



Department
for Education

Independent evaluation of the Frontline pilot

Research report

March 2016

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Contents

List of figures	4
List of tables	5
List of abbreviations	6
Acknowledgements	7
Executive Summary	8
Background	8
Evaluation objectives	8
Methods	8
Results	9
Conclusion	10
1.0 Introduction	12
1.1 Entry requirements	12
1.2 Course curricula	14
1.3 Readiness to practice	15
1.4 Step Up to Social Work	16
1.5 Frontline	17
1.6 Programme evaluation	19
2.0 Method	24
2.1 The backgrounds of Frontline participants	24
2.2 The quality of Frontline delivery	24
2.3 The quality of Frontline participants on completion of the programme	28
3.0 Is Frontline successful in attracting high quality graduates?	35
3.1 Comparison of Frontline and students on mainstream programmes (HESA)	36
3.2 Evaluation questionnaire results	44
3.3 Summary of findings	50
4.0 Are the key elements of the Frontline programme being delivered to a high standard?	52

4.1	Inputs and participants' reactions	53
4.2	Mediating factors	75
4.3	Moderating factors	78
4.4	Participants' learning	83
4.5	Outcomes	90
4.6	Summary of findings from case studies	98
5.0	How well does Frontline prepare participants to be outstanding social workers?	102
5.1	Agreeing criteria for assessing practice skills	103
5.2	Simulated practice results for Frontline participants and students on mainstream programmes	105
5.3	Discussion	117
6.0	Overall discussion and conclusion	119
6.1	Summary of findings	119
6.2	Limitations of the evaluation	121
6.3	Conclusion	122
7.0	References	125
	Appendix One: Family interview information sheet	134
	Appendix Two: Mapping of Bogo <i>et al.</i> criteria for assessing practice quality against English frameworks for social work education	135
	Appendix Three: Criteria used for simulated practice exercise	136
	Appendix Four: Simulated practice information sheet	142
	Appendix Five: Reasons for declining participation in simulated practice	145
	Appendix Six: Simulated practice case scenarios	147
	Appendix Seven: Simulated practice written reflection proforma	151
	Appendix Eight: Simulated practice questionnaire	154
	Appendix Nine: Recall Days	158
	Appendix Ten: Piloting the simulated practice test	159

List of figures

Figure 1.1: Evaluation framework	23
Figure 4.1: Main inputs	52
Figure 4.2: Confidence ratings.....	95
Figure 4.3: Novice-expert scale - Frontline cohorts one and two in the first few months of placement	97
Figure 4.4: Participant novice-expert ratings for Cohort One - T1, T2 and T3	98
Figure 4.5: CSW novice-expert rating.....	98

List of tables

Table 1.1: Phases of the evaluation.....	22
Table 2.1: Case study respondents	28
Table 2.2: Simulated practice assessment criteria, as agreed by Delphi process	31
Table 2.3: Recruitment of simulated practice participants	32
Table 3.1: Demographics of Frontline and HESA students.....	38
Table 3.2: Socio-economic factors.....	40
Table 3.3: Secondary school attended and UCAS points	44
Table 3.4: HESA entry qualifications	45
Table 3.5: Results from evaluation questionnaire	48
Table 3.6: Awareness of Frontline publicity	50
Table 4.1: Novice-expert respondents	96
Table 5.1: Delphi participants' rating of Bogo et al. criteria for use in UK	104
Table 5.2: Characteristics of simulated practice participants	106
Table 5.3: Overall mean scores by participant group.....	109
Table 5.4: Rating of practice skills for Scenario 1 (Mother – 'Lisa') – individual items by participant group.....	110
Table 5.5: Rating of practice skills for Scenario 2 (Teenager – 'Jakub') – individual items by participant group	111
Table 5.6: Rating of written reflection for Scenario 1 (Mother – 'Lisa') – individual items by participant group.....	112
Table 5.7: Rating of written reflection for Scenario 2 (Teenager – 'Jakub') – individual items by participant group.....	113
Table 5.8: Self-efficacy ratings – individual items by participant group.....	114
Table 5.9: Simulated practice results: Matched samples.....	116
Table 8.1: Comparison of first and second year students in pilot exercise	159

List of abbreviations

AT	Academic Tutor
CLE	Contrasting Learning Experience
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CSW	Consultant Social Worker
CWDC	Children's Workforce Development Council
DH	Department of Health
FLS	Frontline Specialist
HCPC	Health and Care Professions Council
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
LA	Local Authority
NQSW	Newly Qualified Social Worker
PCF	Professional Capabilities Framework
PG	Postgraduate
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
RQF	Regulated Qualifications Framework
T1	Three months into Frontline Cohort One
T2	Seven months into Frontline Cohort One
T3	10 months into Frontline Cohort One
T4	Three months into Frontline Cohort Two
UCAS	University and College Admissions Service
UG	Undergraduate

Acknowledgements

The evaluation team are very grateful to those who gave their time to help the evaluation run smoothly. Especially worthy of mention are the Frontline trainees, children's services staff and service users who took part in the case studies and all the participants in the simulated practice exercise, both from Frontline and from mainstream social work programmes. Teaching staff in all these programmes were also very helpful in facilitating the recruitment of research participants. The evaluation was supported by critical friends on the research advisory group and by two academics who peer reviewed the final report. Membership of the advisory group shifted over the course of the evaluation. This is the full list of members, by category of membership. In most cases only one person attended for that category, as denoted by a forward slash in the list below.

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- Department for Education, social care analysis and research: Richard White and Jessica Dunn
- Director of Children's Services: Dave Hill (Essex) / Rachael Wardell (West Berkshire)
- Workforce development: Kati Maskell (Tri-borough, London)
- Consultant Social Worker: Sharon Hadley (Tri-borough, London)
- College of Social Work: Tony Stanley / Tiffany Green
- Frontline representative: variously Nathan Sansom, Patrick Sholl, Josh MacAlister
- Lead university academic for Frontline programme: Donald Forrester / Louise Grant
- Frontline participant: Stephanie Ware
- Experts in social work education: John Carpenter and Imogen Taylor

Executive Summary

Background

Frontline is a fast-track training scheme for social workers in child protection, which aims to attract outstanding graduates who may not previously have considered a career in social work. Compared to most mainstream students, The training model emphasises direct practice skills, with a single over-arching theoretical framework – a systemic model –and teaching of two evidence-based interventions, i.e. motivational interviewing and a parenting programme based on social learning theory. Frontline participants have generous financial support and considerable resources are invested in selecting the best possible candidates. Frontline has some strong supporters and backing from many employers but has not been welcomed by some in the profession, especially some social work academics. It has been claimed that it has an overly narrow focus on child protection, that the duration of the training is too short and that it may be more suited as a post-qualifying course for social workers wishing to specialise in child protection and systemic practice. Frontline accepted its first cohort of graduate trainees in 2014. Originally funded as a pilot, this evaluation considers the pilot stage only.

Evaluation objectives

The Department for Education set out the following objectives for the independent evaluation:

1. Assess whether Frontline is successful in attracting high quality graduates
2. Examine the quality of the delivery of Frontline to assess whether the key elements are being delivered to a high standard
3. Measure objectively how well Frontline prepares participants to be outstanding social workers

These evaluation objectives are used to structure the summary of methods and findings below, with the numbered sections referring to the numbered objective.

Methods

1. Three sources of data were used to describe the Frontline intake (Chapter 3.0). Firstly, data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency were used to capture the demographic and educational profile of the general social work student body. Secondly, data collected on Frontline participants at the point of application were analysed. Thirdly, a questionnaire was distributed to Frontline participants at their Summer Institute and also to postgraduate social work students in comparison

high tariff universities. This questionnaire addressed routes into social work and planned career trajectories and also, for the students on mainstream programmes, sought additional demographic data.

2. The quality of Frontline delivery was assessed through qualitative case studies in six local authorities for the first two cohorts of Frontline trainees (Chapter 4.0). Data included interviews and focus groups with Frontline trainees and interviews with other stakeholders: consultant social workers (practice educators), academic tutors, 'Frontline specialists', social work managers, practitioners and service users. There was also observation of teaching at the Summer Institute and at additional 'recall' days during the period of practice learning. The case study element was formative, insofar as interim reports were passed to Frontline during the first year of Cohort One training, allowing for changes to be made for Cohort Two.
3. The practice quality of Frontline graduates was assessed via a quasi-experimental study which compared them with qualifying students on mainstream programmes (Chapter 5.0). Simulated interviews were set up with actors playing the parts of service users – a mother with learning difficulties and a teenage boy. Audio recordings were made and independently rated by two experienced practice assessors, according to generic social work practice quality criteria. Simulated practice participants were also asked to write a brief written reflection on each interview and these were also independently rated. Assessors did not know to which groups the simulated practice participants belonged (i.e. Frontline or mainstream social work programmes).

Results

1. Frontline participants have significantly better A-level results than students on mainstream programmes, better GCSE grades in Maths and English and more first class degrees. They are also significantly younger, more likely to have parents who were graduates and are more likely to have attended independent schools. The Frontline programme also has fewer minority ethnic students than mainstream programmes, but at least the same proportion as there are minority ethnic people in the general population of England and Wales (Section 3.1.1).
- 2i. The findings on Frontline delivery were broadly positive and there was some evidence of improvements having been made between Cohort One and Cohort Two. The Summer Institute was generally well received by trainees and positively evaluated by observers (Section 4.1.1). The leadership element of training at the Summer Institute was considered problematic by many of the Cohort One trainees, however and, though it was changed for Cohort Two, the new approach was also criticised by some. Frontline participant feedback regarding the 'recall' days was mixed (Section 4.1.3).

- 2ii. In Cohort One, deadlines for written assessments and the prescriptive requirements for child observation caused some disquiet amongst trainees and consultant social workers, but these initial problems seem to have been resolved for Cohort Two (Section 4.3.3). The unit model was regarded very positively by trainees and they were also positive about support from consultant social workers (Section 4.4.1). Local authority staff's perceptions of trainee quality was very positive over time, albeit their lack of practice experience was noted by consultant social workers at the outset (Section 4.2.2). Key strengths were said to be their ability to engage well with service users and quality of their written assessments (Section 4.5.2). Participant integration with other practitioners within the social work teams was variable, with some authorities achieving this better than others. There were mixed reviews for the 'contrasting learning experience' (adult placement), with some Frontline participants viewing it as very positive and others seeing it as a distraction from child and family work (Section 4.1.5).
- 2iii. Disagreements were noted between some local authorities and the Frontline organisation over retention, with LAs wanting to tie financial support for the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment to a two-year retention agreement and Frontline averse to this idea (Section 4.2.1).
3. When all simulated practice participants were compared, Frontline participants were rated significantly higher than students on mainstream programmes for the quality of their interviewing and their written reflection (Section 5.2.3.1). When matched with a sub-sample from the mainstream programmes who had the minimum academic requirements for Frontline, so would themselves have been eligible to apply, the difference in interviewing quality remained. However, the difference in quality of written reflection was not statistically significant (Section 5.2.3.2). Despite enjoying high ratings for practice quality, the Frontline trainees' rating of their own confidence in their abilities was lower than their mainstream counterparts.

Conclusion

This study suggests that a new cohort of highly skilled practitioners is joining the workforce. The impressive skills of Frontline trainees (as demonstrated in simulated practice) include developing strongly collaborative relationships with service users, cultural competence and conducting holistic assessments. It may well be that Frontline's very well-resourced and highly selective recruitment campaign has borne fruit, although it is also possible that the Frontline training model has contributed to the impressive practice quality of Frontline graduates. There are important questions about the Frontline model that we cannot yet answer. Criticisms, particularly within the academic community, about the appropriateness of the Frontline model remain. In the context of further investment in Frontline and sector concerns about the funding of mainstream programmes, it would perhaps be understandable if social work educators in England did

not rush to embrace Frontline. We do not know about the durability and career trajectories of these trainees and we do not know about their impact on outcomes for children and families. Nonetheless, at this juncture, the initial evidence is mostly positive.

1.0 Introduction

Frontline is a fast-track social work training programme whose pilot phase runs from 2013-2017 with around 230 trainees in the first two cohorts. It is focused on statutory child protection work in local authorities. It aims to attract graduates with strong academic records and excellent interpersonal skills and the training model is distinctive in being heavily practice-based, using a specific theoretical model and two specific evidence-based practice approaches.

The Department for Education set out the following objectives for the independent evaluation:

1. Assess whether Frontline is successful in attracting high quality graduates
2. Examine the quality of the delivery of Frontline to assess whether the key elements are being delivered to a high standard
3. Measure objectively how well Frontline prepares participants to be outstanding social workers

The effectiveness of social work education in preparing social work students for practice has been the subject of some political attention in recent years (Lishman, 2011; Halton and Powell, 2013). The introduction of the social work degree in 2003 was aimed at creating an all-graduate profession and reversing the decline in numbers of applicants for social work programmes, the high turnover of staff and short professional career lifetimes (Hussein et al, 2011). Since then there has continued to be a focus on social work education and, although there has been an increase in student numbers since 2008, recent figures show that local authorities are reliant upon employing high numbers of agency staff to fill their vacancies (Department for Education, 2015).

Whilst a comprehensive literature review was out of the scope of this evaluation, the following sections will provide an opportunistic review of some background literature to set the context for the study.

1.1 Entry requirements

The Social Work Taskforce (SWTF, 2009), set up following the death of Peter Connelly and subsequent publicity, sought both to improve standards in practice and to bolster the resilience of the profession, which had been castigated in the media every time a child death scandal arose (Jones, 2012; Parker and Doel, 2013; Warner, 2015). In relation to social work education, the Taskforce highlighted concern surrounding the interpretation and implementation of minimum entry requirements to social work education, lack of consistency across courses and the extent to which the social work qualifying courses provided students with sufficient experience of child protection for frontline practice,

initial education and training is not yet reliable enough in meeting its primary objective, which must be to prepare students for the demands of frontline practice (Social Work Taskforce, 2009:16)

The Laming Report's description of the tasks undertaken by social workers emphasised the need for highly skilled practitioners, able to observe, understand, analyse and reflect upon the relationships between parent and child, record and present information clearly, work with families using evidence-based practice, recognise non-compliance, communicate to colleagues and partner agencies as well as operating in accordance with the legal framework surrounding safeguarding and child protection (Laming, 2009). The Department of Health's (DH) *Requirements for Social Work Training* (2002) recognised the need for social work degree entrants to have achieved minimum standards in English, Maths and communication skills (written and spoken). This document also instructed higher education institutions (HEIs) to determine those applicants with the 'appropriate personal and intellectual qualities to be social workers' (DH, 2002:2). This placed the onus on HEIs to adequately design application procedures which would identify applicant *suitability* for social work.

Alongside establishing minimum academic entry requirements, HEIs were also committed to widening participation, as prioritised under the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, more commonly known as the Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1997). In practice, HEIs have been faced with the challenge of designing admissions procedures that will both identify the more 'academic' applicants and those with the personality characteristics suited for social work whilst also addressing the imbalance between the groups represented within HEIs. Generally the social work degree has been successful in widening access and increasing diversity with more entrants from black and ethnic minorities, women, older applicants, those with non-traditional educational qualifications, and applicants from routine and semi-routine occupational backgrounds (Moriarty and Murray, 2007). However, determining applicant suitability for social work has been more problematic with some HEIs struggling to determine valid and reliable admissions criteria (Dillon, 2007).

Moreover, HEIs have been faced with the dilemma of whether to set standards high so as to attract the 'best' applicants or whether to widen access by setting standards low to attract those who may be suitable but lack the traditional academic pre-requisites for entry. Added to this is the existence of financial incentives offered by the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) for institutions to offer places to students from these groups. Minimum entry requirements have varied between HEIs from 120 to 320 UCAS tariff points (Holmström, 2007). A range of entry requirements is to be expected, but there was concern that social work courses were enrolling candidates with especially low achievement. Social work courses are also associated with an above average proportion of entrants from non-traditional educational routes such as access courses as well as those with no formal qualifications. Despite the Social Work Reform Board's (2010) attempts to implement the Taskforce recommendation of raising the minimum UCAS point threshold, Narey's (2014) review suggested that there is concern amongst social work employers about the calibre of social work students. Narey suggests that some

employers have an 'informal list' of the HEIs known to set lower entry requirements. This is a concern in light of research evidence from Canada and the US which supports the correlation between prior academic grades and performance on social work programmes, with the majority of studies demonstrating that as undergraduate grade point average increases so does success on graduate social work programmes (e.g. Bogo & Davin, 1989; Dunlap et al., 1998; Thomas et al., 2004; Vleish, Fogarty and Wertkin, 2015). Based on their findings, Vleish *et al.* suggest that more consideration should be given to previous academic success, albeit with consideration also given to social work values and educational competencies.

1.2 Course curricula

In the UK, recommendations to improve the quality and consistency of qualifying courses were contained within the Taskforce and Reform Board's development of the Professional Capabilities Framework on which to guide the design of course curricula (SWRB, 2010). However, as noted by Burgess and Irving (2005:13), the achievement of a comprehensive and relevant, robust and balanced social work education curriculum in the face of many and various influencing issues and forces is 'no easy task'. Moreover, Narey's (2014) review of social work education reforms highlighted that rather than streamlining course design to aid consistency, HEIs are faced with designing curricula based on multiple documents from different organisations. Namely, HEIs must draw upon the Health and Care Professions Council's (HCPC) *Standards of Proficiency* (which provide 76 standards in 15 categories), *Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics* (14 standards) and *Standards of Education and Training* (59 standards); the College of Social Work's curriculum guides (12 subject areas), the *Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF)*, which has nine domains; and a 21-page document from the HCPC which maps their *Standards of Proficiency* to the *Professional Capabilities Framework*. In addition, institutions must also consider the *Benchmark Statements for Social Work* provided by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA).

Eileen Munro's (2011) review of child protection found that the content, quality and outcomes of degree courses were inconsistent and also noted the following deficits,

there are crucial things missing in some courses such as detailed learning on child development, how to communicate with children and young people, and using evidence-based methods of working with children and families. Theory and research are not always well integrated with practice and there is a failure to align what is taught with the realities of contemporary social work practice (2011:97)

The Reform Board recommended better partnership working between HEIs and employers with HEIs still responsible for providing practice placements for student social workers (SWRB, 2010). Hence, qualifying courses were required to include 200 days of practice learning, which includes two defined placements of 70 and 100 days and 30 days for skills development (SWRB, 2010). Munro (2011) expressed the need for high

quality placements to prepare students for the ‘challenge of child protection work’ (2011:98). However, Narey (2014) has argued that not all HEIs provide students with sufficient practical experience, with many failing to obtain statutory placements through the HEI. Even for those that do, Domakin (2014) reports a lack of knowledge about the academic curriculum amongst practice educators as well as an isolation from universities which negatively impacts upon the quality of practice learning undertaken.

1.3 Readiness to practice

Research into readiness to practice has shown that newly qualified social workers (NQSWs) often do not feel that social work education equips them with all the necessary understanding and skills required for the role. Several small studies have shown that NQSWs report feeling equipped in the skills and processes such as communication, social work methods, anti-discriminatory practice, law, and research-based practice (Bates et al, 2010), working with individuals and relationship-building (Jack and Donnellan, 2010) but less well prepared in the instrumental tasks such as court skills, assessments, report writing and case management (Bates et al, 2010) as well as knowledge of child protection, dealing with hostility from service users, and assessing risks (Sharpe et al, 2011). However, NQSWs were often expected to ‘hit the ground running’ (Webber, 2014) often experiencing a ‘reality shock’ when their ideals were challenged by case management and professional accountability (Jack and Donnellan, 2010). Rather than preparing students to hit the ground running, Moriarty *et al.* (2011) argue that social work education should be seen as a developmental process, not as the end product. The role of HEIs is then one of,

Provid(ing) an education in social work at the culmination of which the student is properly equipped to undertake social work in a professional manner in a supported and supervised role. The initial qualification is the entry point to a profession in which learning should continue throughout the professional life of the individual (Croisdale-Appleby, 2014:71)

To this end, the NQSW programme established in 2008 and endorsed by the Taskforce (SWTF, 2009) adopted a developmental approach to the transition from qualifying course to employment.

Consistent with the Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) novice-expert model which consists of five stages of skill acquisition (novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient and expert), the NQSW outcome statements were in line with the ‘Advanced Beginner’ stage of the model. Using self-efficacy measures to evaluate the development of competence and confidence across the first year of practice, Carpenter *et al.* (2015) found support for an evolutionary model of professional development, where NQSW self-reported confidence increased over the first year as expertise developed. The new Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) built upon the success of the NQSW programme, extending provision to include a personal development plan and a reduction in workload.

1.4 Step Up to Social Work

Loss of public confidence following media coverage of high profile child deaths, as well as concern about course content, links between HEIs and employers, and NQSWs' academic standards and readiness for practice led the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) to develop an employer-led postgraduate route into social work which specialised in children and families social work; the MA programme 'Step Up to Social Work'. Step Up offered a new entry route into social work where trainees undertook an intensive 14-month course, with trainees receiving a bursary of around £19k. Step Up was designed to attract high calibre career changers to an employment-based intensive route into social work coordinated and delivered at regional partnership level with HEIs. To do this, two HEIs were commissioned to develop the programme specifications for Step Up with the framework designed with the scope for negotiation and development of local delivery arrangements across regional partnerships (Smith et al, 2013). This meant that regional partnerships had a clear sense of ownership, able to determine how their HEI partners facilitated student learning. There was increased alignment between the academic curriculum and practice learning where,

It was repeatedly observed that linkages between theory and practice were more easily made than had previously been experienced, both because of the structure of the programme and the abilities of the trainees (Smith et al, 2013:14).

The abilities of the trainees were determined by offering the course to graduates who had previously obtained an Upper Second or First, as well as relevant experience of working with children and families. Admissions decisions were made following applicants' attendance at an assessment centre. Results from Step Up Cohort One found that candidates from black and ethnic minority groups were not as successful on gaining a place following the assessment centre, raising concerns about the diversity of Step Up entrants and their ability to reflect the communities they serve, although this was addressed for the second cohort (Smith et al, 2013; Baginsky and Manthorpe, 2014). Findings from the first two cohorts showed that successful candidates were very favourable about the use of an assessment centre to determine their suitability and about their relationships with the local authority. They felt prepared in the knowledge areas of social work with children and families and interpersonal communication. Perceptions of the university varied across HEIs. Respondents had favourable views about their placements, reporting that they had prepared them with the skills of assessing need, assessing and managing risk, developing plans and record-keeping (Baginsky and Manthorpe, 2014). This was due in part to the greater influence employers had to shape and determine the learning experiences of Step Up students as well as the increased interest by employers in offering high quality placements due to the high proportion who were later offered permanent employment.

Whilst a greater emphasis upon partnership working (SWTF, 2009) has been included within the Step Up programme, several criticisms have been offered. Disquiet has been expressed as to the limited exposure Step Up students have to working with a range of

different social work practitioners' styles of practice, having been placed in the same groups of students and supervisors (Croisdale-Appleby, 2014). In addition, the extent to which fast track routes offer students the opportunities to reflect and develop the critical thinking skills necessary for linking theory to practice has been questioned. However, Staempfli *et al.*'s (2015) comparison of mainstream MA and Step Up students found no support for limited reflective practice development in Step Up students. In keeping with the developmental model of expertise Staempfli *et al.* (2015) argue that students need to gain practical experience whilst engaging in reflective practice in order to develop their knowledge and practice. The Step Up programme has also been questioned as to the extent to which it offers a truly generic curriculum both academically and from practice-based learning as regional partnerships are able to determine learning priorities and experiences (Smith *et al.*, 2013). This also reflects the competing demands where HEIs provide a broad knowledge base on which to base continuing professional development (CPD) whereas employers want functionally ready workers (Sharpe *et al.*, 2011).

