate the support and intervention required, ensuring positive engagement of the child and family, including through transition.

d. Formal Meetings - Work with children, families and other professionals to develop a plan to respond to the assessed needs of specific children or young people; take part in statutory and other reviews and decision making forums, providing information, based on the plan, about children and families' needs. This may include representing their views.

e. Review -- Within agreed timelines, critically review all information against plans to reduce identified risks and meet the needs of the child in order to evaluate achievements and outcomes and identify required changes.

f. Recording - Record, report and communicate using accurate, up-to-date, evidence which differentiates between opinion and fact and shows the reasoning for conclusions and recommendations. Ensuring that the information is expressed in plain English, taking account of requirements to respect service user confidentiality and local multiagency requirements.

g. Communication - Communicate clearly, sensitively and effectively with children of different ages and abilities, their families and the professional system. Use appropriate communication methods which are engaging, motivating and respectfully challenging even when people are perceived to be hostile and resistant to change.

h. Relationships -- Build purposeful, effective relationships with children and families, which are both authoritative and compassionate using information about their life experiences, needs and expectations.

i. Multi-Agency working -- Operate successfully in a wide range of organisational contexts. Contribute to the work of multi-agency partnerships and family courts seeking appropriate direction from line managers/supervisors in situations of uncertainty.

j. Disadvantaged groups - Identify and work with others to meet the needs of children and families from diverse and disadvantaged communities to improve their life chances. Take into account the impact of poverty and social deprivation and harmful practices in specific communities such as FGM and enforced marriage.

k. Professional Development --

Recognise your own professional limitations and know how and when to seek help. Critically evaluate the impact of your own belief systems on practice. Use self-reflection, supervision and development activities to improve your use of research to inform complex judgements and decisions.

l. Professional Accountability and Ethics

-- Demonstrate the principles of social work through professional judgement, decision-making and actions within a framework of professional accountability i.e. the HCPC Codes of Practice. Understand the complex relationship between ethical professional practice, the law and social policy.

Personal role clarity and conflict

32. When responding to the following statements, try to imagine a scale running from one to seven (the left-most side being VERY FALSE and the rightmost side being VERY TRUE).

	Click the button that measures how much you think each statement applies to your job. Try to think about the actual nature of your job.						
	1 Very False	2	3	4	5	6	7 Very True
a. I am certain about how much authority I have							
b. Clear, planned goals and objectives exist for my job							
c. I know that I have divided my time properly							
d. I know what my responsibilities are							
e. I know exactly what is expected of me							
f. Explanation is clear of what has to be done							
g. I have to do things that should be done differently							
h. I receive an assignment without the staff to complete it							
i. I have to bend or ignore a rule or policy in order to carry out an assignment							
j. I work with two or more groups who operate quite differently							
k. I receive incompatible requests from two or more people							
l. I do things that are apt to be accepted by one person and not accepted by others							
m. I receive an assignment without adequate resources to carry it out							
n. I work on unnecessary things							

Job Satisfaction Scale

33. Please indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with your:

	Please click the buttons to indicate how satisfied you are with the following aspects of your job.				
	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Don't know	Satisfied	Very satisfied
a. Income					
b. Job Security					
c. Number of hours of work					
d. Flexibility of hours of work					
e. Ease of travel to work					
f. Management and supervision by your superiors					
g. Relationship with fellow workers					
h. Opportunities for advancement					
i. Public respect for the sort of work you do					
j. Your own accomplishments					
k. The physical work conditions					
l. Developing your skills					
m. Having challenges to meet					
n. The actual tasks you do					
o. The variety of tasks					
p. Opportunities to use your own initiative					
q. Your work in general					

34. How likely is it that within a year you will be actively looking for a new job?

- Not at all likely
- Not very likely
- Fairly likely
- Very likely

If you are **"fairly likely"** or **"very likely"** to be looking for a new job in the next year, do you think this will be

- Within children's social work
 - Within another area of social work
 - Outside social work
 - Other (*please specify*):
-

Dealing with the expectations of the job

We would like to know if you have been affected by any of the following issues **over the last few weeks**.

Please answer ALL the following questions by clicking the option you think applies to you.

Remember that we want to know about **present and recent complaints**, not those you had in the past.