1.5 Frontline

Against this backdrop, MacAlister, Crehan and Olsen (2012) proposed the creation of a fast-track graduate recruitment programme for frontline children's social work based on the Teach First model and run by a social enterprise agency and registered charity entitled 'Frontline'. Funded mainly by the Department for Education (DfE), the programme has been piloted in Greater Manchester and Greater London from September 2013 to 2015 and expanded to include the North-East until 2017. Its mission is to 'transform the lives of vulnerable children by recruiting and developing outstanding individuals to be leaders in social work and broader society' (Frontline, 2014). Following Teach First, Frontline was designed to attract high calibre graduates as well as career changers who would undergo a rigorous recruitment process to identify applicants with the qualities necessary for social work such as confidence, empathy, communication skills, resilience and motivation (MacAlister, Crehan, Olsen, 2012). Whilst employment-based routes into social work are by no means new, Frontline offers an accelerated two-year programme where entrants are placed within local authorities after the initial five-week residential training programme. Strong links have been forged with the local authorities as the programme requires that students, or as Frontline call them 'participants', are based within units of four participants and are supervised by Frontline-trained but LA-employed Consultant Social Workers, who take the role of practice educators. The units receive additional academic tuition within the LA through regular contact with an Academic Tutor and attendance at recall days. The student unit model has a strong heritage in mainstream social work programmes, albeit there has been a retreat from this model in recent years due to cuts to budgets for practice teaching. However, the more recent inspiration for the unit model is said to be the Reclaiming Social Work initiative developed in the London Borough of Hackney, in response to recognition that social work requires a range of complex skills, professional knowledge and understanding of evidence-based practice as well as the growing belief that social work has been,

degraded by managerial structures designed to improve accountability and risk management but which have materially changed the way social workers interact with service users (Cross, Hubbard and Munro, 2010).

Changes to the organisation of social work practice in recent years have been criticised for having become too bureaucratic and prescriptive, hindering local authorities' ability to provide a local response to the needs of their children and families as well as social workers' capacity to conduct direct work with children and their families (Munro, 2011). The Munro Review presented the Reclaiming Social Work initiative as one such model that enabled local authorities to reconfigure services to meet local needs. To do this, social work 'units' were created, comprising a consultant social worker (CSW), a social worker, a child practitioner, clinical therapist and a unit administrator with shared responsibility for cases. Hence, units were able to provide a range of expertise and perspectives to produce better assessment of risk to children as well as a broader assessment of appropriate interventions. In addition, Reclaiming Social Work units were trained in systemic practice and social learning theory in order to increase evidence-based practice within their work with families (Cross, Hubbard and Munro, 2010). The Frontline programme incorporates a similar approach in that participants are based within units with a CSW and where all receive training in systemic practice and social learning theory.

The Frontline programme has attracted criticism from some quarters, although some stakeholders have also welcomed the initiative. The aspects subject to criticism have included perceived elitism, the training model being devised outside the social work profession, the short duration of the training and the narrow focus on child protection (see, for example, Fighting Monsters blog, 2013; Henri, 2013). A joint statement produced by Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee and Association of Professors of Social Work (JUC SWEC and APSW, 2013) argued that Frontline should be re-framed as a post-qualifying course for social workers wishing to specialise in child protection and systemic practice. Ostensibly, the joint statement proposed that Frontline overlaps existing provision offered by the Step Up scheme, places demands on the public purse and focusses on child protection to the detriment of gaining comprehensive knowledge of social work and the issues faced by families.

Also, writing before Frontline was launched, Croisdale-Appleby (2014: 27) expressed concern, arising from his consultation within the field, that it might produce social workers 'inadequately informed and qualified to understand the various perspectives in any situation'. Furthermore, he wrote,

The result could be the imposition of simplistic versions of child protection methodology which could lead to selective information gathering and the utilisation of a narrow processing methodology and a consequently narrow view of social work involving children as being only child protection and safeguarding. (Croisdale-Appleby, 2014:27)

Although this independent evaluation of the Frontline pilot was not commissioned to examine the criticisms of the Frontline model, these form an important part of the context in which the evaluation is taking place.

1.6 Programme evaluation

Data were collected for the evaluation between August 2014 and November 2015. At the time of the evaluation, Frontline was only available in two areas - Greater London and Greater Manchester - although by Cohort Two work was being undertaken to expand into the North East for cohort three. The evaluation focusses upon the first year of the Frontline programme and as such, some of the problems encountered are due to the normal teething problems of any new course. A consistent finding throughout has been Frontline's openness to feedback from participants and stakeholders and its commitment to improving the programme. As such, some of the issues highlighted by the evaluation team had already been raised with Frontline directly by participants, and steps had already been taken to address them. The evaluation has been partly formative, with interim reports on Frontline unit case studies written every few months and presented to Frontline to allow for changes to be made based on these.

The evaluation began when the first cohort of the Frontline programme started the five-week residential training course, the 'Summer Institute' and ended around four months into Cohort Two, with the first cohort having completed year one of the programme. The evaluation adopted a multi-method approach where qualitative and quantitative data were collected for both cohorts of participants, and a quasi-experimental approach was adopted to compare Frontline participants with students from traditional social work programmes. The evaluation methods are detailed in Chapter Two, but Table 1.1 provides an initial summary of the different elements and their timing.

It has been observed that public policy uses pilot studies to both gain practical knowledge to guide implementation and research evidence to prove what 'works' (Ettelt, Mays and Allen, 2015a). This is an uneasy relationship where the decision to initiate a pilot must be made before there is evidence whether it does, in fact work. Ettelt, Mays and Allen (2015b) observe that the risk of initiating a pilot which is seen publicly to fail is not desirable and can present tension between policy makers who prioritise positive messages and evaluators' desire for rigorous and robust research evidence. To ensure the evaluation was feasible and also rigorous and robust, a Research Advisory Group was set up, comprising representatives from the Department for Education, children's services and Frontline, as well as academics with expertise of both delivering and researching social work education (see Acknowledgements). Some minor modifications were made to the evaluation design following comment from social work academics concerned about the Frontline model (see JUC SWEC and APSW, 2014).

The evaluation was comprised of three main aims set by DfE; to assess whether Frontline was successful in meeting its objective of attracting high quality graduates

(Chapter Three), to examine the quality of the delivery of Frontline to assess whether the key elements were being delivered to a high standard (Chapter Four), and to measure objectively how well Frontline prepared participants to be outstanding social workers (Chapter Five). The main focus for the evaluation was the first Frontline Cohort, however application data and one phase of interviews were undertaken with Cohort Two.

The evaluation drew upon Guskey's (2000) development of the Kirkpatrick (1994) model of professional evaluation to understand how the different aspects of Frontline interacted. This model supported the synthesis of data collected at different points in time, from different participants, and across four case studies Guskey's model includes five levels: participants' reactions; participants' learning; organisational support and change; participants' use of new knowledge and skills; and outcomes for service users and services. In order to capture the different teaching and learning elements of the Frontline programme a sixth level, 'Inputs' was included. The use of 'level' is somewhat of a misnomer, as the different aspects of the model are used to describe the different elements and influences upon learners. Learners do not move up incrementally between the levels (Bates, 2004).

Figure 1.1 demonstrates how the six elements relate to the Frontline programme and provides the structure for chapter four. The main development Guskey made to Kirkpatrick's model was of the inclusion of outcomes. Whilst there is beginning to be some sustained UK interest in researching the outcomes of social work education (Carpenter, 2011), comparative research is still fairly rare. Most studies are of change in one group only, without the added strength of using a comparison group. Also, most studies of outcomes rely largely on trainees' self-report. Whereas direct observation of social work practice is expected as part of practice learning on qualifying programmes, this relies on the subjective judgement of individual practice assessors. In order to address these limitations, the evaluation invited participants to take part in a standardised simulated practice exercise.

The standardised assessment of actual or simulated practice, for education or research purposes, is very rare in social work. Examples of its use are described by Petracchi (1999), Badger and MacNeil (2002), Forrester *et al.*, (2008) and Bogo *et al.* (2012). The rarity of these examples contrasts with the situation in medicine, where the standardised assessment of clinical skills using real and simulated patients is routine in assessment for medical degrees and is also used for research (e.g. Kinnersley and Pill, 1993). This element of the evaluation assessed Frontline participants' practice skills and understanding as compared to social work students who were about to qualify on regular programmes. Two comparison groups were used for different elements of the evaluation. These were (1) a typical sample of students about to qualify from the full range of mainstream programmes and (2) students in high UG tariff universities. The second group had been highlighted because it was hypothesised that, given the reality of the higher education market in the UK, these students might be the most comparable with Frontline participants in terms of academic background.

This report begins by presenting the methodology adopted for the evaluation. It is structured around the main evaluation aims. Chapter Three assesses whether Frontline attracted high quality graduates by drawing upon evidence from Frontline Cohorts One and Two as compared to students from social work courses in England, based primarily on data provided by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). Chapter Four examines the quality of the delivery of Frontline, with reference to data collated from case studies in six local authorities, primarily from Cohort One although interviews were also conducted with Cohort Two participants, targeted on problematic issues arising from Cohort One. Chapter Five presents evidence from the simulated practice exercise undertaken with participants from Cohort One and comparison groups, in order to determine how well Frontline prepared participants to be social workers. Finally, there is a discussion of the main findings.

Timescale	Frontline Programme Element	Evaluation Activity
Aug 2014- Sept 2015 Cohort One	Summer Institute	Observation
	Stage one of practice learning (about three months in)	Interviews: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participants - Consultant Social Workers - Academic Tutors - Frontline Specialist - Social work managers - Social workers
	Stage two of practice learning (after about seven months)	Observation of Recall Days Interview: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consultant social worker Focus group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participants
	Stage three of practice learning (towards the end of the first year)	Telephone interviews: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participants - Consultant Social Workers - Social work managers - Social workers - Service users - Frontline's Chief Executive - Lead professor for Frontline - Frontline Specialists Questionnaire: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Senior social work staff Simulated practice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Frontline participants - PG students in high tariff universities - Students from other UG and PG mainstream programmes.
Aug 2015- Nov 2015 Cohort Two	Stage one of practice learning (three months in)	Interviews: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participants - Consultant Social Workers - Academic Tutors - Frontline Specialist - Social work managers - Social workers

Table 1.1: Phases of the evaluation

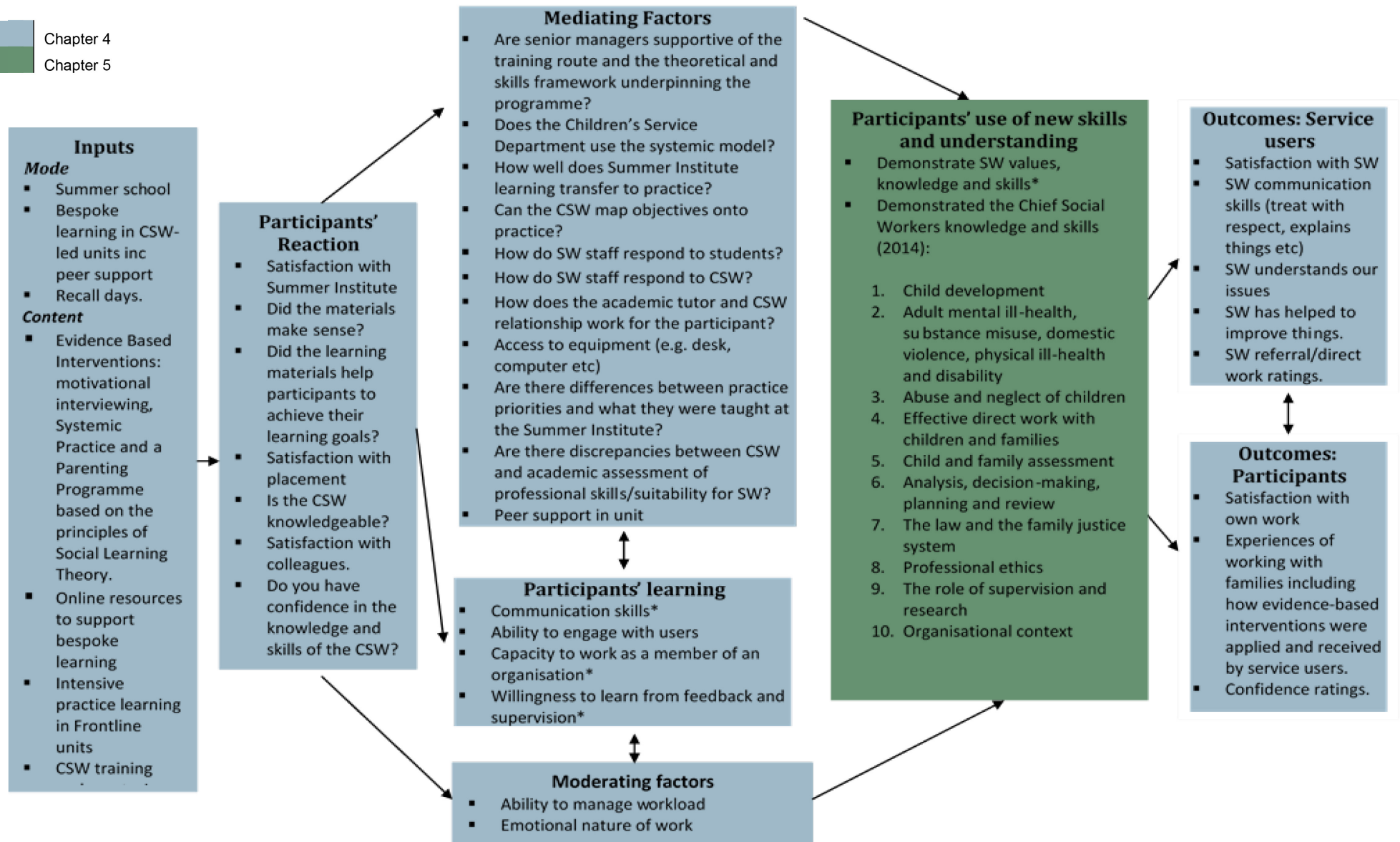


Figure 1.1: Evaluation framework

2.0 Method

The evaluation of the Frontline programme consisted of three main phases of data collection, each relating to the three evaluation objectives.

2.1 The backgrounds of Frontline participants

To assess whether Frontline had been successful in attracting high quality graduates, Frontline participants were compared with social work students on undergraduate and postgraduate courses in England across a range of variables including demographics, educational background and career aspirations. For Frontline participants, data were obtained from the Frontline organisation for the successful applicants who began Cohort One (n=104) and Cohort Two (n=124). In addition, a questionnaire was designed and distributed to the 104 Cohort One participants attending the Summer Institute. The questionnaire consisted of data on demographics, academic and previous employment experience, history of interest in social work and career aspirations. Ninety-seven participants completed the questionnaire. For the comparison group of social work students on traditional courses, data were obtained from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) for all of the 4750 beginning undergraduate and post-graduate programmes in England in the 2013-14 academic session. Questionnaire data were obtained from 128 students from five high UG tariff universities (response rate = 70%). The questionnaire included the same questions asked of the Frontline participants at application stage (by the Frontline organisation) and at the Summer Institute (by the research team). The average UCAS admissions tariff of undergraduates at each university was used to group universities for analysis of HESA data.

2.2 The quality of Frontline delivery

To examine the quality of the delivery of Frontline and therefore assess whether the key elements were being delivered to a high standard, qualitative research was undertaken primarily with Cohort One, although Cohort Two trainees participated in one semi-structured interview each which focused upon any modifications that had been made to the programme following Cohort One experiences. Quality of delivery was assessed through observation of the Summer Institute and case studies of practice learning. Three members of the research team, each with more than 15 years' personal experience of delivering social work education, each observed one day of the Frontline teaching at the Summer Institute and one of the recall days during the period of practice learning for Cohort One. Interviews were undertaken with Cohort One case studies around three months into practice learning (T1), after seven months (T2) and after 12 months (T3). Interviews were conducted with Cohort Two three months into their practice learning (T4).

The evaluation identified four LAs for Cohort One whilst for Cohort Two, two existing case studies were revisited and two new LAs were recruited in order to reach a wider range of

staff involved with Frontline, especially consultant social workers. The evaluation report summarises the perspectives of various stakeholders: Frontline participants, consultant social workers (CSWs) and other local authority colleagues, as well as academic tutors (ATs) and Frontline specialists (FLSs). The selection of LAs to be case studies was based on a combination of stratified random sampling and purposive sampling. They were selected on four criteria. The first criterion was inspection record. The original intention was to select one authority within each band of 'outstanding', 'good', 'requires improvement' and 'inadequate', using the local authorities' most recent inspection record for children's social care services. However, there were in fact no authorities with any outstanding ratings. Mean inspection scores across all domains were inspected and randomisation was achieved within the bands of 'good' (two selected), 'requires improvement' (one) and 'inadequate' (one), using random numbers generated by MS Excel.

The second criterion, the number of Frontline student units per local authority was taken into consideration, as although most local authorities had only one unit, some had two, some three and some had one unit shared across two or three authorities.

The third criterion, geography was considered, so that three authorities were selected from the South East (one of these coming from outside London), and a fourth from the Manchester area for both Cohort One and Cohort Two. In order to apply the second and third criteria, it was necessary in a couple of the inspection categories to select the second or third authority ranked by random number.

A fourth and less important criterion for the sample was that it would ideally cover all three of the Frontline specialists. Happily the initial selection did this, so no more change was needed to the sample. Within two of the local authorities which had more than one Frontline unit – two and three respectively – a random selection was made of one of these units.

Data collection from the case studies began with an initial introductory visit to each site before semi-structured interviews were conducted with 38 individuals for Cohort One (T1, Table 2.1). All four case study sites were visited in the period October-November 2014. The purpose of this visit was to clarify the evaluation protocols, apply the audit framework to develop an initial overview of how Frontline was being implemented, identify key data sources and contact details for participants so that telephone interviews could be conducted. In two of the Cohort One case studies, where interviewees indicated a preference for face-to-face conversations these were conducted during the visit. All other interviews were conducted via the telephone in the period October-December.

The T2 data collection comprised a second visit to each Cohort One case study in March 2015 to explore the developing perspectives found at T1. Interviews were conducted with the four consultant social workers and focus groups were conducted with Frontline trainees in each site. Thirteen of the 15 trainees took part. In one case study site, two Frontline participants could not take part in the focus group due to work commitments.

The second visit was scheduled so that the evaluators could also attend the unit meeting in each case study site. Approximately three hours of observations were undertaken of the unit meeting and of interactions within the office environment.

For T3, four different types of interviews were undertaken. Firstly, staff (three practitioners and four managers) who had supported Frontline participants during their 'Contrasting Learning Experience' (CLE) adult social care placements were interviewed. Following feedback at the second visit to the participant units (March 2015), it was decided that it would be more beneficial to conduct these interviews prior to placement completion, as opposed to during the placement. There was, however, no uniform date when placements would end. All 15 participants were emailed in June 2015 to request a name and contact details for their CLE representative as well as an approximate completion date for the placement. Twelve of the 15 participants responded. An email reminder elicited one further response; however the participant reported having no information that could be forwarded. No further responses were gained following subsequent reminders (telephone and email). Appointments were made to interview 11 of the 12 CLE representatives, with the twelfth stating that they were willing to participate but were on annual leave for four weeks. Nine of the 11 CLE representatives were interviewed across all four local authorities (two could not be reached at the agreed time).

Secondly, the four CSWs and 14 of the 15 participants from the four case study units took part in telephone interviews in the period July-August. Despite several reminders from the evaluators and the CSW, one participant did not take part in the final interview. Anecdotal evidence suggested that this participant would not be proceeding on to year two of the Frontline programme. The final interview for Cohort One sought to assess experiences of the latter half of the programme, including the contribution the CLE made to the programme. Greater emphasis was placed on participant perceptions of how they have applied their knowledge (e.g. motivational interviewing) and how they perceive their skills.

Thirdly, all participants were asked to invite the families they worked with to take part in a brief telephone interview. An information sheet was disseminated, explaining the rationale for the interview (Appendix One). Service users were asked to sign their consent, provide their telephone number and indicate the most appropriate time to call them. The information sheet also provided the option for a Skype interview but no service users requested this option. Completed forms were received from six service users, with four subsequently interviewed. Attempts were made at contacting the remaining two service users on two different occasions but there was no response. The four service users interviewed were from three of the four units and each had a different Frontline participant working with them. Caution is needed when reviewing the service user findings, as such a small sample cannot be said to be representative of service users generally, or of the four case study units. The results are presented merely as an illustration of what these service users said about their Frontline social workers.

Fourthly, interviews were conducted with Frontline's Chief Executive, the lead professor for Frontline, and two Frontline specialists. Undertaken at the end of Cohort One, these interviews invited reflection upon the first year of operation. Specifically, the interview asked what had worked well for Cohort One and what had not worked as well. Rather than present these findings as a separate section, these findings are included where they endorse or differ from the findings presented throughout the report.

Finally, T4 replicated the method used for T1 where visits were made to the four Cohort Two case studies in November 2015 in order to introduce the evaluation and identify key data sources and contact details for participants so that telephone interviews could be conducted. As Cohort Two participants were only expected to undertake one interview for the evaluation, all four case studies indicated a preference for the interviews to be conducted face-to-face during the introductory visit so that participation was completed in one day. In each site, one participant was unavailable and so this interview was conducted via the telephone. One CSW was unavailable on the day and despite having arranged a telephone interview on two separate occasions, the CSW continued to be unavailable. Hence, only three of the four CSWs were interviewed. For T4, 32 interviews were conducted in total (Table 2.1).

All of the interviews and focus groups from the case studies were recorded and transcribed. N-vivo software was used to facilitate thematic coding where the coding frame was structured around the audit framework. Using the audit framework, research findings as to the implementation fidelity of the key innovative aspects of the programme across the case studies were explored with regard to inputs, participant reactions, mediating factors, participants' learning, moderating factors, and outcomes. Data regarding participants' practice skills and understanding were generated via a simulated practice exercise (Chapter Five).

Cohort One		LA1	LA2	LA3	LA4
T1	Consultant Social Workers	1	1	1	1
	Participants	4	4	4	4
	Academic tutors*	1	1	1	1
	Frontline Specialists*	1	1	1	1
	Social work managers	1	1	1	0
	Social workers	4	1	0	3
	<i>T1 Total</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>10</i>
T2	Consultant Social Workers	1	1	1	1
	Participant focus group	3	4	4	2
	<i>T2 Total</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>3</i>
T3	Consultant Social Workers	1	1	1	1
	Participants	3	4	3	4
	Contrasting learning experience representatives	2	3	1	3
	Service users	0	1	2	1
	Children's Service Director	1	0	0	0
	<i>T3 Total</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>9</i>
Cohort Two		LA1	LA2	LA5	LA6
T4	Consultant Social Workers	1	1	1	0
	Participants	4	4	4	5
	Academic tutors	1	1	1	1
	Frontline Specialists*	1	1	1	1
	Social work managers	0	0	1	0
	Social workers	1	1	0	0
	Senior manager	0	0	1	0
	<i>T4 Total</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>7</i>

Table 2.1: Case study respondents

2.3 The quality of Frontline participants on completion of the programme

To measure objectively the practice quality of Frontline participants, a quasi-experimental study was set up, which compared Frontline trainees with students from mainstream programmes. To do this, simulated practice was employed, with students taking part in interviews with actors playing the roles of service users in two scenarios (a mother with learning difficulties and a teenage boy). Each interview was audio recorded and students also had to write a brief written reflection on each of the two interviews. Both the recordings and written reflection were independently rated by two experienced practice assessors, according to generic social work practice quality criteria. Assessors did not know to which groups the simulated practice participants belonged (i.e. Frontline or mainstream social work programmes).

The use of standardised assessment of social work practice mirrors the Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) from medical education. Building on the work conducted in Canada by Marian Bogo and colleagues (2009, 2012, 2014) into the use of simulated practice in social work, Frontline trainees were compared with social work students who were about to qualify on regular programmes from two comparison groups: (1) postgraduate students in high undergraduate (UG) tariff universities and (2) a sample of students from a range of other mainstream programmes (both UG and postgraduate [PG]). The first group were selected with the aim of identifying students most similar to Frontline trainees in terms of academic background (as opposed to any assumption of programme quality). As Frontline's admissions criteria include an upper second degree or higher and at least 300 UCAS points in top three A-levels or equivalent, the Guardian newspaper university league table (The Guardian, 2013) was consulted in order to identify institutions likely to have some students who were roughly comparable in terms of academic background. This was based on the assumption that if the postgraduate student market were to be similar to the UG market, we might assume that the best qualified students will be drawn to Masters programmes in the same universities that have the highest entry standards at UG level.

Thirteen English universities which teach PG social work were in the bracket of 400+ points for all-subject UG entry tariff. In identifying universities to approach about participation in the evaluation, all-subject tariff was considered more relevant than the tariff for UG social work specifically, as it is the former that affects position in league tables. The second group were selected with the aim of also providing a broader range of social work students.

The system for scoring practice quality on the simulated interviews and written reflections was created using a 'Delphi' process which was undertaken with equally-weighted groups of social work academics, practice educators, practitioners and service users. The Delphi method consists of a series of individual consultations with domain experts, interspersed with controlled feedback of the experts' opinions (Dalkey and Helmer, 1963). The academics were recruited via advertisement to the Joint Universities Council Social Work Education Committee (JUC SWEC) email list. Although similar advertisements were put out for practitioners (via the College of Social Work) and practice educators (via the National Organisation of Practice Teachers), adverts did not generate sufficient interest so practitioners and practice educators involved with the Cardiff MA Social Work programme were recruited. Service users were recruited via the user-led organisation for care-experienced young people Voices from Care. All of these participants had experience of social workers when they were looked after by the local authority and several had also been involved with children's services as parents.

The Delphi group considered the assessment tools for generic social work skills that have been developed and validated by Marian Bogo and colleagues (2009) in Canada (<http://research.socialwork.utoronto.ca/hubpage/resources-2>), slightly slimmed down to reduce the burden on participants and assessors. The Bogo *et al.* criteria were mapped

on to the Professional Capabilities Framework, the Health and Care Professions Council's standards of proficiency and the Chief Social Worker's Knowledge and Skills document and found to be compatible, albeit they are only concerned with the range of capabilities which can be assessed via a simulated interview and written reflection and they do not cover the full range of tasks encompassed by these frameworks (see Appendix Two). The criteria do not, for example, assess someone's ability to function effectively within an organisation and do not assess social scientific knowledge in depth. The Delphi group scored each of the Bogo *et al.* criteria on a scale of 1-10, with 1 being completely unsuitable, 10 completely suitable and 6+ being adequate. The Delphi group agreed in the first round of consultation that the Bogo *et al.* criteria were acceptable for assessing qualifying social workers in the UK. A few minor edits were made to the language in the Bogo *et al.* criteria to ensure their translation to a UK context. The full criteria used can be found in Appendix Three and the headings are listed in Table 2.2.

A simulated practice pilot was conducted with 25 postgraduate students from one high UG tariff university who volunteered to take part. This group comprised 15 second years and 9 first years (21 female, 4 male). Each took part in two interviews with actors playing service user roles; one interview was with a parent and the other with a teenage child. The pilot exercise was designed to test the validity and reliability of the simulated practice test and identify any practical issues with its delivery. Although the Bogo *et al.* criteria had previously been subject to piloting and validation in Canada (Bogo *et al.*, 2011, 2012), we were using a slightly slimmed down version and anyway there was no published validation of these criteria in a UK context. The results of the pilot are presented in Appendix 10. Some minor changes were made to the practical arrangements of the exercise as a result of the pilot.

Of the 13 English universities in the 400+ UG tariff group, seven agreed to take part, though in one case it was too late in the term to be able to recruit students. Five declined, all but one of these because of fundamental objections to Frontline or doubts about how fair the evaluation would be. A further one did not respond. Thirteen other HEIs, from outside the 400+ UCAS tariff bracket, were randomly selected and approached about participation. Of these, six agreed to take part, although in one case a recruitment visit was not possible because students were not returning to the university, three declined, with one of these stating concerns about Frontline and the others not giving specific reasons for declining. Four of the 13 did not respond either way.

Practice assessment*
<p>The student develops and uses a collaborative relationship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduction - Response to service user: general content and process - Response to service user: specific to situation - Focus of interview <p>The student conducts an assessment of the person in their environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presenting problem - Systemic assessment - Strengths <p>The student sets the stage for collaborative goal setting</p> <p>The student demonstrates cultural competence</p> <p>Overall assessment of the simulated interview</p>
Written reflection assessment*
<p>Student is able to conceptualise their practice/make use of knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Content</i>: How students theoretically conceptualise substantive issues in the scenario and for their practice - <i>Content</i>: How students conceptualise issues of culture and diversity in their practice - <i>Process</i>: How students' past knowledge and experience impact their approach to the case <p>Student is able to assess their own practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Cognitive</i>: what students focus on and talk about regarding their performance <p>Student is able to think about their professional development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Learning</i>: What students focus on and talk about regarding their learning - <i>Growth</i>: What students say about how they would integrate this experience into their practice

* Taken from the work of Bogo *et al.* (2009) <http://research.socialwork.utoronto.ca/hubpage/resources-2>

Table 2.2: Simulated practice assessment criteria, as agreed by Delphi process

A common recruitment process was then undertaken for all potential simulated practice participants. This consisted of contact with programme staff to explain the evaluation and agree a date for a recruitment visit, circulation of the information sheet (Appendix Four) to potential participants in advance. Teresa de Villiers (in most cases) or Jonathan Scourfield (in two cases) attended the programme on a day when teaching was taking place and explained the simulated practice, answering questions and asking people to sign up. All participants were offered £50 in acknowledgement that they were giving up their time and in most cases doing so for an evaluation of a programme other than their own. Most were also making a special journey in order to take part in the study. Recruitment visits to universities were followed up with emails to any students who had not been present to offer participation. There were various recruitment challenges. These included low numbers of students being present for teaching and a couple of practical hiccups such as students having been sent home early because of poor communication between different teaching staff. When some difficulties in recruitment became evident, in

three universities and amongst the Frontline participants based in the South East potential participants were asked for their reasons for declining participation. These are listed in Appendix Five.

The numbers of simulated practice participants were lower than originally envisaged, as the aim was for 70 in each group. In the third group of universities with less than 400+ UCAS tariff (all-UG), the ratio of undergraduates to postgraduates was 1.3 to 1 whereas the aim, reflecting the proportions in the whole sector, had been for a ratio of 2 to 1. Although the numbers recruited were lower than planned, the sample achieved nonetheless allowed for statistically significant differences between groups to be detected, in part because there was less variation in the data set than expected (i.e. the standard deviations were lower than hypothesised in the original sample size calculation), as revealed in the pilot exercise and detailed in Chapter 5.

The participation rate (or response rate) can be seen in Table 2.3. The disappointingly low rate raises the possibility that those participating may not be representative of all students on the respective programmes. The only way available to test this was to request aggregate achievement data from programmes. Participants had not given permission for their own grades to be passed on, but in all but one of the participating programmes we were able to obtain aggregate overall grades both for students who participated in the simulated practice and for their whole cohort. These results are presented in Chapter 5.

Participant group	N eligible	N completed	Response rate
Frontline	103	49	48%
Higher tariff universities (n=6) PG	121 approx.	36	30%
Other universities (n=5) UG+PG	173 approx.	30 (13 PG/17 UG)	17%
<i>Overall total</i>	<i>397 approx.</i>	<i>115</i>	<i>29%</i>

Table 2.3: Recruitment of simulated practice participants

The simulated practice exercise took place in university teaching rooms for students on mainstream programmes and, for Frontline participants, at the conference centre where their final collective teaching session was taking place. All simulated practice events took place when programmes had finished but in most cases final results were not yet known.

When they arrived at the simulated practice venue, participants were given a single paragraph outlining the scenario shortly before the interview and actors were given fuller information, in line with the approach taken by Marian Bogo and colleagues (2014). Students had been emailed the criteria on which they would be scored a few days before the test. The practice scenarios used can be found at Appendix Six. They were written by the research team and checked by practitioners. The aim was for everyday practice scenarios. One was of a parent (mother) and the other a teenage child (boy). The parent scenario was constructed so as to also include adult social care issues, namely learning difficulties.

The interviews were audio-recorded and students completed a 15-minute written reflection after each one, consisting of responses to eight questions on a two-page pro-forma, with fixed space for response (Appendix Seven). All students also completed a questionnaire about demographics, educational background and self-efficacy for the practice domains being assessed (see Appendix Eight). The idea for the self-efficacy scale comes from Holden *et al.* (2002) but the statements given to participants mirror the Bogo *et al.* criteria. Rating of audio recordings was done by a pool of seven practice assessors, with two assessors for each recording and all assessors rating a selection of recordings from each of the three groups, but with no knowledge of which programme (i.e. Frontline or other social work degree) the participants had attended. Assessors received training in order to ensure assessment standardisation. This included the use of a recording from the simulated practice pilot to develop a consensus about the appropriate rating.

The original evaluation protocol stated that video recordings would be made. It was subsequently decided to move from video to audio recordings, for two reasons. Firstly, feedback from the pilot and the first recruitment visit was that some students were put off from volunteering to take part by the use of video, some feeling self-conscious about their appearance. Secondly, the use of video might have resulted in the participant group being identifiable, as all the simulated practice tests for Frontline participants took place in similar rooms whereas the comparison groups were in a diverse range of university rooms. This decision was taken just after the pilot exercise had taken place, so video recordings had already been made for the pilot. Because of the decision to move to audio recordings, the assessors for the pilot were asked not to look at the screen when rating recordings.

For Objective Three of the evaluation the primary interest is in three way comparisons between Frontline participants, PG students from high tariff universities and UG+PG students from other universities. If we assume that all three groups have the same standard deviation in test scores, analysis of variance (ANOVA) can be used to compare the means across all three groups at once. Use of ANOVA to estimate statistical power is in keeping with the original sample size calculation for the study protocol (see <http://sites.cardiff.ac.uk/cascade/publications-2/cascade-publications/>, CASCADE Paper 01). The non-parametric equivalent of the ANOVA (i.e. Kruskal-Wallis test) has similar or better statistical power than the ANOVA under most situations whilst retaining distinct advantages (Hecke 2012). ANOVA and Kruskal–Wallis tests were used to evaluate the likelihood that any differences in scores between the three groups could have occurred purely as a result of random variation or measurement error. To conduct multiple tests of statistical significance would not be desirable, because of the risk of false positives. ANOVAs and Kruskal-Wallis tests were therefore only used for comparison of total scores for practice quality and written reflections. Additional differences between the three groups in any of the 16 individual scoring criteria (Table 2.2) are presented in Chapter 5 as descriptive statistics only.

The simulated practice exercise was intended to assess the impact of the Frontline programme compared to other social work programmes. However, prior to their studies, Frontline participants differed from other social work students in many ways. For instance, all eligible applicants to the Frontline programme had to have at least 300 UCAS points for their top three A-levels, and HESA data on UGs and our own questionnaire data for PGs show that only a minority of students on regular social work programmes achieved this tariff. In short, selection into the Frontline programme was not random. It is difficult under these circumstances to evaluate whether any differences in performance in the Frontline evaluation are due to the Frontline programme itself or due to any selection effects.

Different starting points could have implications for like-for-like comparison between the groups. In order to assess whether there are comparable individuals across the different programmes, we attempted to create a matched sample of Frontline participants and individuals from other programmes. The participants in the sample were matched based on educational qualification and unmatched cases were not used in this analysis. It was also possible to construct comparative samples matched on reported pressures affecting the experience of social work education, such as caring responsibilities and external employment. Both results using matched samples and the full sample are reported in Chapter 5, although it should be noted that matching does not solve the problem of selection effects.

There were eight actors used in the simulated interviews and although it was planned that the same pool of actors would be used for all participant groups, due to unforeseen circumstances, three of the actors were unavailable to participate in simulated interviews with the Frontline participants. This raises issues if evaluation scores using these three actors were to be systematically different from scores using the other actors. Tests were conducted to check on this.

3.0 Is Frontline successful in attracting high quality graduates?

This chapter addresses the first aim of the evaluation: whether Frontline has been successful in attracting high quality graduates. To do this Frontline participants were compared with social work students on undergraduate and post-graduate courses in the UK across a range of variables including demographic variables as well as career aspirations. Frontline states that its mission is to 'transform the lives of vulnerable children by recruiting and developing outstanding individuals to be leaders in social work and broader society' (Frontline, 2014). Applicants are required to have an upper second degree or higher, and at least 300 UCAS points in top three A-levels or equivalent. Applicants are also required to attend an assessment centre. This involves a verbal reasoning test, written exercise, simulated client interview and a joint interview undertaken by Frontline and the Local Authority in which they will be placed, so that individuals who are 'committed, determined and showed potential' (Frontline, 2014) can be identified. These characteristics are difficult to measure outside of an intensive assessment centre, however, so this chapter therefore focuses upon social demographics, previous educational attainment, previous employment, social work aspirations and response to Frontline publicity.

Information about Frontline was taken from data gathered by Frontline from its successful applicants for (n=104) and Cohort Two (n=124). No statistically significant differences were found between Cohorts One and Two in terms of demographics. Questionnaire data was also obtained by the evaluation team from the 97 Frontline Cohort One participants who gave permission for these data to be linked to their application data. Participant name was used to link the data before all data were anonymised. Fisher's exact tests were used to assess any difference in the composition of the 97 (93%) who completed additional questionnaires, with permission for data linkage, and the full sample of 104 anonymised Frontline participants from the Frontline database. No evidence was found of any differences between the 97 and the 104.

Demographic data relating to the general body of social work students in England is taken from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) from all of the 4750 undertaking undergraduate and post-graduate programmes in the 2013-14 cohort. Descriptive data were obtained from 128 students from 5 universities (response rate = 70%) using a questionnaire which included the same questions asked of the Frontline participants at application stage (by the Frontline organisation) and at the Summer Institute (by the research team). The average UCAS admissions tariff of undergraduates at each university was used to group universities. Five universities in the 400+ UCAS points all-subject tariff were identified as 'high tariff PG' universities for the simulated practice. This chapter begins by presenting demographic findings drawn from the Frontline applicant data and the HESA data before discussing the questionnaire findings from both Frontline and the university data. To avoid repetition, where the questionnaire

has repeated items from the Frontline applicant and HESA data, the results are presented together.

3.1 Comparison of Frontline and students on mainstream programmes (HESA)

3.1.1 Demographics

This section examines whether the demographic characteristics of Frontline participants from Cohort One (n=104) are different from other social work students by directly comparing them with the HESA data for the 2013-2014 social work student cohort (n=4750). Reference is also made to Frontline Cohort Two (n=124) as a means of exploring whether these differences are observed across the two cohorts.

Data was obtained from HESA relating to social work higher education enrolments in England for the period 2013-14. Enrolments were categorised for inclusion if it was the first year of study, the course title contained the term, 'social work' and if the course allowed HCPC registration after graduating (n=4750). Enrolments were excluded if they were post-qualifying courses, did not confer HCPC eligibility, and did not have the first year marker. Hence, 1,697 students were excluded. This yielded a sample of 4,750 first year students on accredited pre-qualifying courses which could be used as a comparison group for the Frontline data, hereafter referred to as 'all-HESA' group. In addition, a sub-group of the HESA data was formed of the 14 universities in England with all-subject tariff of 400+ UCAS points for UG admission, hereafter referred to as the 'HESA high tariff' group.

Gender

The majority of students were female across Frontline Cohort One and Two as well as the all-HESA and HESA high tariff groups (Table 3.1). Moriarty and Murray (2007) note the decline in the numbers of men applying for social work courses. The decrease in male applications has been associated with the perceived lower status and pay for social work (Parker and Crabtree, 2014; Evaluation of Social Work Degree Qualification in England Team, 2008) as well as the fact that probation officers no longer need a social work qualification, as a probation career has traditionally attracted more men. Moriarty and Murray's (2007) research shows that it is not that men are less likely to be accepted onto courses but rather that men are less likely to apply.

The gender makeup of Frontline participants is slightly different from that of the general student body, with the all-HESA group having a higher proportion of men (22-24%, compared with 14-15%). This difference between Frontline and the all-HESA group of all mainstream students was statistically significant for both cohorts ($X^2=5.34$, $p=0.02$ for Cohort One and $X^2=10.31$, $p=0.001$ for Cohort Two). When comparing Frontline with HESA high tariff university Masters students, the difference was significant at the 0.05 level for Cohort Two ($X^2=6.22$, $p=0.01$) but not for Cohort One ($X^2=3.07$, $p=0.08$). The

Frontline participants' gender profile is very similar to the number of registered social workers, where 77% were female and 23% were male (General Social Care Council, 2010), the comparably higher rates of men possibly reflecting Frontline's drive to raise the status of social work as a career. The inclusion of leadership into the programme may also have served to attract men who have been found to place greater emphasis upon career progression (Evaluation of Social Work Degree Qualification in England Team, 2008).

Age

Table 3.1 shows that Frontline participants across both cohorts are on average younger than the all-HESA mainstream students. This is perhaps not surprising as Frontline's recruitment campaign actively targets UG students, employing 'Brand Managers' on campus who are responsible for raising the profile of Frontline amongst their peers and who attend university careers fairs. Frontline also has a presence in the annual university recruitment 'milk round'. Sixty-four per cent of Frontline participants were under 25 years of age, with 90% being under 29 years of age. Findings from the all-HESA data showed that the student population tended to be more distributed across age groups with fewer under 29 (62%), 24% between 30 and 39 years and 14% over the age of 40. This difference was statistically significant for both the all-HESA group ($w=171940$ [i.e. Wilcoxon rank sum test, difference in sum of ranks], $p<0.001$) and the HESA high tariff group ($w=30578$ $p<0.001$). A similar pattern emerged for Frontline Cohort Two, where 88% were under 29 years, with the notable exception of one participant in the 55-59 age range. Moriarty and Murray (2007) note that although only 10% of UCAS applications are from those aged 25 and over, half of those accepted for mainstream social work courses are aged 25 and over.

Disability

There are no exact figures for Frontline with regard to disability. When asked, only two Frontline participants specified having a disability, however a few more disclosed learning difficulties such as dyslexia once the course started (email communication with Frontline; no specific numbers given). Seventeen per cent of all-HESA students and 13% of HESA high tariff group reported having a disability of some form but no further details were available.

	Frontline Cohort One N = 104		Frontline Cohort Two N = 124		All-HESA N = 4750		HESA High tariff N = 779	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Female	81	78	94	76	4080	86	660	85
Male	23	22	30	24	670	14	120	15
17-24 ¹	66	64	75	60	2015	42	350	45
25-29	27	26	35	28	930	20	200	26
30-34	8	8	9	7	650	14	90	12
35-39	1	1	4	3	480	10	65	8
40-44	2	2	0	0	335	7	35	5
45-49	0	0	0	0	240	5	25	3
50-54	0	0	0	0	90	2	10	1
55-59	0	0	1	1	20	0	5	1
60-64	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
White	89	86	95	77	3295	70	590	76
Black	2	2	9	7	880	19	85	11
Asian	2	2	2	2	250	5	40	5
Other (including mixed)	9	9	18	15	260	5	60	8
Unknown	2	2	0	0	70	1	10	1

Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding

Table 3.1: Demographics of Frontline and HESA students

Ethnicity

In terms of ethnicity, both Frontline Cohort One and all-HESA data revealed high numbers of British White students (86% and 70%, respectively). The proportion of white people in England and Wales in the 2011 census was 86%. Participants identifying themselves as either black, Asian or other/mixed differed across the groups, with Frontline reporting fewer in the Black and other/mixed categories. Frontline Cohort Two reported a slight increase in black participants and double the number of those describing themselves as either 'other' or mixed race. The difference in distribution of ethnic backgrounds across the groups was statistically significant for Frontline Cohort One and all-HESA (Fisher's exact test, $p < 0.001$), and for Frontline Cohort Two and all-HESA ($p < 0.001$). The difference in distribution was also statistically significant for Frontline Cohort One and the HESA high tariff group ($p = 0.005$) and for Frontline Cohort Two and the HESA high tariff group ($p = 0.02$).

¹ The category 17-24 could not be sub-divided into 17-19 and 20-24 as it is based on the categories used by Frontline for its applicant data.

According to the General Social Care Council's Annual Report 2009-10, 70% of registered social workers are white, with 10% black and 4.3% Asian. Whilst the number of Black students on Frontline Cohort One was lower than would be expected, this replicates the findings from Step Up to Social Work where low numbers of Black students were reported for the first cohort (Smith *et al.*, 2013). The data revealed that Frontline Cohort Two had a higher proportion of black participants than Frontline Cohort One (7% and 2%, respectively). In terms of ethnicity, the findings suggest that Frontline is more similar to that of the HESA high tariff group although it should be noted that Frontline Cohort Two attracted more participants from 'other' or 'mixed' ethnic backgrounds than the high tariff HESA group (15% and 8%, respectively).

Socioeconomic background

The Frontline applicant data contained three items which can be used as socio-economic status indicators, namely income support receipt, free school meal entitlement, and parental education (Table 3.2). Of these indicators, only one, namely parental education, was obtainable from HESA. The questionnaire we administered to Masters students in high UG tariff universities ($n=128$) also contained items relating to income support receipt, free school meal entitlement, and parental education and these results are presented below.

For receipt of income support, the Frontline data showed that 17% of Cohort One and 12% of Cohort Two reported that their families had received income support during their school years. The number of social work students reporting to have been in receipt of income support during their school years, might be expected to be similar for Frontline and the high tariff questionnaire group. Indeed, similar numbers were found between Cohort One (17%) and the high tariff questionnaire group (21%) although there was a difference between Cohort Two (12%) and the high tariff questionnaire group (21%). This difference was not statistically significant for Cohort One (Fisher's exact test, $p=0.23$). Statistical significance was found for Cohort Two (Fisher's exact test $p=0.01$). Both Frontline Cohort One and the high tariff questionnaire group reported that 15% of students had received free school meals. Whilst not significant, slightly fewer participants in Cohort Two reported having received income support.

With regard to parental education, more than half of Frontline Cohort One participants' parents had a degree (59%) as compared to just under a third of all-HESA students (31%). Statistical analysis confirmed that Frontline Cohort One parents were more likely to have a degree than the all-HESA group ($X^2=17.70$, $p<0.001$) and those from the HESA high tariff group ($X^2=6.47$, $p=0.01$). For Frontline Cohort Two, the proportion whose parents were graduates rose slightly. The difference was significant for Cohort Two and all-HESA ($X^2=28.77$, $p<0.001$) and Cohort Two and the HESA high tariff universities ($X^2=11.65$, $p=0.001$).