Have you recently:

35. Been able to concentrate on whatever you're doing?

- Better than usual
- Same as usual
- Less than usual
- Much less than usual

36. Lost much sleep over worry?

- Not at all
- No more than usual
- Rather more than usual
- Much more than usual

37. Felt that you are playing a useful part in things?

- More so than usual
- Same as usual
- Less useful than usual
- Much less than usual

38. Felt capable of making decisions about things?

- More so than usual
- Same as usual
- Less capable than usual
- Much less capable than usual

39. Felt constantly under strain?

- Not at all
- No more than usual
- Rather more than usual
- Much more than usual

40. Felt you couldn't overcome your difficulties?

Not at all No more than usual Rather more than usual Much more than usual

41. Been able to enjoy your normal day-to-day activities?

More so than usual Same as usual Less so than usual Much less than usual

42. Been able to face up to your problems?

More so than usual Same as usual Less able than usual Much less able than usual

43. Been feeling unhappy and depressed?

Not at all No more than usual Rather more than usual Much more than usual

44. Been losing confidence in yourself?

Not at all No more than usual Rather more than usual Much more than usual

45. Been thinking of yourself as a worthless person?

Not at all No more than usual Rather more than usual Much more than usual

46. Been feeling reasonably happy, all things considered?

More so than usual About the same as usual Less so than usual Much less than usual

Final questions

Email

Please could you provide us with a personal email in the off chance that you decide to leave your current post? We will only contact you at this email if we cannot reach you at your work email when we do the follow-up survey in a year's time.

47. Please enter an alternative email here.

48. Approximately how long did this take you to complete this survey (excluding interruptions)? Please enter number of minutes.

Close

That's it! Thank you very much for completing the survey.

If you wish, you may review your answers and make changes before exiting the survey.

In about a year from now, we will ask you to complete a full version of the survey once more so that we can see if your answers have changed.

Please remember that your answers are anonymous and that no one will be able to identify you personally.

Please now exit this survey and close your browser.

Thanks again for your help in this evaluation.

Appendix 2: Interview Arrangements and Schedules

SUSW - Participant Invitation Letter

Dear

On behalf of the research teams at Durham and Bristol Universities, we just wanted to say thank you for taking part in our SUSW Survey in recent weeks.

Your survey answers are currently being analysed along with over 50 other responses that we obtained to the survey and we hope to report back to the Department for Education some headline findings by the end of September 2015.

To help us contextualise the survey data we are hoping to complete a number of telephone or face to face interviews to pick up on a few issues that were raised in the survey and to gain a greater understanding and appreciation of some of these points.

I'm writing in the hope that you might consider helping us with this further stage of research? Interviews will be informal, last between 30-45 minutes and be held between July and September 2015. As with the survey, interviews will be anonymised and quotes will not be attributable to any single individual.

If you would like to know more, or are happy to talk to us further then please reply to this email and I will respond directly in order to make appropriate arrangements.

Once again we very much appreciate your invaluable contribution to this research project.

With all the best,

On behalf of the research team

Dr Laura Venn
Visiting Research Fellow
School of Applied Social Sciences
Durham University
30 Old Elvet,
Durham,
DH1 3HN
E-mail: laura.venn@durham.ac.uk

SUSW - Interview Schedule (V1)

Cohort 1 / Similar / All Qualifying (20 each x 45 mins)

Interviewer notes: *recap on why interview is important to the research / anonymity / confirm ok to record interview / ask for them to answer with respect to their qualifying experiences.*

Warm Up -Background details (5 minutes)

Name:	Date:	F2F / Telephone	Recorded? Y / N
Current Employer (LA/Agency)			
Current Job Title/Role/Team			
How long in post?			
No. of previous posts (cross check with survey data)			
SUSW RP /LA (if applicable)			
University course (if comparator)			

[IceBreaker] What made you decide to pursue a career in social work? (career change / high flyer?) *Survey answers = to help people / funding available / work with C&F*

Main Body (30 minutes)

A. Career expectations

1. Thinking back, when you started your SW education, what were your SW ambitions?
2. Where did you think you would be in terms of your career 3 years after graduation?
Survey = Q22.