In their analysis of social work student data using both HESA and UCAS figures, Moriarty and Murray (2007) found that unlike the general population of university students (all

subjects) who tended to be from more affluent backgrounds, social work attracts students across all socioeconomic groups. In this regard, Frontline participants appear more like the general population of students than their social work counterparts. This may, in part explain concerns expressed by some as to the apparent elitism of Frontline. Indeed, Frontline participants were from more affluent backgrounds than both social work students as a whole and the sub-set who were studying at high tariff universities. This was more pronounced for Cohort Two.

		Frontline Cohort One N = 104		Frontline Cohort Two N = 124		HESA N = 4750		HESA High tariff unis N = 779		Questionnaire high tariff N = 128	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Income support received during school years	<i>Yes</i>	18	17	15	12	-	-	-	-	27	21
	<i>No</i>	71	68	100	81	-	-	-	-	81	64
	<i>Prefer not to say</i>	3	3	1	1	-	-	-	-	0	0
	<i>Don't know</i>	12	12	8	6	-	-	-	-	18	14
Free school meals	<i>Yes</i>	16	15	15	12	-	-	-	-	19	15
	<i>No</i>	80	77	103	83	-	-	-	-	104	82
	<i>Prefer not to say</i>	3	3	1	1	-	-	-	-	30	24
	<i>Don't know</i>	5	5	5	4	-	-	-	-	3	2
Parents have a degree	<i>Yes</i>	61	59	79	64	1450	31	245	31	52	41
	<i>No</i>	39	38	44	35	2170	46	275	35	76	59
	<i>Prefer not to say</i>	3	3	1	0	0	16	0	0	0	0
	<i>Don't know</i>	1	1	0	0	1135	24	255	33	0	0

Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding

Table 3.2: Socio-economic factors

3.1.2 Educational background

Secondary school

There was an information overlap regarding secondary school attended and A/AS levels, where both the all-HESA data and high tariff university questionnaire data provided results for this variable. The all-HESA data, however, did not distinguish between selective and non-selective state-funded schools and as such caution is needed when interpreting these results. As previously described, the questionnaire sample consisted of 128 social work Masters students from 5 universities with high UG tariff.

As Table 3.3 shows, the main difference appears to be that far fewer of the social work students from the all-HESA group or the HESA high tariff group had attended an independent or fee-paying school in the UK. Some caution is needed regarding this finding however, due to the level of non-responders for this item. Thirty-four per cent of the all-HESA group and 51% of the HESA high tariff universities group did not answer, meaning that there is no way of knowing whether they did, in fact attend these establishments.

With regard to the Frontline samples, the data shows very similar results for cohorts one and two with 20% Cohort One and 19% of Cohort Two having attended an independent school. Only 7% of the high tariff questionnaire students had attended an independent school. This difference was statistically significant for Cohort One and the high tariff questionnaire students (Fisher's exact, $p < 0.01$).

A/AS Levels

As noted at the beginning of this section, Frontline's admissions criteria for the programme are an upper second degree or higher, and at least 300 UCAS² points in top three A-levels or equivalent. Requirements for UG social work courses vary across institution with published entrance requirements ranging from 120 UCAS tariff points (from 2 A-levels) to 320 points (from 3 A-levels; Holmström, 2010). In order to examine whether the Frontline criteria differ in practice from general social work pre-qualifying courses, it was anticipated that a comparison would be made between the top 3 A/AS level results of Frontline participants, all-HESA students, HESA high tariff group and Masters students completing the evaluation questionnaire. In practice, this was problematic mainly due to differences in how grades were reported.

For Frontline Cohort One, it appeared that some participants reported the total of all qualifications undertaken including A, AS level as well as Advanced Extensions rather than the top 3 which in some cases, gave rise to a figure of 500+ UCAS points. For Frontline Cohort Two, participants were asked to provide individual A/AS level subject and grade; giving rise to more accurate data. Six of the 124 Cohort Two participants were excluded at this stage, as they had not followed the A/AS level route into undergraduate study although it should be noted that all participants had achieved the 300 point or equivalent minimum entry requirement. These reporting differences led to a significant difference between Cohort One and Two ($w=6497$, $p=0.002$).

Difficulties were also noted for the all-HESA data as only 515 students provided grades for the top 3 A/AS levels or Advanced Highers. Whilst this figure suggests that only 515

² *UCAS tariff points are allocated to post-16 qualifications. They enable universities and colleges to make broad comparisons between qualifications and courses to determine entry into higher education. For GCE A level subjects, a grade A is equal to 120 points, a grade B is equal to 100 points and a grade C is equal to 80 points.

of the 4,750 students had attained A/AS level of study, further analysis of the item 'highest qualification on entry' (Table 3.4) shows the different educational pathways for the all-HESA group. To aid comparison, these data have been categorised using the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) which provides a single system for cataloguing qualifications (Ofqual, 2015). This shows that 2,440 students had achieved a level 3 qualification, of these 515 had completed A/AS level whilst the remaining 1,925 students had followed a more vocational pathway such as BTEC or NVQ. Further, 2,140 students reported their highest qualification as higher than a level 3, where 1,540 had completed an undergraduate degree (level 6) and 245 had achieved a masters level qualification or above (levels 7 and 8), it is unclear whether these students had undertaken A/AS levels or vocational qualifications prior to this qualification. The all-HESA data represent what each university had recorded so it is possible that for those with undergraduate degrees or higher, data on A/AS level grades were not provided. Having removed the 4,235 who were recorded as having obtained an 'XXX' grade, the grades for the remaining 515 students were converted into UCAS tariff points. Given that many graduates do not have data on A-level results we can assume that the UCAS tariffs for mainstream all-HESA students represent a section of the undergraduate social work student body.

For the HESA high tariff group, 465 students had completed an undergraduate degree, with a further 55 having a Masters degree. Of the 259 remaining, their entry pathways varied with only 70 reporting grades from A/AS levels. Finally, the high tariff questionnaire group were specifically asked for the grades for the top 3 A levels completed. This yielded the most accurate data on this group as the grades could be translated to UCAS point and summed. Of the 130 students in this sample, 20 had not studied A-levels and 10 did not respond, leaving a sample of 90 students.

Whilst acknowledging the difficulties presented above, Table 3.3 shows the difference in UCAS points for Frontline Cohort One and those of the all-HESA group for whom we do have A-level grade data, with all-HESA students being much lower than their Frontline counterparts. This is fully to be expected, as Frontline's entry requirements included 300+ UCAS tariff on top three A-levels. With Frontline Cohort One UCAS points ranged from 300-749 whereas all-HESA students points ranged from 40-399. The distribution of Frontline UCAS tariffs was significantly higher than that of the general social work all-HESA student population ($w=72080$, $p<0.001$) and the high tariff group in HESA ($w=6350$, $p<0.01$).

HESA social work students

The 4,235 HESA students who had not studied A/AS levels presented a range of qualifications. This diversity in educational attainment is supported by data from the Social Work Admissions Service for 2002 which showed that whilst half of social work students had an undergraduate degree, 49% had a range of qualifications including higher diplomas and certificates with only 1% having no educational qualifications. The HESA results support these findings (Table 3.4). Eleven per cent reported A/AS levels as

their highest qualification on entry to the HESA course and 37% had obtained an undergraduate degree. Forty-one per cent had undertaken a level 3 qualification which is equivalent to A/AS levels although not all are subject to UCAS Tariffs. This was followed by 1% who had completed GCSEs and 3% having no formal qualifications.

		Frontline Cohort One N = 104		Frontline Cohort Two N = 124		Questionnaire high tariff N = 128		HESA N = 4750		HESA high tariff unis N = 779	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Secondary school attended	A state-run or state-funded school in the UK which is selective on academic, faith or other ground	29	30	34	27	40	31	3100	65	375	48
	A state-run or state-funded school in the UK which is non-selective	43	44	60	48	63	49				
	Independent or fee-paying school in the UK	19	20	24	19	9	7	30	1	6	1
	Attended school outside the UK	4	4	3	2	16	13	0	0	0	0
	Did not answer	2	2	3	2	0	0	1620	34	400	51
	Total	97	100	124	98	128	100	4750	100	85	100
UCAS points, where recorded	1 - 49	0	0	0	0	6	6	20	2	0	0
	50 - 99	0	0	0	0	13	13	85	9	0	0
	100 - 149	0	0	0	0	1	1	125	13	5	5
	150 - 199	0	0	1	1	9	9	110	12	5	5
	200 - 249	0	0	0	0	24	24	275	29	25	27
	250 - 299	0	0	0	0	36	37	180	19	15	16
	300 - 349	38	40	58	52	9	9	145	15	40	44
	350 - 399	31	33	44	40	0	0	10	1	0	0
	400 - 449	10	11	8	7	0	0	0	0	0	0
	450 - 499	5	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	500 - 549	4	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	550 - 599	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	600 - 649	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	650 - 699	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
700 - 749	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	

Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding

Table 3.3: Secondary school attended and UCAS points

3.2 Evaluation questionnaire results

This section focuses on the evaluation questionnaire results from Frontline Cohort One participants and social work Masters students from high tariff universities. The questionnaire continued to explore whether Frontline participants were of a 'high calibre' and whether academically they were of a higher level than mainstream social work students. In addition, the questionnaire attempted to gain a picture of whether Frontline attracted applicants who were not already contemplating social work as a career and whether they aspired to become leaders in social work.

For Frontline, 97 participants from Cohort One completed a questionnaire at the Summer Institute and gave permission for these data to be linked to their application data. This sample constituted a 93% response rate. There were 20 males and 77 females. The high tariff university questionnaire group consisted of 128 social work students from social work Masters programmes in five high UG tariff universities. The response rate was 70%. There were 27 males and 98 females.

3.2.1 Previous educational attainment

GCSE

In order to study social work, the Requirements for Social Work Training (Department of Health, 2002) states that social work students must have achieved at least a grade C in Maths and English GCSE. For Maths, Frontline participants were more likely to have achieved grades A and B, whilst the high tariff questionnaire group reported a range of results from A*-D (Table 3.5). This difference was statistically significant for Frontline Cohort One (Fisher's exact test, $p < 0.001$). A similar pattern was observed for English with Frontline participants having achieved grades A or B whilst the high tariff questionnaire students were more evenly dispersed through grades A-C. This skew towards a higher grade for GCSE English for Frontline participants was statistically significant for Cohort One (Fisher's exact test, $p < 0.001$).

Undergraduate degree

A much higher proportion of Frontline participants had attended a Russell Group university than the high tariff group (71% and 30%, respectively). Both groups had a similar number from pre-1992 universities (13% and 12%, respectively) but far more from the high tariff questionnaire group had attended a post-1992 university (52%) than their Frontline counterparts (12%). This difference was statistically significant (Fisher's exact test $p < 0.001$).

RQF Level	Qualification	All-HESA		HESA high tariff unis	
		N	%	N	%
8	Doctorate (including non-UK)	5	0	0	0
7	Masters and masters level qualifications (e.g. PGCE)	240	5	55	7
6	Undergraduate degree (Honours)	1540	32	465	60
5	Foundation degree	60	1	0	0
	Higher National Diploma	30	1	0	0
	Other level 5 qualification	65	1	10	1
4	Higher National Certificate	10	0	0	0
	Diploma of Higher Education	90	2	5	1
	Certificate of Higher Education	50	1	0	0
	Certificate of Education	5	0	0	0
	Other level 4 qualification	35	1	5	1
3	A/AS level	515	11	70	9
	Level 3 including those who are all, some or none subject to UCAS Tariff	1025	22	90	12
	International Baccalaureate Diploma	5	0	0	0
	Access Course	895	19	75	10
2	GCSE level (grades A-C)	50	1	5	1
1	GCSE level (grades D-G)	5	0	0	0
-	Mature student (admitted on basis of previous experience and/or admissions test)	95	2	0	0
-	Other qualification level not known	30	1	0	0
-	Student has no formal qualifications	5	0	0	0
-	Total	4750	100	779	102

Percentages may not equal to 100 due to rounding

Table 3.4: HESA entry qualifications

Frontline participants were required to have achieved an upper second class degree or higher. Of the 98%³ of Frontline participants for Cohort One who provided their class of degree, 31% achieved a first and 67% an upper second. Only 15% of the high tariff university questionnaire group had achieve a first and 66% an upper second. Despite having the same entry requirements, the percentage of participants with a first class degree was higher than the Step Up to Social Work students for cohorts one (15%) and

³ Further investigation into the two participants who did not provide this information revealed that of the total sample of Frontline participants (n=104) all had obtained an upper second or above except one. One participant had not been able to sit final degree examinations due to ill-health, leading to an unclassified pass degree. This participant had gone on to receive a Masters. Twenty-two of the 104 had a Masters qualification with two also having a PhD.

two (19%, Baginsky and Teague, 2013). In comparison with the high tariff university questionnaire group, Frontline participants were twice as likely to have achieved a first; the differences in grade was statistically significant (Fisher's exact test, $p < 0.001$).

There were no significant differences between the type of undergraduate degree (Fisher's exact test $p = 0.31$) studied between the two groups. Using the degree subject classification adopted by Frontline (Table 3.5), both groups had similar proportions of students whose first degree was in social sciences (44-46%), which could be classed as having direct relevance to social work training. Frontline participants included 7% science graduates, compared with only 1% from the high tariff universities.

Analysis of graduation year data revealed that Frontline participants had completed their undergraduate degree an average of 3 years prior to the start of Frontline (mode=1 year). Reflecting the older age range of students reported above, students from the high tariff universities had an average of 6 years since graduation (mode=2 years).

3.2.2 Previous employment

High tariff university questionnaire respondents were more likely to be employed prior to studying social work ($\chi^2 = 9.26$, $p = 0.01$). There was a statistically significant difference between the high tariff students and Frontline in terms of the sector in which they were employed (Fisher's exact test $p < 0.001$). The high tariff group had a higher number of students whose previous work experience could broadly be classed as having direct relevance to social work (e.g. healthcare, not-for-profit, public sector and social sciences). This is to be expected, as mainstream postgraduate courses tend to specify the need for previous relevant experience, whereas Frontline is keen to recruit career changers and to attract those who would not previously have thought of social work as a potential career. Holmström (2010) argues that the prerequisite for relevant experience can not only discriminate against younger applicants but the lack of clarity around what constitutes relevant experience can serve to exclude other forms of valuable experience such as mentoring or informal support. Holmström suggests that consideration should be given as to what it is that universities are attempting to measure through previous experience; whether it is motivation and commitment or ability to reflect and understand the social work role. Interestingly, Frontline's assessment centre sought to identify both applicant commitment and personal qualities relevant to the social work role.

		Frontline Cohort One questionnaire N = 97		Questionnaire high tariff N = 128	
		N	%	N	%
<i>GCSE Maths</i>	A*	0	0	7	6
	A	63	68	22	18
	B	24	26	44	35
	C	6	6	46	37
	D	0	0	5	4
	Total	93	100	124	100
<i>GCSE English</i>	A*	0	0	13	11
	A	87	93	40	33
	B	7	7	41	34
	C	0	0	26	22
	D	0	0	0	0
	Total	94	100	120	100
<i>University type</i>	Russell Group university	69	71	38	30
	Other pre-1992 university	13	13	15	12
	Post-1992 university	12	12	65	52
	Other university	3	3	3	2
<i>Degree type</i>	BA	66	68	79	62
	BSc	21	22	39	31
	LLB	2	2	4	3
	MA	4	4	2	2
	Other	4	4	4	3
<i>Class of degree</i>	1 st	30	31	19	15
	2:i	65	67	83	66
	2:ii	2	2	23	18
	3 rd	0	0	1	1
<i>Degree subject</i>	Art & Music	6	6	7	3
	Business/Economics	2	2	4	6
	English	11	11	13	10
	Humanities	17	16	31	25
	Law	6	6	4	3
	Mathematics	1	1	1	1
	Modern Foreign Languages	4	4	4	3
	Religious Studies	4	4	2	2
	Sciences	7	7	1	1
	Social Sciences	46	44	58	46
	Total	104	100	125	100
<i>Employment</i>	Yes	54	56	85	66
	No	37	38	43	34
<i>Previous employment sector</i>	Healthcare	4	4	5	4
	Not for profit	26	27	8	6
	Public sector	10	10	54	43
	Social Sciences	1	1	6	5
	Art and Music	3	3	1	1
	Business, Management,	2	2	4	4

	Economics				
	Corporate sector	4	4	8	6
	Law	2	2	1	1
	Media	1	1	1	1
<i>Considering social work course</i>	Within the last year	44	45	50	39
	Within the last 1-3 years	51	53	57	45
	4 or more years ago	2	2	21	16
	Total	97	100	128	100
<i>Intended duration of social work career</i>	Less than 2 years	0	0	4	3
	2-4 years	8	8	9	7
	5-7 years	48	50	21	17
	7 years or more	41	42	90	73
	Total	97	100	124	100
<i>Career aspirations</i>	I want to stay as a social work practitioner for the foreseeable future	69	71	75	60
	I would ultimately like to be a social work manager	9	9	18	14
	I would ultimately like to work in a policy, education or research job in the social welfare field	16	17	23	18
	I can envisage leaving social work and doing something else altogether	3	3	10	8

Table 3.5: Results from evaluation questionnaire

3.2.3 Social work as a career

Participants were asked when they had decided to train as a social worker. There was a statistical difference between groups ($\chi^2=12.37$, $p=.002$). For Frontline, 45% had made the decision within the last year, and 53% from 1-3 years. Slightly fewer high tariff students had made the decision within the year (39%) and 1-3 years (45%) with more students having considered social work as a career for 4 or more years. Again, this reflects the age profile of students with more Frontline participants having only graduated between 1-3 years previously.

The overwhelming majority across both groups reported that they expected to remain working as a social practitioner for five or more years. However, a significant difference (Fisher's exact test $p<0.001$) was found with 73% of high tariff students feeling they would remain working as a practitioner for 7 or more years as opposed to 42% for Frontline. When career trajectory is considered, no significant differences emerged. Whilst over 50% in both groups envisaged remaining as a social work practitioner for the foreseeable future, this was higher for Frontline participants (71%) than the questionnaire high tariff group (60%). These findings are reassuring for those who feared that Frontline would attract applicants only interested in using social work as a stepping stone for career progression or that it would be akin to Teach First which aimed at attracting

applicants who would 'teach first' before going on to careers in other sectors (Hutchings et al, 2006). Fewer Frontline participants (than high tariff university students) envisaged themselves leaving social work and doing something else altogether. In addition, a higher percentage of high tariff university students reported having the ultimate goal of becoming a social work manager (14%) or to work in a policy, education or research job in the social welfare field (8%), although this difference was not statistically significant (Fisher's exact test $p=0.22$).

3.2.4 Response to Frontline publicity

As well as exploring whether Frontline attracted high quality graduates, the questionnaire also attempted to gain a picture of whether Frontline attracted applicants who would not otherwise have contemplated social work as a career. Perhaps not surprisingly, more of the Frontline participants reported that they had been influenced by the high profile publicity for Frontline than the high tariff questionnaire students ($\chi^2=47.93$, $p= <.001$). The Frontline data suggest that 83% ($n=86$) had only applied to Frontline. The findings in Table 3.6 suggest that the Frontline publicity helped to confirm existing interest in becoming a social worker for 33% of participants with a further 23% indicating that the Frontline advertising had made them think about becoming a social worker for the first time. These findings are interesting as we could perhaps assume from the data that most of the Frontline participants were already thinking about a social work career, yet they did not apply to other social work courses. Although not quite as stark, 49% of the high tariff university questionnaire sample also appear to have only applied to one institution to study social work. This is interesting as it suggests that students are more selective in where they complete social work training. It is possible that as the high tariff group tended to be older with around 6 years since graduation, that responsibilities and commitments render it difficult to relocate for study purposes. Indeed, there were significant differences with regard to caring responsibilities between the groups ($\chi^2=26.60$, $p= <0.001$), with 22% of the high tariff group primary carers of a child under the age of 18, 1% the primary carer of a disabled adult and 2% a secondary carer. Only 4% of the Frontline group reported having caring responsibilities, all of which were as a secondary carer.

Not surprisingly, 50% of the high tariff university group had applied to other social work courses, with only 13% stating that they had applied to Frontline. Thirteen per cent of the high tariff university group reported having been influenced by Frontline publicity although it is not possible to state whether it is the same 13% who also applied for the Frontline programme.

		Frontline Cohort One questionnaire N - 97		Questionnaire high tariff N - 128	
		N	%	N	%
Awareness of Frontline publicity campaign	I wasn't aware of any Frontline publicity	22	23	46	36
	I saw the publicity and it didn't really influence me	20	21	64	50
	Frontline publicity helped confirm my existing interest in becoming a social worker	32	33	12	9
	Frontline publicity made me think seriously about becoming a social worker for the first time	22	23	5	4
Have you applied to any other social work courses?	Yes	10	10	64	50
	No	80	83	63	49
	Prefer not to say	7	7	0	0
Did you apply for Frontline?	Yes	-	-	16	13
	No	-	-	110	86

Table 3.6: Awareness of Frontline publicity

3.3 Summary of findings

- The majority of students were female for Frontline Cohort One and Two, as is the case in the general social work student population.
- Frontline participants were younger overall than mainstream social work students. Sixty-four per cent of Frontline Cohort One participants were under 25 years of age with 90% under 29 years of age.
- The number of Black students on Frontline Cohort One was lower than would be expected for social work trainees, replicating the findings from Step Up to Social Work where low numbers of Black students were reported for the first cohort (Smith et al, 2013). The data revealed an increase in the proportion of Black participants for Cohort Two. Frontline attracted more participants describing themselves of mixed race than the high tariff universities group (HESA data). The proportion of minority ethnic students on the Frontline programme is at least as high as that found in the general population of England and Wales.
- The proportion of Frontline participants from higher socioeconomic backgrounds was higher than the general population of social work students and also higher

than Masters students in high tariff universities. This was more pronounced for cohort two.

- Frontline participants were more than twice as likely to have attended an independent school as Masters students from high tariff universities.
- Students on mainstream social work courses had a more diverse range of entry pathways than the Frontline participants who tended towards the A-level route. For those from the social work student body that did report A-level grades to HESA, these were noticeably lower than those of Frontline participants.
- In terms of prior attainment, Frontline participants tended to have higher grades for Maths and English GCSE, were more likely than high tariff university students to have graduated in the previous 3 years, attended a Russell Group university and been awarded a first class grade for their undergraduate degree. There were no differences in degree type or subjects studied between the groups.
- Frontline participants were less likely to have been employed prior to studying social work. Of those who were employed, Frontline participants were less likely to have been employed in a sector with direct relevance to social work.
- Not surprisingly, given that Frontline participants tended to be younger than those from the high tariff universities, slightly more Frontline participants reported having made the decision to be a social worker in the last 3 years or less.
- The majority of Frontline participants expected to remain working as a social work practitioner for five or more years. Thirty per cent more students from the high tariff universities expected a career of seven or more years as a social work practitioner.
- In terms of career progression, Frontline participants were less likely to report that their goal was to become a social work manager with 71% envisaging that they would remain working as a practitioner for the foreseeable future.
- Fewer Frontline participants envisaged themselves leaving social work and doing something else altogether than their high tariff counterparts.