3. Would you say that your expectations have been met – how, Why?

Survey = Q22a

4. What are your career goals now?

Q23 = Same level, specialist practitioner, Mgr, Alt Career

5. Would you consider yourself on track for reaching these goals? Y / N

a. What is helping you to reach these targets do you think? (macro level – professional, personal)

b. Is there anything preventing you from reaching these targets? (macro level – professional, personal)

B. Your course and feeling prepared for practice

1. Before your qualifying course began, what did you think it would be like? (PIN-what were your expectations?)

2. Do you think the teaching and learning you received on your course provided you with a sound basis of knowledge in order to start work as a social worker? Can you give examples / explain your answer?

Survey Q15 – follow up, you stated 'X' was v.good – can you expand on this?

3. Do you think your original course gave you the skills necessary for life as a social worker? Can you give examples / explain your answer?

Survey Q15 – follow up, you stated 'X' was v.good – can you expand on this?

4. To what extent were your practice learning opportunities useful in terms of being prepared for practice? Can you give examples / explain your answer?

Survey Q15l

5. How useful have the academic aspects of the course been to you in your present (and previous) position(s)?

6. To what extent did your qualifying programme prepare you for further career development?

Survey Q24

7. Looking back, what would you say were the most valuable aspects of the course in terms of being prepared for practice?

8. (Consider previous answers re: shortcomings – reiterate here) Is there anything else that could have been improved on your original course to make it more useful for practice?

9. Considering your own educational experiences, and those of other colleagues, do you think Step Up social workers are different from other qualified social workers? If so, in what ways?

C. Influencing factors

1. What or who would you say has had the most significant influence on your career to date? *(Prompt if necessary - course / practice educators / snr managers / colleagues etc / progression policy at LA)*
2. Within your social work career to date, what would you say has aided/facilitated your success? *(PIN – mass of grads, team support, freedom to take initiative, relationships)*
3. Within your social work career to date, what would you say have been the main barriers to success? *(PIN – adaptation period, lack of support, organisational structures/policies)*

D. Commitment to social work

1. Where do you see yourself in 2 years from now? Still in social work?
2. How has your experience of social work compared to your previous expectations?
3. Has how you view your social work career changed since being in employment? How and why?
4. Would you say you are more or less committed to remaining in social work than you were when you graduated? Of all the things we have discussed what do you consider most responsible for this view?

Additional questions if time

1. What training have you undertaken since starting in post – was this to cover gaps in knowledge and/or skills? Did you identify these needs or did a senior member of staff recommend the course?
2. What do you think makes a good social worker?
3. Following on from Self-Efficacy questions in the survey - Can you recall at what point in your career you felt 'competent' in your role?

Summary and close (5 minutes)

Thank you. That completes the list of questions that I have, is there anything that you would like to add or mention that you feel is important, which hasn't be raised so far?

Interviewer notes and comments:

Length of interview:

Any problems with recording / any discussions off record?

Reflections (any questions not working / feedback to the team / new issues raised?)

SUSW – Leavers Interview Schedule (V1)

Cohort 1 & 2 (45 mins each)

Interviewer notes: *recap on why interview is important to the research / anonymity / confirm ok to record interview / ask for them to answer with respect to their qualifying experiences.*

Warm Up -Background details (5 minutes)

Name:	Date:	F2F / Telephone	Recorded? Y / N
Current Employer			
Current Job Title/Role/Team			
How long in post?			
When LEFT social work (i.e. LA/Agency) Any gaps?			
No. of previous posts			
No of Promotions?			
SUSW RP /LA			
Date qualified as a social worker 05/2012 or 02/2013?			

[OPENER] What made you decide to pursue a career in social work? (career change / high flyer?) PIN: to help people, personal experiences, stable job, springboard to another career, funding etc.

What was your first degree in?

Career Expectations (10 minutes)

1. Thinking back, when you started your SW education, what were your SW ambitions?

2. What did you think being a social worker would be like? Expectations of the profession?
3. Where did you think you would be 3 years after graduation? (...was leaving on the cards from the outset?)
4. What are your career goals now? (Short / Medium / Long term) Any likely barriers to achieving these, factors assisting?

Social Work Qualifying Programme (10 minutes)

5. Before your qualifying course began, what did you think it would be like? (PIN- what were your expectations?)
6. Thinking back to the qualifying programme, how would you rate the programme in terms of:

Quality of academic learning provision?	VG	G	NGNP	P	VP
Preparation for practice?					
Learning about social work values?					
Understanding organisations and systems?					
Variety of practice learning?					