4.0 Are the key elements of the Frontline programme being delivered to a high standard?

The key elements of the Frontline programme that affected participants' learning and practice, both directly and indirectly, are set out in figure 4.1.

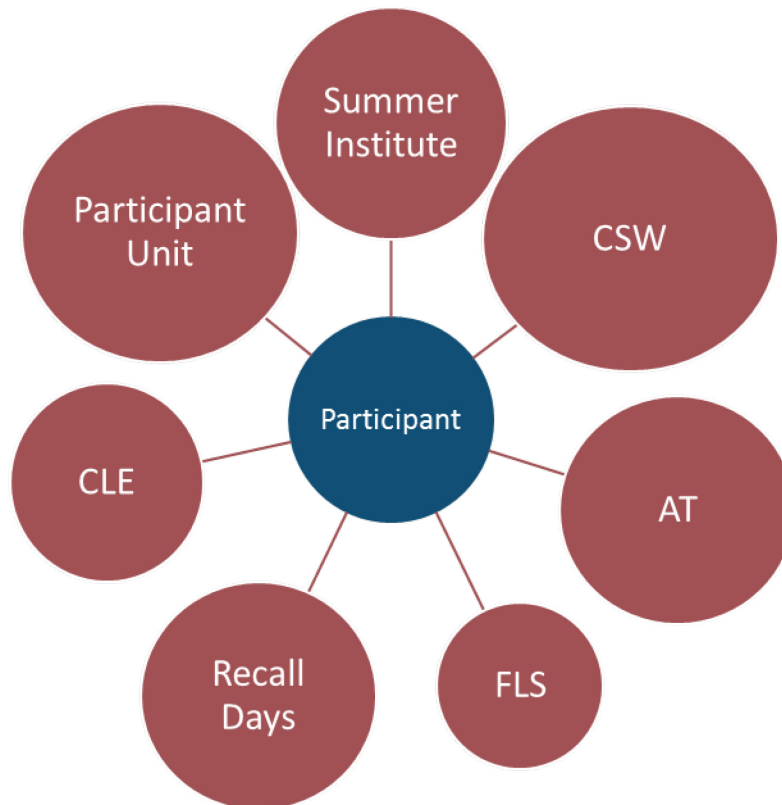


Figure 4.1: Main inputs

Of these elements five directly impacted upon participants:

- The residential Summer Institute
- Consultant Social Worker (CSW)-led practice based learning within participant units
- Recall days
- Academic Tutors (ATs) who provided academic a Bespoke Curriulum
- Contrasting Learning Experience (CLE)

These elements contained a number of professional learning modes, including peer support, and encompassed a wide range of content.

*

The remaining elements were the indirect inputs which were targetted at those who were supporting participants, the CSW and the AT. The CSWs were provided with a 12 day training programme for CSWs and the Frontline Specialist (FLS) supported both.

4.1 Inputs and participants' reactions

4.1.1 Summer Institute

The Frontline programme was based upon the Teach First model (MacAlister, Crehan and Olsen, 2012). The Teach First model was designed to attract graduates into teaching through an employment-based route. This route began with a six-week Teach First Summer Institute, with two weeks based in two different schools and four weeks on a programme of subject studies and professional studies (Hutchings et al, 2006). Hence, the Frontline programme began with a five-week residential programme delivered by the 'Frontline Academy' which consisted of the University of Bedfordshire's Tilda Goldberg Centre, the Institute of Family Therapy, the Institute of Psychiatry at King's College London as well as a number of guest speakers including social work experts and service users. Unlike Teach First, the Summer Institute did not include time in practice, but it did enable participants the opportunity to meet their CSW and spend time within their unit.

Interviews with Cohort One participants (T1) showed mixed views as to the length of the Summer Institute with some thinking it was an appropriate length and others thinking it should have included an additional week. Described by participants as an 'intense' learning experience, specifically, the 'long days' which began with an 8am breakfast journal club and finished with a 9pm twilight session were perceived negatively by participants. In addition, the lack of time available for consolidation of learning, background reading and reflection was highlighted. Building in greater time for structured reflection and dialogue would be in line with research on effective professional development programmes that impact upon practice (Cordingley *et al.*, 2005). These issues were addressed for Cohort Two. Interview data at T4 revealed that the Summer Institute had been re-structured so that Monday and Friday adopted a 9.00-5.30 format whilst Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday were longer days (8.30 am to 6.30 pm) with a three-hour break in the middle of the day for reading, reflection and work on the readiness to practice portfolio. This modification was perceived favourably by participants,

You are immersed in this totally new environment with these new people and then you're getting all this information but it felt manageable (Participant R, from Cohort Two)

The majority of participants felt that the aim of the Summer Institute was to provide the foundation knowledge necessary to begin learning on placement. All 16 participants from the four Cohort One case study sites were satisfied that the Summer Institute had fulfilled this aim. The majority of participants had found everything covered at the Summer

Institute useful. Several participants noted that at the time some of the academic material had seemed rather abstract but since starting in practice the relevance and usefulness had become clear, a connection frequently noted within social work education (Duncan and Shardlow, 2005; Burton, 2015). The inclusion of service users, young people and children was particularly valued. It appeared that it was not always understood how the materials fitted together, particularly as different parts of the syllabus were taught by different organisations. These findings were consistent for T4.

All participants commented upon the high calibre of the teaching staff at T1 and T4. Specifically at T1, staff were described as approachable and available for academic and pastoral support. The passion of the teaching staff was highlighted as a factor in helping participants to maintain their focus throughout the Summer Institute. The majority of participants regarded the level of teaching as pitched perfectly for the diverse audience of participants. There was some indication that a sense of community amongst the participants was created at the Summer Institute where participants were described as being supportive towards one another. The lecturers were aware of the potential for emotional reactions to some of the learning materials. This is by no means unique to the Frontline programme, but having core academic staff available throughout the day and into the evenings meant that staff were able to take a planned approach in managing the emotional response. At T4, reference was made to the positive manner in which teaching on emotional resilience had been timed before sexual abuse as well as the expertise of the lecturer in presenting a difficult topic.

A variety of views were noted by case study interviewees with regard to the leadership training delivered by an external provider. This training was deemed slow, not well integrated into the Frontline programme and somewhat divisive by some. Alternately, other participants had found this training a useful and valuable experience. According to one AT,

there were those participants that got it and thought it was amazing and the best thing ever, and then other participants who thought it was offensive and provocative and just awful (AT3)

A range of views – though mostly negative - on the leadership training were also expressed to researchers who observed teaching at the Summer Institute. In response to the negative feedback surrounding the leadership training this was modified for Cohort Two and delivered by a different organisation. The majority of participants interviewed at T4 reported that the training was now too vague, too basic, not contextualised within social work and delivered too early in the Frontline programme. Participants stated that there was a decline in numbers attending the afternoon session although some participants suggested that the afternoon session was the most positive of the day. The ATs acknowledged these difficulties although they reported that their feedback from the units was that the leadership training on the recall days was much improved.

The Summer Institute appeared effective in giving participants the confidence to begin on placement and start their learning journey. One said,

I felt very prepared and I felt that I had a really good understanding of the basics of social work and the basic ideas of how to interact with people and some of the expectations in terms of the way that things were recorded and so on (Participant E).

A quarter of participants thought their confidence levels would have been increased had the Institute included more practical knowledge of what participants would face going into the placement setting. This reflects the tension between practical and theoretical knowledge which is always hovering in professional education (Eraut, 1994), with social work education as no exception. The Frontline programme was established to locate social work training within the LA rather than the university, making the fact that some participants noted a lack of knowledge as to the practical aspects of social work noteworthy. Whilst the Summer Institute was partially based upon the Teach First model, a crucial difference is that prospective teachers have, unless they were home-schooled, necessarily had direct personal experience of schools and teaching, which they can draw upon and use as a critical reflective resource. Indeed, this was highlighted as a potential barrier that Frontline would need to overcome in research conducted by MacAlister, Crehan and Olsen prior to the launch of the programme,

not everyone has come into contact with children's social work, and so a graduate scheme looking to attract people into the field would therefore need to explain and educate the profession to potential applicants (2012:16).

Frontline participants are less likely to have had previous experience of social work as service users. They may also be less likely to have had previous experience of unqualified work in social care than students on mainstream programmes, because Frontline specifically aims to recruit career-changers. It is worth considering whether prior to the Summer Institute participants could be given a little more exposure to the 'realities' of social work practice that could inform their later learning.

The research team's observation of the Summer Institute revealed that the Frontline participants were very engaged with the classes and displayed well-developed critical perspectives. The teaching seemed generally very appropriate, although some of the staff from the Institute of Family Therapy did not have social work experience and seemed to be assuming a high level of verbal articulacy from family members. Research papers were discussed at breakfast meetings, but research evidence had a very low profile in the rest of the teaching that was observed. Theory, however, was very much to the fore.

Changes made to the Summer Institute for Cohort Two

With regard to the content and the delivery of the Summer Institute, interviewees at T1 made six specific suggestions on how it could be improved. These were fed back to Frontline staff in an interim evaluation report. The suggestions are presented below along

with findings from T4 as to the extent to which these areas were developed for Cohort Two.

1) Explicitly making links between subjects and session to reduce the fragmentation that can be caused by different organisations delivering parts of the syllabus.

Fragmentation was also noted at T4 where there appeared to be a disconnect between the different organisations. Specifically participants questioned the extent to which the materials had been applied to social work. Respondents were divided between those who felt that there had been too much focus on systemic practice and those who felt that the syllabus only allowed superficial covering of a range of subjects.

2) Improving the integration of the leadership training into the Frontline programme.

The leadership training had been modified for Cohort Two but there were still problems associated with the manner in which it was taught. The main difficulties arose in applying this to social work especially for those with either little or no previous social care experience. Participants suggested that training in leadership be delivered on a recall day later in the programme.

3) Increased teaching on child development.

Teaching on child development was perceived as both a strength and a weakness of the Summer Institute at T4. Although the focus on child development was perceived positively, some participants still felt that the breadth of tuition could be extended,

a lot of teaching was quite scientific, in-depth stuff about genetics, and how an environment can shape a child, which is quite relevant, but it was so scientific ... I struggled to apply that to day-to-day what should I actually look for when I'm looking at a child, how are they developing, milestones, what should a child at 18 months look like, what would I look for physically, emotionally, language – and that wasn't covered at all (Participant AB)

4) Give more emphasis to social work skills to contextualise learning and to prepare participants for practice

Most participants felt that tuition in systemic practice had been repetitive although several commented that this had served to help them apply the skills once in practice. Interviewees thought the focus of every session should be brought back to social work.

There was limited evidence at T4 that this had occurred within the teaching materials although it is worth noting that these findings are based upon participant recollections. One participant did recall that whilst the teaching was delivered within a family therapy context the role-plays for the session were written for social work scenarios.

5) Increasing the teaching on adult mental health, attachment, domestic abuse, parental learning difficulties and substance abuse.

There was no evidence at T4 that this teaching had been extended on the Summer Institute. Participants reported that that they would have appreciated more on these topics and the effects they have on working with families.

6) Extend the period between the end of the Summer Institute and the start of the placement.

At T1, participants suggested that assigning an essay to be completed in the intervening week between the end of the Summer Institute and the start of the placement was difficult to manage alongside preparations to start the practical element of the programme and particularly for those who had to relocate. For T4 the intervening gap had been extended to 2 weeks which participants viewed more positively.

4.1.2 Practice based learning within CSW-led Participant Units

Drawing upon the recommendations from the Munro Review (2011), Frontline adopts a unit model. In its truest Reclaiming Social Work form, units are comprised of a CSW, a Social Worker, a Child Practitioner, a Unit Coordinator and a Clinician Therapist, the aim of which is to provide different expertise and perspectives for improved assessment of risks to the child as well as a broader assessment of interventions (Cross, Hubbard and Munro, 2010). For Frontline, the model was adapted so that participants would work in a unit of four, overseen by a CSW. In doing so, units would benefit from having a shared understanding of, and responsibility for cases where,

Critical reflection within the unit should help to detect and correct the common biases in reasoning such as tunnel vision, or failing to revise a flawed assessment in the light of new evidence (Cross, Hubbard and Munro, 2010:3)

The CSW role was perceived as 'critical in ensuring the success of the programme' (*Children's Services Director*). The majority of participants deemed the CSW as 'integral' to their learning as,

they know what particular things that individuals in the unit might struggle with or are better at and they're very good at developing all of our individual skills and always trying to develop us as individual workers rather than just a general social worker (Participant C).

The majority of participants reported high levels of support where CSWs challenged them at appropriate levels, encouraged them to think through possible solutions and were readily available to offer both professional and emotional support. This finding was consistent across all three phases of data collection for Cohort One. The benefit of having a CSW based within the unit was highlighted as 'cases can change very quickly' (*Participant A*). The CSW had detailed knowledge of all the cases within the unit and so

could offer guidance and support as well as the opportunity for participants to observe the CSW's practice,

We have contact with other social workers so we do learn from other social workers but ultimately she oversees all of that and a huge amount of her knowledge and expertise is passed on to us through that process (Participant J)

The level of CSW knowledge and expertise was a key factor in providing the intensive practice learning. The quality of supervision has been found to be associated with readiness to practise on the Step Up programme as well as overall satisfaction with the course (Baginsky and Manthorpe, 2014). At both T2 and T3, some participants felt that their CSW knowledge was limited in some areas and that the practice educator role would benefit from employing staff more experienced in Frontline's chosen interventions. Despite this, the CSW was perceived as helpful and the 'first port of call' (*Participant G*). Both the Chief Executive of Frontline and the lead professor (until the end of 2015), expressed the view in their T3 interviews that the quality of CSWs across all LA units was variable. This variation should perhaps be understood in the wider context of practice education. The Practice Educator Professional Standards introduced in 2013 enable HEIs to determine the training pathway, leaving scope for 'postcode variations' where practice educator training is tailored locally, as opposed to implementing national standards (Plenty and Gower, 2013).

The availability of CSWs was valued, although slight variation was noted, with two units reporting higher levels of availability. This was, in part, a natural consequence of participating in a new programme with unfamiliar procedures and forms as well as the demands of supporting four learners. Indeed, Step Up reported similar findings where inaccessible practice educators were associated with increased workload (Baginsky and Manthorpe, 2014). It was suggested that having a deputy CSW would have alleviated some of this pressure as well as providing additional support to participants and cover for such things as CSW annual leave. This was recommended by Frontline for Cohort Two although it was ultimately an LA decision whether to appoint a deputy. The Chief Executive of Frontline noted in an interview at T3 that the need to cover CSW roles had not been fully anticipated and that finding replacements when needed had not been easy. Of the three CSWs interviewed at T4, one had appointed a deputy, one was in the process of identifying a suitable member of staff and the other had more than one unit so it was envisaged the CSWs would fulfil this role for each other.

For all case study sites, unit meetings were held at the same time every week in a separate room free from interruptions consistently throughout the year. Individual supervision was held in a separate room and was held every fortnight. One Frontline participant commented,

the individual supervision with the supervisor is more about how I'm coping personally ... the unit meetings are very different because that's when we bring cases to the group and then the whole group discuss it so we learn from each other (Participant J)

Finally, at T3 participants questioned who had overall responsibility for the CSW as they are working both within the local authority and the Frontline programme. This could lead to competing demands and priorities for the CSW as well as difficulties for participants if any difficulties arose within the unit. This question was raised at T4 and the general consensus was that Frontline had overall responsibility for CSWs and participants. Hence, issues with the CSW would be taken to the FLS whilst issues raised by participants would be directed to either the CSW or the AT. However, CSWs and social work managers perceived a gap between the LA and Frontline as one CSW stated,

it would be quite easy for me to communicate how things are going, and for the FLS to see how things are going, and my manager, potentially, to have a different view (CSW6)

Both of the two social work managers interviewed were relatively new to managing a Frontline CSW so at this early stage of Cohort Two they reported a 'disconnect' between the LA and Frontline,

in terms of the contact between Frontline and what is actually happening on the ground, it just feels like there's nothing of that at all, but that might be what was set up in the first place in terms of the agreement. So I feel like there's a feedback gap from what is actually happening (Manager D)

According to FLS3, this apparent disconnect was being addressed by Frontline for Cohort Two by holding a meeting in each of the three stages of the programme, between the CSWs line manager, the FLS and the new post created for Cohort Two, the 'Relationship and Development Manager'. This post served to separate the FLS role into two, where the Relationship and Development Manager was responsible for managing the relationship between Frontline and the LA whilst the FLS focussed upon the implementation and operation of the programme. The aim of these meetings would be for each party to discuss how the programme was going and to raise any potential issues that needed to be addressed. This division of the role was also spoken on in the interview with the Chief Executive of Frontline as an important change needed for Cohort Two.

Early evidence from T1 suggested that both the unit model and the wider Frontline programme protected participants so that they did not need to access the wider team in the same way that social work students on mainstream programmes would. Despite the CSWs' encouragement for participants to develop relationships with social workers, participants appeared reluctant to approach them for support and advice. Social workers reiterated this point, describing the value of informal learning and how, during their student placements, they had been encouraged to listen to their colleagues' approaches on the phone, observe different styles of practice, and listen to the informal conversations and case discussions that occurred on the office floor. It was believed that the Frontline participants, immersed within their units, were missing out many of these impromptu learning opportunities. Both the CSW and AT made concerted efforts to encourage participants to integrate themselves more in the teams so that by T2, there was evidence of increasing levels of integration to the extent that social workers would simply turn from

their desks and offer guidance when participants were informally discussing their cases in the office. This could, to some degree alleviate the challenges of working in the unit which included being reliant on others especially if they were disorganised, and the danger of feeding off each other's stress. This is one of the difficulties inherent in such closely knit teams where it is inevitable for tension to occur at times (Forrester et al, 2013).

A potential weakness at T1 was the danger of units becoming 'stuck in a rut' where the same four voices argued the same perspectives. This perhaps reflects the difference between a Frontline unit and the Reclaiming Social Work approach which brings together different experts into the unit, whereas Frontline brings together trainees overseen by the CSW. In order to address this limitation, two of the case studies began to invite other colleagues to the unit meeting. This was observed by the evaluators on their T2 visit, as a family therapist attended the unit meeting to offer their insight to the unit's cases. This also had the additional advantage of encouraging integration where participants were able to benefit from new sources of information and support whilst the CSWs' colleagues benefited from being able to see how the unit model operated.

Perhaps one of the consequences of introducing a participant unit alongside social work teams had been a tendency for social workers to view the participants as the 'unit' as opposed to individuals. The natural progression into different teams enabled participants the opportunity to be seen 'individually for their individual skills and have the opportunity to test them in a wider team and a different team' (CSW 3).

Regarding the unit meeting, two of the four CSWs described it in terms of case management,

I have probably 15 cases to discuss in a unit meeting, and it's called a case management unit meeting (CSW 1)

It was highlighted that the CSW had to be informed and up-to-date with each case held by the unit. For participants who frequently discussed their cases on an informal basis, unit meetings were seen as an opportunity for theoretical discussion. This suggested that CSWs were balancing the need for case management with theoretical discussion of cases. The ATs' role here of attending meetings and contributing to theoretical discussion was valued.

Of the four case studies, one unit did the majority of their work in pairs. This approach was used as a learning tool so that participants could be paired according to their strengths and their learning needs. The participants in the unit were very positive, citing examples where they had 'been out of (their) depth' and therefore grateful when the other participant stepped in and 'did it really well'. The participants gave and received feedback to each other demonstrating a clear understanding of how important it was for them to do things correctly: 'this is a person's life and not something you just use as a guinea pig'. In the last few months of the first year, the CSW, 'pulled back from them directly co-working' (CSW 4) so that participants were working more independently on cases. In

addition, the manner in which the CLE was organised within this unit meant that one participant was left overseeing all the cases whilst the others were at CLE placements.

Observation data (T2) revealed that the four case study sites unit meetings followed a very similar structure. Each participant selected a case which they wanted to be discussed as a unit. Although there were subtle variations, each of the four units followed a general format where the case was presented using a genogram, the unit would ask clarifying questions before the caseholder presented their dilemma, either in terms of what to look at in a new case or a question regarding an ongoing case, before finally hypotheses were generated by the unit in response to the dilemma posed.

Generally, participants were actively engaged in this process and took the lead, with the CSW in three of the four units taking a secondary role. In these units the CSW appeared to guide the participants, such as presenting alternative perspectives or encouraging participants to elaborate on their ideas. In the fourth unit the CSW took more of a lead role with participants seemingly more reticent to take part. Nevertheless, the participants generated hypotheses and drew upon their experiences in their own cases to add to the discussion.

One unit had an administrator who, although absent on the day of the observation, took notes under the following headings on the unit proforma: Background/Update; Clarifying questions asked by the unit; Dilemma; Hypotheses considered; Hypotheses selected; and Actions and by whom. In this unit, discussions led to specific actions to be identified and documented. In two of the units the CSW took notes so that the presenter could 'be in the room' whilst in the final unit participants took notes for each other.

Allocation and Induction

The local authority allocation process was seen as very effective for the majority of participants. Frontline invited participants to indicate a general preference in terms of region and sub-region (e.g. North London) and endeavoured to meet these preferences. Of those who expressed dissatisfaction, this was because they had not been informed of the late inclusion of the geographical area they had been assigned. Without prior warning, participants felt unprepared for logistical aspects such as relocation, commuting distance, cost, and travel time. Once on placement and based in the participant unit with the Consultant Social Worker (CSW) this dissatisfaction quickly disappeared.

The nature of the induction offered was a key element in supporting participants make the transition into their placement.

Area one

All four participants stated that the introduction to the placement was pitched appropriately. It began with a two-week induction programme, based on the usual format used for social work students. The programme included visits to local statutory and voluntary services, including opportunities to observe these services' work. During induction, participants were encouraged to arrange their own shadowing opportunities by

asking their social work colleagues. This approach allowed participants time to 'absorb the environment' and observe their colleagues' practice.

The induction programme was followed by the assignment of roles in relation to the CSW's ongoing cases (those cases with which the CSW was already working were brought into the unit) which in turn led to each participant taking referrals as they came into the department. Ongoing dialogue with the CSW meant that the CSW monitored their progress and they were able to say if they had too much or too little work.

For Cohort Two, area one opted to undertake the first 10-day adult placement at the beginning of stage one. Hence, participants spent one day in the case study unit before undertaking their contrasting learning experience (CLE). Whilst this will be discussed further in the CLE section, it is worth noting that at the time of the T4 interview the CSW reported that this meant that the introduction to the placement was slower than the previous year and slightly out of synchronisation as participants gained practice experience on the CLE before completing the two-week induction to the practice placement. None of the four participants offered comments on this, opting instead to talk of the opportunities they had been offered to learn about the different teams and meet with staff.

Area two

Participants felt that the overall pitch of their introduction to the placement was appropriate. A two-week induction programme was delivered with timetables distributed for week one which included induction meetings to the department, meetings with various agencies with whom they would be working, and the opportunity to shadow colleagues attending court and visiting a family. Week two was less structured with the onus placed on participants to actively find shadowing opportunities. Weeks two to four were described as 'quite gappy' with participants unsure what about what they should do. As cases became allocated in week five, an increase in structure emerged.