7. Do you think the teaching and learning you received on your course provided you with a sound basis of knowledge in order to start work as a social worker? Can you give examples / explain your answer?
8. Do you think your original course gave you the skills necessary for life as a social worker? Can you give examples / explain your answer?

9. To what extent were your practice learning opportunities useful in terms of being prepared for practice? Can you give examples / explain your answer?

10. What would you say were the most valuable aspects of the course in terms of being prepared for practice?

11. Is there anything else that could have been improved on your original course to make it more useful for practice?

12. Did you consider yourself a competent social worker when you qualified? How would you have rated yourself in terms of preparation for practice / having transferable social work skills / potential to achieve in a social work career?

Work Experiences – Reasons for Leaving (15 minutes)

13. What were the main reasons for leaving your post in child and family social work? Tick as many as appropriate.

End of temporary contract	Career change	better pay and benefits	Relocating	Lack of job satisfaction
Relationships – communications with supervisors/managers	Relationships – communications with colleagues	Better flexible working package	Travel difficulties	Poor working environment
Lack of recognition	Lack of career/development opportunities	Job insecurity or the effects of organisational change	Caring responsibilities	Returning to full time education
Ill health	Retirement	Redundancy	Maternity-related	Accommodation problems – housing, costs

Personal – not job related, partner relocating	Discrimination, harassment, bullying	Left for another reason, please explain		
--	--------------------------------------	---	--	--

14. Could you talk a little more about the lead up to you leaving your post....? How long had you been considering this decision, did you consult anyone in the organisation about your plans? What was their response / suggestions / any actions taken? What was the **main reason** underpinning your decision to leave?

15. How did you feel when you left your post in child and family social work?

16. Could anything have been done to change your mind/your decision?

17. What is different about the job/career you have now compared to the last post you held in child and family social work?

18. How do you view child and family social work now?

19. How likely is it that **within a year** you will be actively looking for a post in child and family social work in a Local Authority?

Not at all likely	Not very likely	Fairly likely	Very likely
Why?			Why?

20. How likely is it that you would consider **returning in the future** to a post in child and family social work in a Local Authority?

Not at all likely	Not very likely	Fairly likely	Very likely
Why?			Why?

21. Where do you see yourself in two years from now?

Summary and Close (5 minutes)

Thank you, that completes the list of questions I have, is there anything that you would like to add or mention that you feel is important, which has not been raised so far?

Length of interview:

Any problems with recording / any discussions off record?

Reflections (any questions not working / feedback to the team / new issues raised?)

SUSW – Employer Interview Schedule (V3)

3/4 key agency representatives in 5 LA areas (15/20 x 45 mins)

Interviewer notes: *recap on why interview is important to the research / anonymity / confirm ok to record interview / ask for them to reflect on SUSW colleagues as compared to colleagues from other qualifying routes*

Warm Up -Background details (5 minutes)

Name: _____ **Date:** _____ **F2F / Telephone** _____ **Recorded? Y / N** _____

<i>To be completed in advance and confirmed at outset of interview</i>			
Current Employer (LA)			
Current Job Title/Role/Team			
Classification for interview purposes	Prog. Coordinator Coord/Workforce	Dir/Ad/HoS Team L/Mgr	ASYE
How long in post?			

Key:

Bold Questions – mandatory questions, asked to all interviewees

Bullet Questions – supplementary and optional dependent upon experiences of interviewee / flow of conversation

Background (ALL interviewees)

1. Can you tell me when you first became involved in the SUSW programme?

- PIN – how many cohorts has LA been involved with? / which cohorts have you personally been involved with (CHECK C1 & C2)?
- Has your role/involvement remained the same over the cohorts?
- Involved pre and post qualification? (sorting question for later)

2. Can you recall what your original expectations of the programme were?

- PIN – Remember the original marketing/ambitions?
- Who informed you/explained the programme? / Generally supportive or have concerns?
- What did you think of it as a new qualifying route into social work?

3. What is your day to day involvement with the SUSW programme and graduates?

- PIN – no of graduates you manage / have direct contact with – on what basis?
- Do you conduct supervision / mentoring sessions with graduates?