The induction to the placement was developed for Cohort Two to include three sessions on basic housekeeping tasks such as chronologies and case notes. Other than that the overall structure remained the same for weeks one and two. During this period, participants reported difficulties in identifying shadowing opportunities as they were all asking the same staff. One participant suggested that this could be improved by creating a timetable where each participant was either allocated a specific day(s) to undertake shadowing or placed with a specific social worker. The main difference for Cohort Two was that some participants began their CLE placement on weeks three and four. This meant that immediately after the initial two-week induction participants then left the child and family social work teams to be placed within an adult-focused setting, this will be discussed further in the CLE section.

Area three

The induction programme differed for Area Three both in terms of the planned approach and the fact that the CSW had removed some children from their home the Friday before the participants began the placement. First, the planned approach differed as the induction was not contained to a two-week period. Rather, the CSW had prepared a two-page checklist which identified areas of training and knowledge to be imparted, the person responsible and when this should be completed. The first checklist items which focused upon procedural knowledge such as health and safety, were delivered to participants in the first two days. The remaining items were covered in each participant's individual supervision. Second, following the removal of the children certain tasks had to be performed immediately, with the CSW allocating the participants these tasks following the one day induction. Mixed views emerged about 'having to hit the ground running', ranging from feeling useful straightaway to the limited time given to adjust to the new setting.

Area four

The CSW produced a two-week induction programme using materials provided from the local authority. For week one, participants from the units (there was more than one in this local authority) were brought together in one location and undertook training e.g. on the LA's computer system. For week two, participants were divided into their separate units to meet their teams, meet other agencies in the area, undertake family visits and begin co-working with colleagues. Such co-working continued for weeks three and four before cases were allocated in week five.

Rather than 'picking up' cases, participants were very positive about being allocated first referrals as they entered the department. Adopting this bottom-up approach appeared to increase participant understanding as they knew where cases came from, what initial assessments involved and the decision-making process as to whether the case would be allocated for further work. All of which heightened understanding when they were allocated cases. This is a useful learning point for future cohorts.

Area five

The CSW reported that the format of the induction had remained the same for Cohort Two, with participants receiving a two-week programme focused on the journey of the child through the service. Participants spent each day with a different team, beginning with where referrals originated and the assessment team and moving through teams in the order in which the case would travel. Reading was given which extended this knowledge.

One difference for Cohort Two was that the CSW had opted to delay introductions to external agencies as it was acknowledged that participants needed to understand the format of the child and family service before extending this knowledge to the role other agencies played. Another development for Cohort Two was that the CSW delegated responsibility to each team to lead the induction (as opposed to doing it themselves). The

CSW reported benefits of this approach where the teams had taken ownership of the induction, for example, one team had prepared case studies for the participants. In this sense, the induction began to foster relationships between participants and social workers and was extended by the CSW who expected the participants to offer to write-up any visits made when shadowing. This provided a benefit for social workers to provide shadowing opportunities as well as providing participants with learning opportunities as they received feedback on their observations from other social workers.

Area six

Area six had a comprehensive four week induction which involved shadowing different teams and the agencies who worked with children's services. One participant commented on the lack of practical aspects such as fire and safety, mileage claims and logging on to the phone system. None of the other participants made reference to this but rather appreciated the experience they gained reflecting on how it had helped them to build confidence before being allocated cases in week four. This experience included shadowing the different teams internally such as child protection meetings, family visits, and court work, and meeting external agencies such as the police. Participants also commented on the benefits of shadowing in terms of beginning the process of integration into the wider team.

Summary of findings on the unit model

Interview findings from Cohort One across all three data collection points (T1, T2 and T3) showed that the participants viewed the unit model favourably. At T1, interviews revealed that participants opted to sit close to each other so that they could engage in almost constant 'mini hypothesising' and discussion about their cases. The benefits included being able to debrief after difficult situations, the fact that participants were from different backgrounds meant that they able to contribute different perspectives to support critical reflection. Forrester et al's (2013) comparative evaluation of systemic units has shown that the most valued aspects of unit working are the shared responsibility, discussion, reflecting, planning and decision making. The strengths of this approach were noted at T3, as rather than learning alone, the unit enabled participants to learn with each other and from each other, supporting each other both professionally and emotionally: 'there's been different strengths from different participants and I guess when you bring those together as a unit, it adds a whole different force behind the way that you can work' (CSW 3). This CSW also felt that once placed into their ASYE team, participants would use their new 'team structure as an equivalent to the unit, as a reflective space' (CSW 3).

4.1.3. Recall Days

In addition to the five-week Summer Institute, the Frontline programme consisted of 20 days of tuition through 'recall days'. For stage one, recall days took place every fortnight whilst for stages two and three recall days took place either once or twice a month. Participants were able to attend this training within the general area of their placement (Greater Manchester or Greater London). The timetable for recall days can be found in

Appendix Nine which shows that three organisations delivered this training; Institute of Family Therapy, Tilda Goldberg Centre, University of Bedfordshire, and the National Academy for Parenting Research at Kings College London.

In addition to observation of three Cohort One recall days, data were gathered about trainees' views of the recall days at T2 and T3. Frontline participants were positive about the recall days at T2, commenting upon the expertise of the tutors and the relevance to both assignments and practice. Generally, recall days began with a lecture or group discussion in the morning before dividing into smaller groups in the afternoon. One of the main strengths identified was the intensive group work undertaken in the afternoon such as the opportunity to apply the concepts taught in the morning to one of their ongoing cases. At T3, the findings revealed that perceptions of recall days appeared to be closely associated with the presenter. Frontline participants valued hearing from presenters who were still in practice, e.g. Signs of Safety presented by a Chief Social Worker. This also reflected the value participants placed upon the practical application of theories and concepts. The systemic practice sessions were deemed by some to be too theoretical and difficult to apply in practice. There was some recognition that the value of this knowledge only became apparent over time when participants, encountering new situations, would find themselves drawing upon the theories and concepts they had learned. However, there was some suggestion that they could read the theory in their own time and would have preferred more focus during classes on the practical application of these theories. Offering more practice-focussed recall days is not without problems. If this were to happen, consideration would be needed as to whether participants would need to have completed background reading prior to the session – hence, increasing academic workload. There is also some evidence from Step Up that caution should be given to teaching participants the skills to do the work without the theoretical underpinning (Baginsky and Manthorpe, 2014). Perhaps including greater consideration of the implications of theory in relation to social work within recall days would effectively address this issue.

There were mixed feelings about the responsiveness of the recall day tutors at T2. On some occasions this was perceived as very beneficial as participants were able to shape the direction of learning. On other occasions, gaining the views of large groups of participants could lead to disagreement, lost time and 'directionless teaching' where it was unclear what they had been taught. These findings were replicated at T4 where participants stated that tutors could become 'overwhelmed' at times by the volume of questions which served to detract from teaching. We observed this directly at one recall day when the tutor's open question about what had been going well and what not so well led to the class being overtaken for quite some time by an in-depth discussion of the demands of the academic work. This displaced much of the planned content.

The CSWs welcomed the knowledge participants brought back from recall days, stating that it kept them abreast of new developments. For Cohort One, CSWs stated they would have benefitted from advance knowledge as to the topic of the recall day. Suffice to say,

at times participants brought back incomplete theoretical knowledge or sought clarification about areas with which the CSW was unfamiliar. An example of this was observed at one of the unit meetings (March 2015) where participants were keen to apply the theory they had learned on a recall day but their incomplete knowledge led to frustration as they knew it was relevant but could not remember all of the stages of the theory. This also occurred in relation to the application of 'mentalisation' but in this instance the CSWs received additional training from Frontline, meaning the CSW was able to guide their participant through its use. For Cohort Two, CSWs had received a timetable for the recall days and so knew in advance of what topics had been covered.

On reflection at T3, there was some question about how the recall days had been timetabled. Difficulties around the coordination of academic learning and practice learning were also found in the evaluation of Step-Up (Baginsky and Manthorpe, 2014). For Frontline, reference was made to domestic violence and substance misuse, both of which were delivered in the later stages of the programme but participants had encountered both in their work much earlier. Timing is challenging, of course, as realistically some issues have to be covered later in the programme and there will always be debate about relative priorities. Significant gaps between learning about topics and the associated assignment were also highlighted as a timetabling weakness. This was remedied for Cohort Two as recall days had been scheduled to link with assignments.

At T4, participants had attended three recall days. As stated previously, following feedback on the leadership training this had been improved for the recall day. Participants reported that the recall days allowed consolidation of learning from the Summer Institute before developing this knowledge further. The obvious advantages of the recall days were that participants had gained experience on which to base their understanding.

Broadly speaking, the case study LA in Greater Manchester was more positive about the recall days than the Greater London authorities. This is interesting especially as this had not been identified across the three Cohort One time points. As recall days were held in each of the two geographical locations, reflecting the distribution of LAs, the Greater Manchester training had fewer participants. Participants reported greater opportunities for discussions and fewer delays from assignment-based queries. This was particularly pertinent in regard to the recall day on race. For the Greater Manchester unit, the training was perceived positively as participants challenged each other and had an open discussion. Conversely, participants from the case studies in Greater London were not as favourable about the race training. The main course of discontent for participants was that the training was delivered by white middle class men with no attempt made to provide alternative perspectives,

they explicitly spoke about being a white social worker going into a home, and in particular they specifically spoke about being middle class. I don't come from either of those backgrounds, I'm not middle class and not white. So for me, and I

know for other people in the room who don't come from those backgrounds, it was a bit like this has no relevance for my life (Participant U)

There was consensus amongst participants of the importance of including race but as above, perceptions of recall days appeared to be closely associated with the presenter.

4.1.4 Academic tutor

Academic Tutors were employed by Frontline to provide academic and pastoral support to participant units. The AT was expected to visit the units on a fortnightly basis for the first stage of practice learning, (8th September 2014 to 15th January 2015) and on a monthly basis in the second (16th January 2015 to 30th April 2015) and third stage (1st May to 4th September 2015) of practice learning (Frontline Academy, 2014). In doing so, the AT delivered the bespoke curriculum which was,

built around the particular needs of individual participants consolidates and supplements this core curriculum, and your Academic Tutor is central to developing and delivering these learning opportunities (Frontline Academy, 2014).

The bespoke curriculum was designed to develop participant learning so as to maximise performance in the assessments required on the course. Assessments included written assignments (essays, case studies and the Practice Learning Portfolio), observations undertaken by the AT and CSW (beginning with simulated scenarios before observations and recordings were undertaken with families), and an overall assessment of practice by the CSW. The AT provided support on academic learning, practice issues, linking academic and practice as well as research methods for the social sciences and teaching on each of the four areas of specialism. Bespoke tuition was provided for one hour immediately following the unit meeting. At T1, the academic demands of Phase One of the programme, described as a normal 'squeeze point' for all social work courses, had resulted in limited bespoke tuition. Few comments were made about the bespoke curriculum. Those who did comment were very positive.

Following stage one, the academic team had been restructured. The new structure provided for one academic tutor (AT) to oversee the AT role to ensure that each unit received similar levels of support. Four bespoke tutorials and three progress reviews were planned between January and August where the three-hour unit meeting in the morning was followed by bespoke curriculum teaching in the afternoon. The need for this structure was noted by both the lead professor and the Chief Executive of Frontline in their T3 interviews. Each of the four case study units had received at least one bespoke curriculum tutorial at the time of the T2 focus group. In one unit, the bespoke curriculum had been based on the Contrasting Learning Experience (CLE) with participants helping to present the materials based on their CLE placement experiences. In another unit, the AT had asked participants to identify topics pertinent to their cases so that tutorials could be tailored accordingly.

For Cohort One, there were difficulties surrounding the appointment and retention of an AT for the third unit. Consequently, one participant unit did not receive consistent AT support. This could not have been foreseen and Frontline were able to provide support from Morning Lane Associates as an interim measure. The lead professor for Frontline acknowledged in his interview that in planning the programme they had underestimated how demanding the AT role would be. This finding supports that reported on the first two years of Teach First, where there was high turnover of professional tutors (Hutchings et al, 2006). Further reasons posited for this are the same for both programmes; as well as being generally a very demanding role, the AT position has some specific drawbacks including a large amount of travel across Greater London, with some ATs dividing their time between London and Greater Manchester; supporting around five units consisting of four participants as well as working with the CSW and touching base with the Frontline Specialist (FLS); and providing email support for participants at any time. One AT new to the role at T4 surmised,

that the only way that you could manage this with five units, is to be working evenings and weekends. I can't see how you could have five units with all the travelling time involved and stay on top of all the reports, all of the direct observations, all of the marking. I don't see how you could do that and not work evenings and weekends to keep up with it (AT5)

A further factor was supporting participants on a new front-loaded programme where ATs found themselves fielding a constant stream of questions and confusion about the programme. An example of this was reported at T1 where participants were aware that some units had been allowed extensions on coursework and different parameters had been set by different ATs for direct observations. Whilst Frontline developed a FAQ document to aid consistency, this will mainly aid ATs on subsequent cohorts.

Generally, participants reported having been satisfied with their AT across all three data collection points. Participants appeared to have valued the support received by the ATs and the difference between the three units with an AT and the one without was quite apparent. Having an AT who understood the processes and was able to alleviate the confusion caused by not knowing what was to happen and when, was highly valued. This was remarked upon in Cohort Two by the unit who had not had consistent AT support for Cohort One,

They've [participant's] got their academic tutors to speak to about that, so I'm not managing all the overflow all by myself, being in a position not really knowing either (CSW7)

At T3, ATs were perceived to have been very approachable and responsive, being 'attuned' to participant needs (*Participant K*). The provision of bespoke tuition was valued as were the references made to relevant reading. Several comments were made as to the theoretical nature of this role. For one CSW, the AT was pivotal in linking theory to practice but for some participants the materials were too abstract and theoretical, 'I don't feel that it is completely helpful for practice, more just expanding your learning of

particular issues' (*Participant C*). This distinction reflects the perceived difference between roles, where the AT was responsible for 'keeping them on track for the programme' whereas the CSW was responsible for supporting them to be social workers.

All four units stated at T3 that their contact with the AT had been too limited. It was suggested that the AT's role was too large, serving to limit direct work with participants. In this respect the AT role 'seemed like a waste of their expertise and knowledge' (*Participant I*).

Academic Tutors and FLSs either telephoned, emailed or less often met each other fortnightly in order to share their observations and concerns about the units. Entitled, 'Keeping in Touch' this process was viewed favourably as a beneficial tool which enabled issues to be identified early and as such resolved quickly.

Bespoke curriculum for Cohort Two

For Cohort Two, the decision was taken to move away from a completely bespoke curriculum and towards some standardisation to aid consistency of teaching across units (as explained in the interview with the lead professor for Frontline), although a bespoke element was also maintained. A more structured approach was adopted so that at the beginning of stage one, there was a schedule in place for each of the fortnightly sessions. Each unit received a copy of this timetable. The bespoke curriculum for stage one was closely linked with assignments, reflecting the front-loading of assignments (a change also noted by the lead professor). When asked whether this standardisation had a negative impact upon the extent to which the curriculum was, in fact, bespoke, one AT stated,

we do have to deliver a certain focus of our teaching that's prescribed, because somebody within the academic teams will develop the PowerPoint but I'll adapt it, thinking about each of the individual units and using the whole of the time that I've got with them, there may be time after that teaching to do something else or something different, which I'll try and tailor to the group (AT6)

It was emphasised that ATs were active members of the unit meeting contributing to the discussions and were committed to responding to participant needs, providing relevant resources and, where time allowed tailoring tuition to the needs of the unit. It was suggested by ATs that stage two would allow more scope for participants to request specific teaching relevant to their caseloads.

4.1.5 Contrasting Learning Experience (CLE)

The Contrasting Learning Experience consisted of a 30 day placement (10 days before Christmas and 20 days after) working directly with adults across one of four specialist areas; mental health, substance misuse, domestic violence, and learning disabilities. The CLE was a late addition to the Frontline programme and as such, there was a perception amongst CSWs that it had not received as much prior planning and consideration as other elements of the course. That is not say that all of the problems associated with the

CLE were due to this, as individual differences between participants, differences in how agencies operate and the nature of the clients they work with all impact upon the learning experience. In addition, it was highlighted by case studies that as the CLE did not receive funding, mentoring a participant for 30 days was 'a big ask' of partner agencies.

According to respondents, the manner in which the CLE was organised appeared problematic. Placements varied, including one or two days a week, one week alternating blocks or a four-week block. All three approaches were perceived negatively by both CSWs and participants. Those undertaking the placements one day a week felt that this restricted the work they could undertake, their level of engagement and relationship building with service users,

I feel like I am more of a hindrance than an asset, like a burden (Participant A).

For example, the participant placed in a refuge missed the short term care given to service users as the client was gone by the following week. Those undertaking placements in blocks felt that this was too long a period to be away from their child and family caseloads,

I wasn't interested in adult stuff and it just felt like I have so much on at children's that it was frustrating having to do that CLE stuff (Participant F).

Those left in the office felt that they were having to manage other participants' cases whilst they were away. This is in fact a weakness of having smaller units, where staff absences within the unit have greater impact upon remaining staff (Forrester et al, 2013). Several suggestions were made, including having the placements in a block prior to beginning in the unit or as a 10 day block at the beginning of the first stage (September to January) or as a 20 day block at the beginning of stage two (February to September). No consensus emerged about which approach would be more appropriate.

Addressing these issues will mean taking into account the agency within which the participant is placed and determining what is more beneficial; one day a week or a block. To do this, not only should Frontline programme requirements and participant caseload be considered but also the needs of the placement agency. Interview findings from 10 CLE representatives from 9 agencies suggest that the placement was organised on the basis of the needs of the participant as opposed to the CLE agency. Some expressed frustration that participants had to field calls about their child and family caseloads whilst others commented upon the frequency with which some participants had to re-arrange which day they attended. There was a general feeling that the CLE was not a priority for participants as it was merely a 'bolt on'. CLE staff suggested that more time should be devoted to the initial organisation of the placement. Providing the agency with information about the programme and its requirements would improve participant satisfaction (Baginsky and Manthorpe, 2014), as well as helping to shape the optimum method of participant engagement, clarify the CLE expectations and help to provide consistency for service users.

Reorganisation for Cohort Two

For Cohort Two, three of the four case study LAs had modified how the CLE was organised. The fourth had encountered difficulties arranging the placements due to wider organisational issues; without interview data from the CSW it is not possible to comment further or determine whether any changes had been made to how the placements were organised. Suffice to say that participant interviews within this unit reported that they had received a high level of support from the CSW to arrange the CLE and ensure that they secured good quality placements.

Of the three Cohort Two case studies whose CSWs were interviewed, two had opted to complete the placements in a block at the beginning of the first stage (September to January) to 'minimise disruption at this stage of learning' (CSW3). One had elected for all participants to begin their CLE on day two of their placement whilst the other had staggered the CLE so that two participants attended the CLE on weeks three and four whilst two attended on weeks five and six. Participants were divided between those who mainly shadowed and those who were more involved, for example conducting assessments with clients. Nevertheless, all participants reported that they had gained varied experience and benefitted from their experience. The third CSW adopted a different approach, preferring for participants to conduct the CLE one day a week. The CSW's rationale was that operating the CLE over a longer period enabled participants the opportunity to build relationships with the CLE as well as allowing participants at least three days a week together as a unit. Again, these trainees were positive about their placements.

Cohort Two built upon the prior experiences of CLE as the majority of these placements had participated in Cohort One. Some participants reported having attended a three-way meeting with the CSW and CLE prior to the beginning of the placement whilst in other cases initial discussions took place through email or telephone communication. In one case, concerning a CLE which had been perceived as 'less successful' (CSW2), Frontline's relationship and development manager had liaised with the organisation to improve the placement for Cohort Two. Two of the case studies approached new agencies for Cohort Two with one CSW stating that,

I think I was far more prepared as a CSW to know what to expect and to make sure my student and I ask the right questions; the questions being what door do I come in to when I start my placement and will I have computer access and an identity tag, things that perhaps the first year we didn't think about and it could have taken a few days, which in real time last year was a few weeks (CSW2)

CLE staff were very positive about their involvement with Cohort One Frontline participants. The majority expressed the desire to offer placements for Cohort Two and as discussed above, were actively seeking ways in which the placement could be improved for all parties (Frontline participant, agency, and service users). The CLE staff spoke very highly of Frontline participant communication skills, interviewing skills, and the initiative they used to maximise their CLE experience. Examples were given where a

participant had considered the nature of the agency's work and how they could re-arrange the placement to better fit with service user needs. Other participants had actively sought work, approached staff within the team for opportunities, clarified expectations or created opportunities; one participant initiated a weekly group for service users. Participants attempted to embed themselves within the teams by, for example, answering telephones, taking messages and involving themselves in the agency's work. The participants were described as being very receptive to feedback and able to create solutions for any problems they encountered. One CLE representative stated that they had welcomed the fresh knowledge brought by the Frontline trainee.

4.1.6 Consultant Social Worker Training

During the T1 interviews, the four CSWs were asked to comment upon their training. All were very positive about their 12-day training course, describing it as of 'the highest standard'. Delivered by Morning Lane Associates, 70% was on systemic practice, 20% on motivational interviewing, with one session on social learning theory, and the remainder focused on the practice educator element of the CSW role. Five days of training took place at the Summer Institute. Specifically, the training supported the transition into the CSW role, presented ideas in a simple way, gave social workers the opportunity to role play, e.g. leading a systemic unit meeting, and provided networking opportunities. One said 'I absolutely loved the training. I thought it was the highest standard of training that I've had from anywhere. It absolutely engaged me every time and it challenged me so it was really stretching me' (CSW4).

Three of the four CSWs felt that the training had not adequately prepared them for the practical realities of the Frontline programme, including recall day frequency, the contrasting learning experience and the lack of information about expectations and deadlines.

Two FLSs and two ATs felt that the CSW training did not devote sufficient time to the practice educator element. Early indications suggested that this was to be addressed for Cohort Two, but we do not have data to confirm this. It was suggested that the provision of ongoing CSW training would enable deeper embedding of the systemic ideas and help them address the emerging challenges presented by participants' cases.

The practicalities of travelling to London once a week from April to June were problematic, especially for those based in Greater Manchester. For those whose local authorities did not release them until the participants were in placement, juggling the training demands with caseloads was difficult. There was some suggestion that some CSWs had not adequately familiarised themselves with the complexities of the Frontline programme. The recommendation by interviewees that they be given time prior to the Summer Institute to prepare for the participants' arrival appeared to have been adopted for Cohort Two.

CSW Training for Cohort Two

None of the four Cohort Two case study CSWs were new to the Frontline programme and as such no data were gathered as to whether the initial CSW training had been modified for the second cohort. Looking back on Cohort One, two CSWs reported that following the initial training at the Summer Institute, CSWs were offered five more training days around eight months into the programme. These sessions offered training on areas such as systemic practice, motivational interviewing, mentalisation and the practice educator role,

They were more centred around the practice educator role that we played. It was much needed, and I think we all thought it would have been useful earlier on (CSW7)

For Cohort Two, two of the three CSWs interviewed reported having received two days, 'Advanced CSW Training' at the Summer Institute whilst the third could not recall any such training. Of the two who recalled training, it was viewed very positively to the extent that,

They brought some concepts that we'd not really come across as much, which was really good, because it meant that I could take some of that back to the unit; it felt really helpful. I think the thing that we fed back was that we wanted more of that over the year, which they've taken on (CSW6).

The CSWs had also received a group session on coaching and a further training session was scheduled in November 2015. It was highlighted by participants at T2 that the CSWs' theoretical knowledge of motivational interviewing and systemic practice was of the same level as that of the participants. Participants saw this as a barrier to learning as,

they don't have experience of embedding all of that theory into practice, any more than we currently do (Participant E).

Participants suggested that future cohorts employ CSWs trained at a higher level in these concepts. At T4, this was being addressed through systemic practice training for CSWs during Cohort Two. This was designed to equip CSWs with the knowledge and understanding to support participants, lead unit meetings and mark their work, although it was acknowledged that,

the role is to facilitate and support development, not to be the teacher - they have academic teachers for that – but there needs to be an element of support and knowledge that they need to have (FLS4)

In addition, the programme was being developed so that CSWs proceeding onto cohort three would be offered the opportunity to gain a systemic qualification. The Chief Executive of Frontline noted in his T3 interview that it had sometimes been challenging to recruit high quality CSWs, although this challenge had been overcome.

4.1.7 Frontline Specialist

All three Cohort One FLSs had been practising social workers prior to their involvement with Frontline. Two of them had previously been based in the London Borough of Hackney and as such had prior knowledge and experience of the practice unit model. Frontline Specialists were expected to visit units every 2 to 3 weeks. The main focus of the role was that of supporting the CSW in their role as mentor to four participants within the unit, although according to one FLS, the FLS role was multifaceted,

My job is to make sure that the CSWs are fully equipped to be able to work with the participants, to run the unit meetings and for them to continue to develop and for us to think about difficult things that they come across, and help to find the best way through that really. And also, my role is to work between the local authority and Frontline. So be the face of Frontline within the local authority. So to meet up with the managers to find out how things are going. I see the participants when I go in and catch up with them and get feedback from them, how the CSWs are getting on. We organise the contrasting learning experiences. So, yes, in a way, it's to develop and coach the CSWs, but there's lots of different facets of the job as well (FLS2).

The implementation of coaching sessions appeared to be inconsistent across all data collection points for Cohort One. The reasons for this appeared to be primarily the demands placed upon CSWs in implementing a new programme, as well as an apparent lack of understanding as to the potential benefits of having a protected space to explore any issues or concerns through coaching. At T1, three of the four CSWs reported having received at least one coaching session, although one of these had requested further support from within their LA to supplement support around systemic practice. Sickness and workload had prevented the fourth from arranging time for the coaching session.

By T2, the FLS-CSW relationship had broken down in one instance. From this point another FLS was appointed as the coach with the original FLS remaining with the unit to undertake the FLS tasks. Finally, at T3 three CSWs reported having received at least one coaching session. This was perceived favourably as it gave the CSWs space to explore areas such as any issues within the unit, applying systemic practice or normalising the experiences CSWs were encountering. It was acknowledged that both parties needed to ensure that coaching sessions were scheduled into busy diaries as it is a beneficial element of the programme.

By T4, as with the AT role, there was now more structure to the FLS visits. Each unit received a copy of the timetable for both the AT and the FLS visits for stage one, and where possible the visits were scheduled so both the AT and the FLS would not visit on the same day. Where possible the FLSs attempted to maintain the schedule although it was noted that where other programme demands took precedence, such as the Skills Lab, these appointments were re-arranged.

For Cohort Two, FLSs visited each unit for the whole day once a month (FLS1), attending the unit meeting in the morning and delivering a coaching session to the CSW in the

afternoon. Both participants and CSWs perceived having the FLS available all day as a benefit both in terms of the increased opportunity for informal discussions as well as greater insight this yielded for the FLS of how each unit operated and was managed by the LA. Whilst the CSW-FLS relationship had broken down in one instance at Cohort One, for Cohort Two this CSW was positive about their new FLS, acknowledging the support they had been given to develop their CSW role within the LA as well as the coaching they had received,

I can't really say that, last year, I felt that I had support of a coach. This year, I feel that my one-to-ones with my specialist have been more structured and have followed more of a coaching element, and have, so far, ended with some real practical action points, and things for me to take away. They felt quite guided (CSW2)

The other two CSWs interviewed at T4 were unsure as to how many coaching sessions they had received, commenting that it was 'early days' and time was needed for coaching to become embedded (CSW6). Reference was made to the front-loading of the programme which could be difficult in terms of making time for coaching,

There are still a lot of demands in terms of people coming here once a fortnight, monthly this review will happen, the reports on direct observations, which means this period's still quite tight in terms of being available to do everything (CSW8)

However, the FLSs reported that they were providing coaching regularly in response to CSW needs.

4.2 Mediating factors

4.2.1 Local Authority

For Cohort One, FLSs were the representatives of Frontline within their local authorities and began working with them before the start of the programme, reviewing the recruitment of CSWs, reviewing how the programme was being set-up in each authority and liaising with management about what they wanted the FLS to do in the interim period from April to the 'go-live date'. This was modified for Cohort Two, however, with the introduction of the relationship and development manager to take this liaison role.

For T1, FLSs were able to ascertain how different local authorities operated, identify their key issues and challenges to better help them support the programme's implementation. For example, all local authorities encountered issues around seating arrangements and where the unit was going to be physically located so the FLSs attended meetings to support these decisions.

At T3, CSW reported that senior managers had been supportive of the Frontline programme. One Director described the benefits as having good social work students with a systemic focus, observing that,

we have found the employment based route to qualification to be a good one in the provision of competent graduates.

As a new initiative, local authorities had supported the Frontline programme but initially were unaware of how it would be implemented and the implications of this in terms of the organisation. CSWs had been given the flexibility to implement the programme with the level of support from senior managers increasing throughout the year as the exact implementation details became known. This included recognition of how demanding the CSW role is, addressing initial resistance from some social workers towards Frontline (see Social Work staff section) and rolling out information about systemic practice across child and family teams.

At T4, interviews at management level suggested that there were areas of tension between the LA and the Frontline where the two organisations had different needs and policies. In terms of policies, problems had been encountered around the CSW paycales in some authorities as Frontline recommends that CSWs receive a salary equivalent to that of a team manager although the LA has the final decision on the exact package,

... because they [Frontline] publicly announced it, it's very difficult then as a local authority to say actually I'm not going to pay you £42k a year, I'm going to pay you [at the same level] as other senior practitioners. It's made us set up a bit of an elitism within our own local authority, because we now have these two posts paid at this level of salary which nobody else is paid at (Manager)

Two case studies alluded to conversations between Frontline and the LA regarding the two-year commitment required by LAs for ASYE staff where staff agree to reimburse part of the ASYE costs should they leave during this period. This reflects competing needs where LAs need to increase staff retention but where Frontline are offering a two-year programme which would have to be extended to three- years with the two-year ASYE commitment. As the employing agency, some of the costs of running the programme had to be absorbed by LAs and these costs were perceived to have affected other potential investment. One social worker expressed this view,

I know that for staff, current, permanent staff, training has been cut back because we've put so much money into Frontline, and that seems a bit unfair, really, particularly if we don't end up with social workers that are going to remain with us for years to come (Social worker 2)

The notion of elitism emerged as a criticism, not of the Frontline trainees, but of the organisation running the Frontline programme. For both Cohort One and Cohort Two, middle managers had noted that Frontline communicated directly with the Directors of Children's Services rather than those who were responsible for implementing the programme. This meant that on occasion messages were not filtered down and there was a disconnect between those actively engaged in the implementation and operation of the programme and Frontline.

Participants also commented on this apparent elitism,

It was really good [Summer Institute] a little bit pretentious, with the whole set-up you know, lots of dinners and meetings. It was quite different from working in a local authority. I didn't like that aspect of it (Participant AD).

I think some of the language and the rhetoric Frontline say, the market brand but also in the Summer Institute itself, didn't really sit comfortably with me (Participant S)

This suspicion of corporate style or business ethos also chimes with the views expressed by some trainees about the leadership training during observation of the Summer Institute. The evaluation did not include direct questions to interviewees about future sustainability, but interviews with staff in three of the four LAs suggested there was a degree of scepticism as to how LAs could absorb four participants from future cohorts, concern that as the programme grew geographically there would be less attention to programme detail, and, as mentioned, caution around Frontline organisation itself and how it is funded,

Are we meeting the government's agenda to produce really highly qualified, skilled social workers to fill what the Prime Minister thinks is a deficit in child protection social work, or are we actually running a business that's making money for other people? (Senior Manager)

The view expressed in this data excerpt may represent a mistaken perception of profit being made, when in fact Frontline is a registered charity and does not make any profit. The organisation does 'make money' in the sense of having to sustain the employment of a number of individuals. But in this regard it is no different from any charity which has funding from Government and private donors.

4.2.2 Social workers

At T1, having a distinct participant unit which actively selected appropriate cases for participant learning and had a lower caseload than newly qualified social workers had the potential to lead to suspicion amongst social workers in the wider teams. This suspicion was exacerbated by an initial perception that participants had lower knowledge levels in comparison with other social work students on arrival (mainstream social work students would usually have already had a first placement elsewhere before commencing a statutory one); many Frontline participants having no previous social work/care related qualifications or experience; some wearing clothing thought to be unsuitable; and the disproportionate number of white participants across the four case studies. There appeared an underlying perception from social work staff that Frontline participants were 'Oxbridge graduates' aiming to become the 'next directors of children's services'. The lack of information given to staff about Frontline, coupled with participants' detailed knowledge of systemic practice (many social workers would not have received this training yet), resulted in a level of suspicion about the participants. The unit model added

to this suspicion as participants were not immersed in the teams and as such there was a feeling that they did not get 'as stuck in' as other students.

By T4, this suspicion had dissipated as social workers knew about the Frontline programme and had borne witness to the participants learning journey the previous year. As one social worker stated,

we've got one of the Frontline guys with us now as a social worker and he's doing really well and the other two are in the South and in another team, and they're doing really well as well. So, I think in time because, we had Step Up before, but everyone's just used to the general placement. It was quite an interesting development and actually, because they stayed longer and you got to know them better, which was really good (Social worker 3)

Cohort One participants across all four case studies reported that they had been welcomed into the teams by social workers and felt able to approach colleagues for help and support if required.

4.3 Moderating factors

4.3.1 Ability to manage workload

Of the four case studies, one reported that they did not record the number of cases held by workers but rather the number of children. Hence, the numbers presented here are for the three case studies that provided information as to the number of cases the units held at each time point. At T1, these three case study units held an average of thirteen cases each. Frontline participants varied in the amount of detail they provided about their exact involvement in the cases but for those that did provide information, cases held in the units tended to be Child in Need, Looked-after children, and organising and supervising contacts. At this stage, around four months into the programme, several participants reported that they were attending at least some of the meetings with service users alone. In comparison, for Cohort Two at T4 the four case study units held an average of nine cases per unit. It is not clear why there were fewer cases at this time point although the interviews for T4 were completed two weeks earlier than T1. At T4, one case study had almost double the number of cases (14 cases) the other three had (average of 8 cases for each unit) but it is not clear why there was such a difference. Interview findings from one unit demonstrated that the participants were ready to increase their caseload and that this had been raised during the progress review. However, without compromising the LA's anonymity it is difficult to consider the reasons for this. The AT did state that the cases the unit held were sufficiently complex to challenge participants.

By T2, the three case study units held an average of twenty cases each. Participants were more autonomous in their work and were holding cases which were 'more complex and more challenging' than in stage one. Participants were engaging in longer pieces of work. One participant noted that,

there's a nice amount of complexity, and we're now allowed to focus in-depth on practising those skills where there is complexity (Participant K)

At the time of the second visit, pressure on the duty teams in one case study site had resulted in all the teams across children's social care having to pick up extra cases. For the Frontline unit, this meant that six families had been allocated over a two week period, with one participant commenting,

I don't think any of us really feel like that's appropriate for us at this point in our learning so we've had to go on initial visits alone, which I don't think is right (Participant M)

The CSW, whilst stating that she 'had no choice' was considering the cases and allocating them to participants. Observation noted that one such case was re-allocated to another participant due to the original participant's schedule. This demonstrates that despite receiving several unexpected cases the CSW was very aware of what was manageable for each participant.

At this stage of the practice learning, several comments were made about participants learning how to manage their time,

They're learning the rhythm, that this is the system, and you know hopefully when they move into a unit they'll find their own rhythm. They do it all in different ways, some have notebooks, some have diaries, they've all got their ways, but some are better than others. (CSW1)

Participants were aware of where they needed to reduce time, e.g. keeping meetings to time and writing up notes.

By T3 (July-August 2015), in preparation for year two, most participants were winding down their caseloads. This meant that at the time of interview, caseloads varied from those who still had eight cases per participant to those who had five. A few participants had fewer than five cases but this appeared to be because they had been out of the office on the CLE placement.

At this stage, the majority of participants felt able to manage the workload,

I'd say in terms of workload I probably have the perfect balance. I'm busy enough that I'm kept on my toes, I have moments of stress but I still have enough time to say I'm getting a good learning experience out of it and time to reflect on what I'm doing (Participant J).

Ability to manage the workload was commented on by the CLE representatives who recognised that the participants were managing caseloads in the child and family teams as well as taking on work in the placement. The CSWs confirmed this, stating that they had been able to steadily increase the workload over the year. For those few participants who needed to enhance their time management skills, the CSWs had provided useful advice,

my CSW has taught us some quite good tips on keeping organised and planning your priorities, what needs doing, what needs doing today, what needs doing this week (Participant G)

In addition, as participants gained more experience they appeared more able to prioritise their workload.

The academic pressure identified previously was discussed, but only in as much as to highlight that academic work was completed in evenings and weekends. The CSWs emphasised that participants worked hard, and at this early stage of their careers had not set boundaries when service users could contact them. This has been observed at the second visit to the local authorities (March 2015) where participants had been informed to switch off work mobile phones at 5pm. There was some suggestion that this was not being adhered to consistently meaning that some participants were working long hours and then going home to complete academic work.

4.3.2 The emotional nature of the work

The importance for social workers to be emotionally resilient has been recognised by the PCF which requires that students demonstrate their understanding of the importance of emotional resilience and of taking steps to protect their well-being (College of Social Work, 2012). What is needed is practitioners who are resilient in managing the high pitch emotional content of the job but not so emotionally hardened that they cannot empathise with children and parents. Early in the Frontline programme, the issue of how protected Frontline participants were was raised in terms of the emotional elements of the work. For one social worker, students from other courses had more time to build the emotional resilience required over a longer period of time. However, by the end of Cohort One there was a view that emotional resilience had been developed through the gradual allocation over the year of increasingly difficult cases, support and guidance from the CSW (as well as other participants within the unit) and from completion of the assigned reflective logs. Generally, participants appeared able to cope with the emotional nature of the work. Several staff from CLEs noted how resilient participants were and how 'unfazed' (CLE 6) they were by chaotic service users. The CSWs saw this as something participants would continue to develop throughout their careers. One trainee said,

I think that's been quite a big learning curve for me in terms of just becoming more attuned to how you react to certain things and what you need to do in those situations to make yourself feel better (Participant A).

All Frontline participants, including those who had struggled, commented on how supported they felt as well as the help they had received,

It's been really helpful to talk to my CSW about it and in some of my one to one supervisions kind of been able to perhaps unpick why I'm finding it difficult or sad or whatever (Participant G).

Some participants felt they received conflicting messages as on one hand they were encouraged by CSWs to have a good work-life balance but on the other they were embarking upon an intensive programme of study. Similar concerns were raised by teachers regarding the Teach First student work-life balance although this was in relation to the effects on their teaching.

Individual differences emerged in what participants found challenging. Perhaps most obvious was that some participants found having difficult conversations or listening to service users, including children, talk about what they had been through to be the most challenging aspect. However, some participants coped with this well, yet found their emotional stress manifested itself in impatience with minor things such as IT problems. Other sources of difficulty included the challenge of being in the middle where parents were in conflict, having complaints made about them and not being able to see the bigger picture. In addition, one CSW felt that those participants coming from high achieving backgrounds had struggled to accept they were not on 'top of their game immediately' (CSW 4). A similar finding emerged from the Teach First evaluation (Hutchings *et al*, 2006) which found that some students were so determined to succeed that they pushed themselves to exhaustion and struggled to admit failure; not asking for help until crisis point was reached.

The need for students to understand that employers have a duty of care towards them by providing a supportive environment has been found to enhance social worker emotional resilience (Grant, Kinman and Baker, 2015). In terms of coping, the participant unit was the main source of support, followed by the CSW. Participants had developed strong relationships with each other, often debriefing after difficult visits and talking to each other on the phone during long journeys home. There was some concern as to whether these relationships would endure once divided across different units. In these instances, participants would have to find alternative sources of support.

4.3.3 Assessment burden

It is worth noting that interviewees were not specifically asked about the demands of the programme or about the assessment requirements of the programme. Despite this, the demands of the Frontline programme emerged as a theme at T1. At this first stage of the programme, participants had limited time within the unit due to programme commitments, including the Contrasting Learning Experience (CLE) ten days, attendance at Recall days, direct observations and essays. The consistent theme was of the challenge of balancing these commitments and the struggle to meet all the demands of the programme. There was some suggestion that the programme needs to be clearer about the roles and expectations from the various organisations involved (Figure 4.1).

Reflecting on the demands of the course at T2, the majority of participants were positive about the 'front-loading' of assessments, primarily because it,

allows us to breathe (in stage two), and it also allows us to prioritise our caseload instead of prioritising just the academic work which was having to happen a bit last year (stage one). (Participant E)

It is perhaps worth noting that there were no issues with the theoretical assignments but only those that required a practice evidence base. Across both T1 and T2, some participants encountered difficulties with one assignment which required a number of direct observations of the same child. This resulted in the need to visit some families more than was required, purely to satisfy assessment requirement. Identifying and gaining consent from families for their child to be observed was problematic. Several participants had needed to request an extension as a suitable family had not been secured. A concern was expressed that in order to meet programme assessment requirements, students need to look for - and even 'manufacture' - opportunities to engage with service users, more because they need to do so for programme assessment requirements than because service users actually need or want the engagement. This concern from practice educators is not unheard of on mainstream social work programmes, although the Frontline expectations of several observations of the same child are probably beyond what most programmes would expect.

These observations also impinged upon placement time as they had to be undertaken during office hours due to the age of the children being observed. Similar difficulties were found at T2 in identifying families suitable for the parent-child game assessment which consisted of ten one-hour sessions with a family. The Chief Executive of Frontline acknowledged in his interview that the guidelines had been too prescriptive for Cohort One so had subsequently been revised.

Those who struggled to balance the demands of the course reported at T2 that in addition to the difficulties in completing the child observation, the portfolio 'was the thing that drowned everyone' (Participant F). Participants struggled to see the direct benefits of the portfolio, describing it as 'less practically and intellectually interesting'. The delay in receiving feedback on the portfolio's home visits was also seen as unhelpful.

As mentioned above, the impact of the demands of the programme were reported by some at T1 to have adversely affected the potential for bespoke learning because participants felt they simply did not have the time to do any additional research or reading. More significantly, there was some suggestion that participants prioritised the assignments and assessments for the programme above work with families.

Drawing on these findings, the programme had been modified for Cohort Two. Participants reported that they had been prepared for the front-loading of assignments whilst at the Summer Institute and had received documentation detailing submission deadlines for the academic assignments and portfolios. In this respect, participants felt that, 'this year we've had our expectations managed' (*Participant R*). Participants understood why the course was designed in this manner and generally reported that whilst the academic workload was 'intense', it did feel manageable. There was an

indication that participants had underestimated the demands of balancing a full-time post with an academic course, with one saying,

It's difficult to find the balance with life. I knew that that would happen but I think I'd underestimated how difficult and tiring and thought-provoking the job would be (Participant S).

There was some recognition from Frontline participants that balancing these demands would improve with experience. In addition, there was an awareness that the intensive nature of the programme required participants to be organised and plan ahead. Building on the lessons learned from Cohort One, ATs had a greater role for Cohort Two in ensuring that participants were kept on track, reminding them of deadlines and ensuring that they knew what assessments were coming next. To this end, the difficulties associated with identifying and gaining consent for the direct observations were addressed by planning earlier to make units aware that they needed to find suitable families well in advance. Whilst there were still difficulties, this element of the programme did appear less problematic.

A notable improvement for Cohort Two was the inclusion of the 'Skills Lab' for the direct observations where the AT, CSW and the trainee listened to the recorded direct observations,

My initial thought was, oh, don't do it on a first observation, these poor students being observed in a Skills Lab, it's too much pressure. But, actually as long as it's managed well and all of the students feel supported, which I think and I hope they do, it's a very useful learning experience to have so early on (CSW7)

The lead professor for Frontline explained in his interview that it had proven to be impractical in Cohort One for ATs to travel to LAs for direct observation of trainees' practice, as appointments often got changed, so the Skills Lab was brought in as an alternative approach to allow ATs as well as CSWs to comment in detail on trainees' interactions with families.

4.4 Participants' learning

The Frontline programme involves different modes of professional learning in order to integrate evidence-based interventions, which have been shown to be effective (Frontline Academy, 2014), within participants' emergent practice and professional theories. This section initially considers the nature of participants' learning processes before focussing on key content aspects of the Frontline programme.

4.4.1 Integrating different modes of professional learning

The initial interviews at T1 reported that the amount of time participants had for practice learning within the unit was limited. Closer inspection of the findings suggests a tension between the units wanting time to learn in practice and the tasks needed to complete the

programme for this first stage. At this point, the overall demands of the programme meant that participants were undertaking the ten days required for the CLE, attending recall days once a fortnight, and conducting direct observations (some of which took place outside the placement setting). At this stage, dependent on how the CLE was organised, some participants were only in the office three days a week on alternate weeks. Of these three days, group supervision was scheduled for three hours every week and individual supervision was held every other week. This limited the opportunities for intensive practice learning and presented particular difficulties in managing a caseload, impacting upon the number of cases that could realistically be allocated.

Other difficulties highlighted at T1 included the complexity of the Frontline programme where there was a perception that there were too many emails from Frontline informing about and refining the programme, and too many forms for CSWs to complete as well as an assumption that a practising social worker would be able to whittle these forms down to a more manageable level. CSWs reported that this was the same for T4 although their increased experience improved their efficiency. In addition, at T1 practice learning was said to be affected by participants' relative lack of understanding of confidentiality, risk, and basic office functioning. These had all emerged early in the placement, with the CSWs expressing surprise that these issues had needed to be taught. In this respect, LAs appeared more used to receiving students who had already completed a placement and/or had previous experience of social work. This was perhaps exacerbated by the perception that Frontline participants were 'super students' skilled at systemic practice and the underlying assumption that they would be able to hit the ground running.

Despite these difficulties, Frontline participants were overcoming these obstacles, aided by their 'high expectations for themselves' and their ability to grasp new information quickly. Their ability to hypothesise, generate ideas and their sensitivity to service users were rated highly. The majority of participants felt that the learning pace was appropriate and that they were well supported and listened to.

Throughout Cohort One, participants were described as being very receptive to feedback. The majority of participants reported receiving ongoing informal verbal feedback. In the early stages of practice learning where the participant was doing joint visits with the CSW, informal feedback was given both before and after the visit. In later stages, participants were able to approach CSWs to request feedback or advice and guidance regarding visits to service users. Ongoing informal feedback was received on every piece of work and formal written feedback was given for every assessment. This included written feedback on the five reflective learning logs completed in the first three months and 'every supervision was written up' (*Participant O*). There was some suggestion that participants relied upon the CSW to guide them and make decisions about how many cases they could manage. Overwhelmingly, the participants were positive about the feedback and supervision they received.