4. What are your views about the quality and readiness for practice of newly qualified practitioners across the various routes to qualification?

Interviewer to remind interviewee that we would like them to answer the following questions in relation to their experiences of Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 graduates only.....

Pre-qualification experiences (ALL who indicated involvement in training in Q1)

5. What was your impression of SUSW graduates during their training?

- PIN work ethic / using their initiative / eagerness to learn / ability to integrate theory with practice / preparation for placement
- What impact, if any, did having SUSW grads 'hosted' in the LA have? On the grads themselves, on the in-house teams, on the LA more broadly?
- Were there any difficulties or challenges in adopting the SUSW training model?
- What particular strengths or shortcomings did SUSW candidates demonstrate during training?
- Any noticeable differences between SUSW and other Post grad SW graduates during training - PIN any discernible differences in how SUSW approached and participated in placements compared to non-SUSW graduates? Could you give examples to explain?

Post-qualification experiences (all except Prog Coordinators)

6. What has your experience of SUSW graduates been as full members of staff, post-qualification?

- PIN – aptitude, professional skills, knowledge, skills, preparation for practice
- Any knowledge/skills SUSWs have not developed as a result of their fast track programme (i.e. claim in comparator interviews) that others on orthodox qualification courses possess at the point of qualification?
- How would you compare SUSW employees with similarly qualified non-SUSW colleagues (i.e. PG/UG), at the point of entry into the profession?
- As members of staff are SUSW employees different in any way from other qualified social workers? (*asked in Grad interviews*)

Further questions for those involved with SUSW staff on a day to day basis:

- What were the SUSW grads like on Day 1 of being a NQSW - Prepared for practice, ability to do the job, knowledge and skills (any distinctions with non-SUSW grads? How did they compare with others at PG level starting in a C&F statutory team?)

- At what point in their career do you think your SUSW graduates became competent social workers? (*interviews suggest within first year*) In your opinion is this different for graduates from other routes?
- Is there any difference managing / supervising / having SUSW graduates in your teams? Please explain.

Career progression and development (ALL)

7. In your opinion do different qualification routes give graduates any advantage in terms of career progression and career development do you think? Please explain your answer

- Are there any noticeable differences between the career aspirations of SUSW graduates and non-SUSW graduates do you think?
- Cohort 1 graduates appear to be progressing well in their careers, some reaching advanced practitioner, senior social worker status within 3 years –does this surprise you / do you have any concerns with regards to ‘relatively’ quick progression?
- Do you foresee any difficulties that will arise for SUSW graduates as they progress with their careers?
- Do you observe any narrowing / widening of any differences between SUSW graduates and others as their careers progress? Please explain your answer.

8. Retention amongst the first SUSW cohort appears to be very high (upwards of 90% who qualified via the SU programme are still in C&F SW posts at the three year point in their careers). Do you have any thoughts as to why retention is very good?

9. Do you see any challenges / difficulties on the horizon for SUSW graduates in their early careers?

- Are these difficulties unique to SUSW or shared across all new entrants to SW?
- We intend to survey graduates again at the 5 year point in their career – what will graduates most likely encounter in their careers between 3-5 years?

SUSW Model (ALL)

10. Given everything we have talked about, do you consider the SUSW model to be effective / ineffective? Has it been successful / unsuccessful?

- If yes, How is it effective? What benefits does the programme bring?
- If No, How does it need to be improved? Where is it lacking?
- What differences do you see between the SUSW Model and other qualifying routes?
- What impact, if any, has the programme had on the SW Sector?
- Does it represent ‘value for money’? Worth the extra effort in terms of time/resources?

- Does the programme appropriately serve the needs of the individual social worker and the LA sector?
- Cohort 4 is about to commence, what do you think the future holds for those graduates?
- Is the SUSW programme sustainable do you think? Please explain
- Is there anything about the SUSW qualification route that concerns you in terms of developing and training future social workers?

Summary and close (5 minutes)

Thank you. That completes the list of questions that I have, is there anything that you would like to add or mention that you feel is important, which hasn't be raised so far?

Interviewer notes and comments:

Length of interview:

Any problems with recording / any discussions off record?

Reflections (any questions not working / feedback to the team / new issues raised?)



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