Higher levels of intensive practice learning were evident in stage two (T2), as participants were able to focus more time and attention on their cases. All participants were moving towards increased independence and autonomy in their work. One theme was that participants had to 'speed up and write less' (CSW1). Participants echoed this finding, with one saying,

We have worked out what we spend too much time doing, haven't we? In terms of case notes and stuff and where you need to start shaving off time really; Keeping meetings to time, keeping case notes and writing up notes. (Participant A)

The CSWs across the four case study sites had clear plans for each participant and were implementing these plans during individual supervision. Generally, the participants appeared to be moving away from the shorter pieces of work they had undertaken in the first few months to longer pieces of work where they,

are going to see relationships evolve, experience more challenges, and have to sustain those relationships (CSW3).

At this stage, the CSWs were supporting individual learning needs with the level of support varying according to the participant, the case and the task undertaken. For example, participants needing support in building relationships with service users had more joint visits, as did those working on cases with higher levels of risk, to 'share the burden'. In addition, when participants encountered new challenges, the CSW increased the level of support. In one unit where the CSW no longer attended family visits, the participants stated that they had requested that the CSW attend at least some visits to check that they were 'doing things right'.

Two of the four units reported pairing participants as a learning strategy. This was based on the rationale that participants differed in their strengths and so were able to learn from one another, give and receive feedback, and support each other in new and challenging experiences. Of these two units, one reported pairing participants on most cases which meant that as a unit they held the same number of cases as other units in the local authority. The CSW ensured this was manageable by allocating certain children to participants dependent upon the complexity involved and the participants' learning goals. For example, one participant reported that the cases they held consisted of twenty children but of these, they were directly responsible for six children. Participants were positive about co-working, citing numerous examples where they had learnt from each other and supported each other.

At T3, all four CSWs stated that their Frontline trainees were 'ready' for the assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE). All newly qualified social work students receive support during their first year of employment to develop their skills, knowledge and professional confidence. The move into social work teams was seen as a big step for Frontline participants. One CSW said,

they will be shocked at the differences in support, the differences in team meetings and the differences they're going to experience through different managers but I think that's going to be the same as any other ASYE; it's a big step' (CSW 2).

To aid this transition, the CSWs were planning to arrange for participants to spend time in their new teams. The CSWs had also identified between 8-10 development points for each participant to take into their ASYE year.

As this was the final round of interviews for Cohort One, participants were invited to reflect upon Frontline's intensive learning approach. Every participant responded positively for example,

now that I'm coming towards the end of the year I can really see the amount of learning opportunities that I've been able to take advantage of (Participant H).

Specific reference was made to two aspects of the Frontline programme; learning in practice and the unit model.

With regard to learning in practice, whilst acknowledging they had no direct experience of traditional social work programmes, participants felt that they had 'a much wider practice knowledge' than they would have gained on such a programme (Participant N). Their experience of learning in practice enabled this participant to,

feel a lot more comfortable going because I know a lot of the people, I know a lot of the managers and I know a lot of the other social workers. So I feel more involved in the team already' (Participant N).

It was highlighted that it had been the learning in practice approach that had attracted them to the Frontline programme, and it had not failed to deliver.

The unit model was perceived to 'multiply the learning' (*Participant G*) as participants learned both directly from each other and vicariously by observing each other's casework. Working within the unit enabled participants to 'share in one another's learning' (*Participant K*) so that the unit as a whole learnt the lessons from individual participants' cases. This learning was supplemented by the AT who responded to practice in a theoretical manner and was thus seen to further enhance the learning experience. The CSWs' role in supporting the participants throughout the learning journey was also perceived as a strength of the programme.

4.4.2 Evidence-based interventions

One of the central tenets of the Frontline programme was for participants to learn to be social workers in practice, and part of this was based upon learning evidence-based interventions which have been shown to be effective (Frontline Academy, 2014). Specifically, the programme included motivational interviewing, systemic practice and a parenting programme based on the principles of social learning theory. The strength of the evidence base for these approaches varies. Whereas there is support from

randomised controlled trials for motivational interviewing, this is not in a child welfare context (Lundahl et al., 2010). There is some strong evidence in support of parenting help based on social learning theory, at least for improving children's behaviour (Furlong et al., 2012), including some evidence specifically in relation to families in the child welfare system (e.g. Letart et al., 2010). However there is arguably not the same strength of evidence in support of a systemic practice model. The Cochrane review by Littell *et al.* (2005) found no conclusive evidence for the effectiveness of multi-systemic therapy, for example, and no robust study has been undertaken to compare outcomes of casework based on a systemic model with those of practice that is not. Participants were specifically asked about their ability to apply these techniques in practice at T3.

1) Motivational interviewing

All of the participants reported having used motivational interviewing in their work with families. Findings revealed that supplementing the initial teaching on motivational interviewing with an assignment, where participants had to critically appraise a recording of themselves using the technique, had positively impacted upon use of the technique,

because of an assignment where we had to record ourselves using motivational interviewing with a service user, I found that much easier to understand how it works and when to use it (Participant P).

This is perhaps of no surprise as research findings have shown that the best way to learn motivational interviewing is to provide coaching on skills using either recorded client or simulated client interviews (Miller and Rollnick, 2013). Frontline participants highlighted the benefits of motivational interviewing as a way of talking to service users, working with resistance, and involving the service user,

I definitely try and ask more questions of the service user rather than giving my own opinion and advice which I think is a very natural response I had at the beginning (Participant K).

Participants reported having used the technique in a variety of ways including helping a step-father explore ways to maintain his sobriety, working with a mother to help her consider how her needs differed from her child's, and supporting a mother who was considering a move out of the area. They noted that motivational interviewing for social work was more a way of engaging people during routine visits rather than a dedicated therapy session. In this regard, it was suggested that the Frontline programme could be developed to include teaching on how the technique could be broken down into elements that could be delivered to service users during visits over a number of weeks.

2) Systemic practice

Generally, participants reported having a basic understanding of systemic practice. The Summer Institute and recall days had provided the theoretical knowledge of systemic practice whilst the unit meetings had provided practical experience of thinking systemically. Participants perceived it to be a valuable way of thinking about cases. Several participants felt that the teaching had been too academic and as such they found

it difficult to apply in practice. This had been fed back with immediate steps made to rectify this, 'I find it really hard when something is taught abstractly, to actually implement that into a real-life situation but I think they've [Frontline] improved that' (*Participant F*).

There was some variation in the extent to which systemic practice was used. Several participants stated that it was their preferred approach and that it had a good fit with motivational interviewing. Others felt that they wanted more practice in using the approach and it was highlighted that, 'a lot of the bread and butter of the day to day stuff that we're doing for our cases isn't that sort of [systemic] conversation, or it isn't always feasible to have that sort of conversation or do that sort of thing' (*Participant A*). There was a general call for more consolidation between the academic learning and practical application,

I think in terms of direct work with service users, I understand the principles but I find it quite hard to use that and to know when to use it, and I think quite often I just don't, because I'm not sure when it's appropriate and how to put it into practice, so I guess theoretically I understand it and I think it's good, but I think I need a bit more on how to actually practise that with a service user (Participant O).

3) Parenting programme

Whilst not specifically asked at T2, participants described difficulties in identifying families suitable for the parent-child game used for the parenting programme. This programme was based on social learning principles and delivered to parents of children aged between two and eight years of age. Specifically, engaging families for the ten one-hour sessions proved problematic and participants were sceptical about the choice of parenting tool. This scepticism appeared mainly centred around the lack of teaching manuals available meaning that participants had to devise their own and the approach would not, therefore, be accredited,

The one that they've used, it's not accredited and there's no paperwork that we can give to families to explain it, there's no manual, so if you do Strengthening Families or Triple-P or Incredible Years, you get a manual. (Participant F)

In contrast to these findings at T3 the majority of participants were positive about the inclusion of the parenting programme. The difficulties presented previously were acknowledged, however, on reflection all but one participant (who had previous experience of delivering a range of parenting programmes) reported the value of including the parenting programme on the Frontline programme. The benefits were twofold: participants' knowledge of parenting; and supporting parents in their parenting:

I'm not a parent myself, so I found it a bit daunting before doing that with a family, the learning, for me it was quite helpful. (Participant D)

On a visit I carried out earlier this week I used - it wasn't delivering it formally through 10 sessions - but I was using specific session skills around praise and sticker charts and boundaries (Participant H)

Some participants noted that they used the techniques when playing with children or observing parents with their children, even if this was not the purpose of their visit whilst others commented on how they could draw on the learning to answer specific questions they were asked, for example one mother asked for advice about tantrums. As noted above, the participants acknowledged that the nature of statutory social work does not lend itself to delivering a 10-week programme but rather, 'the positive bit is that it was 10 sessions but you could take elements from each session and do a mini parenting programme or adapt it to a parent you were working with. It wouldn't need to be done as a 10 week session' (*Participant N*).

4.4.3 Transfer of learning to practice

The challenge of translating teaching into practice was alleviated by the bespoke curriculum and flexibility of the approaches taught. Overall, at T3 participants reported that there were no perceived gaps in the learning delivered in the first year. On occasion, the timing with which certain elements had been timetabled were questioned but this was mainly due to the delay between Recall day and assignment deadline. This had been addressed for Cohort Two. In their interviews, both the Chief Executive of Frontline and Frontline's lead professor noted that this change had been necessary.

Participants suggested that some teaching presented an idealistic notion of social work and did not adequately address the difficulties in attempting direct work with reluctant or resistant clients.

Interviewees were unanimous in the view that there were no substantial omissions in either the academic work or experience. However there were slight differences in the types of experience participants had received. As one CSW noted,

it's not possible to give every participant the full range of case work and kind of experiences (CSW 4).

For example, some participants had experience of undertaking section 47 investigations and taking cases to conference, some had worked on looked-after children cases or worked with other teams such as the disability or adoption teams. Disclosures, direct work with teenagers and interventions with foster children were seen to be other 'gaps' in the casework they had received. Gaps are also likely to be present for students on conventional social work programmes.

With regard to academic tuition, several participants indicated that they would have liked more on legal processing and court work at both T3 and T4. This reflects a wider criticism of the Frontline programme, that its educational input is limited, with the programme narrowly focusing on child protection (Higgins, Popple and Crichton, 2014). Interviews with managers at T4 highlighted that Cohort One participants had moved into their ASYE year successfully but stated that it was simply too early to comment upon whether they had the breadth of knowledge and sufficient emotional resilience. Writing before the

actual launch of Frontline, but in anticipation of it being supported, Croisdale-Appleby (2014) reported concerns in the field as to whether Frontline participants would be adequately equipped for a career in social work. There is a wider debate as to whether social work education should be divided by specialism, with child and family social work focusing on child protection (Narey, 2014) or whether it should remain as a single profession and focus not only on protection but empowering service users (Croisdale-Appleby, 2014).

4.5 Outcomes

4.5.1 Service users

All 14 Cohort One case study participants were asked to invite the families they worked with to take part in a brief telephone interview. Six service users expressed an interest in participating, with four successfully contacted for interview. These four service users were from three of the four units and all had different Frontline participants working with them. Findings are presented below of how these service users perceived the Frontline participants working on their cases in comparison to previous (i.e. non-Frontline) social workers. It should be noted that at this stage in their learning, Frontline participants did not have the same size caseloads as social workers and so had more time to devote to those cases that they did have in order to maximise their learning outcomes. In addition, such a small sample size cannot be construed as representative of all the Frontline participants' service users. Volunteers to be interviewed are perhaps more likely to be those who are either the most or least satisfied.

In regard to previous experience of social workers (i.e. non-Frontline), the four service users varied, with two stating that social services had been involved with them for many years and two stating that it had only been within the last year. The four had been working with the Frontline participant for an average of six months.

When asked whether the social worker had explained who they were and why they had become involved with the social worker, there were no differences between previous and Frontline worker. It was difficult to compare frequency of visits as those with a previous social worker reported varied with one reporting weekly visits whilst another reported more random unannounced visits with no timeframe given. When asked about the Frontline participants, three service users saw them every ten days whilst one had weekly visits and regular phone calls. Two service users also received unannounced visits. All but one reported that both the previous social worker and the Frontline trainees turned up for meetings when expected or called if they were going to be late.

A slight difference was noted in regard to whether the service user had felt listened to. For the previous social worker, two felt that they had been listened to whilst two felt that the social worker had not listened and,

She was looking down on me because of the things I was struggling with (Service User 3).

Hence, two were described as 'very friendly',

my social workers were extremely good, they were very nice people (Service User 1)

whilst two were perceived to be 'very unfriendly'. Conversely, all four service users felt listened to by the Frontline trainees. Three of the four were described as 'very friendly', with one stating,

I tell her everything and she also brings suggestions - why don't you do it this way? and you know, it's okay, she's a really good friend (Service User 1).

The fourth reported that the Frontline participant had given them a mixed message about the status of their case,

but from the way they told me and the timing scale they gave me, it was a bit wrong to be honest. They're supposed to be more knowledgeable and their supervisor actually told them also (Service User 3).

Nevertheless, this service user perceived the Frontline participant as 'friendly'.

Again, service users were divided as to whether the previous social worker had understood what they and their family needed, with two stating that the social worker understood what their family needed. Of these, one service user had support to attend activities away from the home environment. This was perceived as 'very helpful'. The other service user reported not receiving any help and, as such, this had been 'unhelpful'. Of the two service users who did not think the previous social worker understood their needs, one had been referred to the Frontline participant immediately following assessment. The other service user reported that they had not received any form of help.

All four service users felt that the Frontline participant understood the issues for the service user and their family. One reported that understanding had developed over time,

they do seem to understand them [the issues] a lot more now (Service User 3).

Another stated that whilst the participant did understand, the participant's age as opposed to their status impacted on the level of understanding,

because they're only young, they've not got any kids of their own so they can empathise with it but they can't really relate to it in any way (Service User 4).

Most service users felt their views had been included within social worker assessments. Three felt that their views were heard. One said,

she asks me my opinion on things and explains what's what and they say is there anything I don't understand and what do I think, have I got any ideas? (Service User 4).

The fourth felt that the Frontline participant had initially placed greater emphasis on their ex-partner's views but this was improving to the extent that they were,

getting my trust issues back up with local authorities and because it just went down, my trust with local authorities just went completely down because my views weren't being paid as an opinion (Service User 3).

In terms of the issues faced by service users, a range of support was being offered by the Frontline participants including indirect support such as referral to counselling or prevention programmes and direct support such as helping the service user to establish routines, attend appointments, and,

still being there when I've not done as well (Service User 2).

Three service users regarded this support as 'helpful' and one as 'very helpful'.

When asked what was the least helpful support they had been offered, two service users felt everything had been helpful. For the two who replied to say what had been the least helpful, one stated it was when they disagreed or saw things differently and the other found having a contract to be unhelpful.

Finally, service users were asked how the Frontline participant compared to previous social workers they had had. All three service users with prior experience of social workers were positive about their experiences with Frontline trainees. One described the Frontline trainee as '100% better than previous social workers' (Service User 4) and another stated,

They will listen to everything that you say. They listen. Not like the one before. That one was okay but when you say something, she says no, no, no, she'd just come in with her own thing (Service User 1).

Three of the four service user interviewees could not think of anything they wanted the participant to improve. Rather than commenting on the participant specifically, the fourth reflected that they had not been listened to initially but this had improved greatly.

4.5.2 Frontline participants

The majority of Frontline participants felt that their ability to engage service users had 'definitely improved' (Participant D) as a result of their practical experience of,

having different types of conversations and different types of relationships on different cases (Participant A).

There had been some suggestion that earlier in the programme (T2) that there was a tendency for participants to concentrate on systemic thinking as opposed to the purpose of the visit. This was addressed by one participant,

When I started the course I think we were all so top-loaded with all the systemic thinking, I was a little bit confused about always trying to be systemic, always

trying to ask circular questions, and I hadn't really found my feet or my identity as a social worker yet. Whereas now I feel a lot more confident in being myself and then applying systemic thinking when it's appropriate (Participant K)

Drawing on published inventories of social worker skills necessary for practice, Engleberg and Limbach (2015) note the importance of communication, where effective intervention is dependent on building rapport with service users. This evaluation of social worker readiness to practise highlighted the significance of interpersonal skills, stating that the relationship between social worker and service user is paramount. At this stage of the Frontline programme, the ability to build and maintain relationships with service users was perceived as one of their key strengths by both participants and CSWs. During direct observations, participants were described as much more able to conduct difficult conversations and address difficult things (CSW 4). Participants reported being able to work with resistance, gain trust, express empathy, listen to service users, and work with the family. This was confirmed by CSWs and CLEs with one CSW stating,

They can build very good relationships with people because of the systemic stuff that they've come through. So that's one of their key strengths, it's commented on a lot by professionals and by families that they feel listened to, they feel incorporated (CSW 1)

When asked what would make them better social workers, the unanimous response was more experience,

having experience with a wider client base and more in-depth knowledge of the processes and protocols of the council I am working in (Participant N).

The desire for more experience included experience of working with other social workers to observe the differences in practice. Participants had been able to shadow social work colleagues at the beginning of stage one but participant commitments (e.g. caseload, recall days and CLE) and social worker caseloads had limited the opportunity to do this in stages two and three,

working with different qualified social workers would be good, because we [participant unit] are all at the same level. So I think that would definitely develop my practice (Participant B).

Slight concern was noted as to whether they would continue to receive a good level of support from their new managers in the ASYE year as well as recognition that there would be less time given to build relationships with families. In response, participants felt they would need to ensure that they used supervision effectively and continued to relationship-build to improve their practice.

4.5.3 Confidence ratings

At T3, most participants identified confidence as their main weakness. This related to having confidence in their own decisions as well as confidence in approaching new

aspects of the work. This is by no means unique to Frontline participants. As one CSW expressed it,

if you were to compare it to having completed two placements in the normal social work course, you would see a lot of students in a similar position and it's about repeatedly going out and doing some of the shorter work, some of the longer term work...So it's just having the confidence in that, because I think they're all able to manage those things but they don't know that yet (CSW 3).

The ability to manage conflicting priorities and remain objective without becoming too engaged with families was identified as something participants would improve with more experience. Several participants reported having difficulty in having challenging conversations with service users. As discussed, relationship-building was perceived as a strength but as one CSW stated, some participants were wary about breaking this relationship by having difficult conversations with service users.

At the final interview, participants were asked to rate their confidence in their social work skills overall using a four point scale (Poor, Adequate, Good, Excellent). The majority of participants rated their confidence as good (Figure 4.2, where colour has been used to denote participant units). The results show individual differences in rating as opposed to unit differences. Hence, some participants' confidence was 'excellent' whilst others rated their confidence as generally good but in new situations, such as having their first child protection case, their confidence was adequate. The two participants with the lowest scores both felt that more experience across different and similar cases would increase their confidence. These scores are higher than the self-report ratings on preparedness for practice presented for the first two cohorts of Step Up (Baginsky and Manthorpe, 2014) with around 96% of Step Up trainees feeling at least adequately prepared, compared to 27% of Frontline Cohort One and 37% of Frontline Cohort Two feeling very adequately prepared for practice. Further data on confidence ratings are presented in Chapter 5, with comparison being made with students on mainstream programmes.



Figure 4.2: Confidence ratings

4.5.4 Novice-expert scale

As previously stated, using self-efficacy to measure the development of competence and confidence across the first year of practice, Carpenter *et al.* (2015) found support for an evolutionary model of professional development, where NQSW self-reported confidence increased over the first year as expertise developed. Carpenter *et al.* found support that self-efficacy increased between the start and the end of the programme but that around three months into employment, with the benefit of experience and understanding that of the complexities of social work in practice, NQSWs would realise that they had not been as competent as they thought at the beginning of the programme.

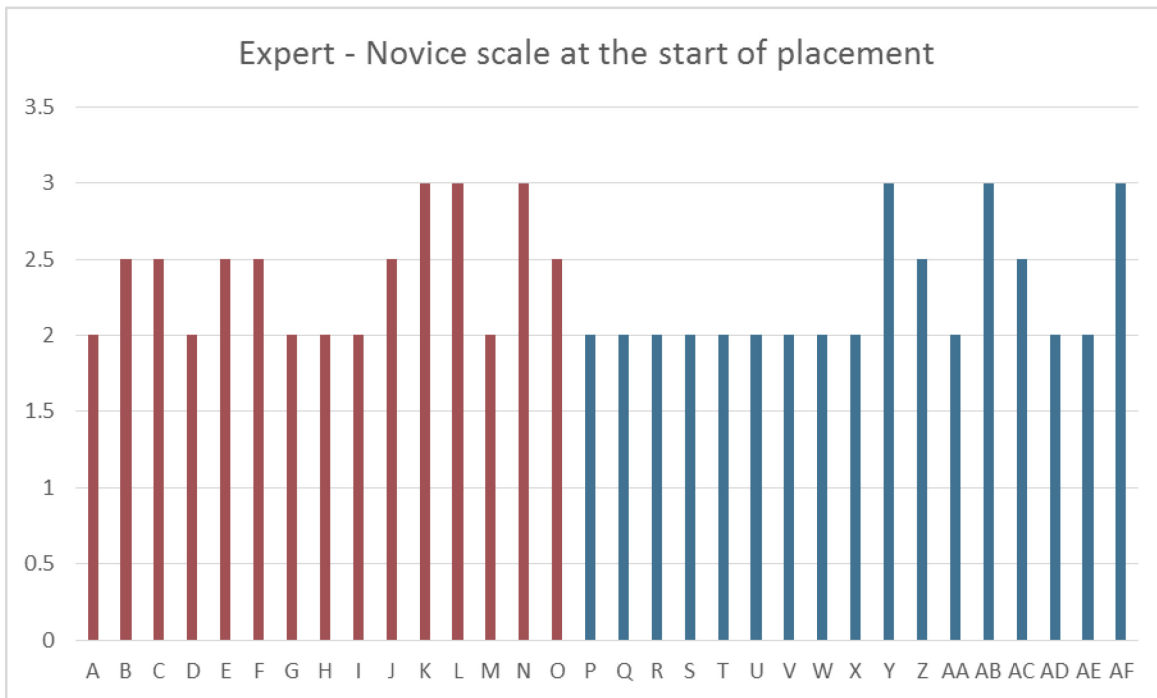
Whilst Carpenter *et al.*'s work draws upon the the Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) novice-expert model, it uses self-efficacy as a means of assessing competence and confidence in ability. For this evaluation, it was deemed inappropriate to expect evaluation participants to participate in several research interviews as well as completing detailed self-efficacy measures at each of the three time points. Rather, participants were asked to provide an overall self-rating of their current level of practice at each of the three data collection phases using Benner's (1984) adaption of the Dreyfus and Dreyfus model (Table 4.1) which consisted of five stages of skill acquisition (novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient and expert). All four CSWs were also asked to rate the unit as a whole. (In addition to this, self-efficacy measures were used with simulated practice participants from Frontline and mainstream social work programmes [see Chapter Five]).

Novice	I have no experience of the situations I am expected to perform. I need close supervision
Beginner	I have a working knowledge of key aspects of practice. I can work on some aspects alone with supervision for the overall task.
Competent	I have a good working and background knowledge for my practice. I can formulate a plan using my own judgement with occasional supervision.
Proficient	I have in-depth knowledge of social work and my area of practice. I can work independently and can supervise others.
Expert	I have an intuitive grasp of each situation with a deep understanding across my area of practice. I am able to take full responsibility of my actions and others even in situations where I have no prior experience.

Table 4.1: Novice-expert respondents

According to this theory of expertise (from Benner, adapting Dreyfus and Dreyfus), on entry to the unit, Frontline participants would be reliant upon their theoretical knowledge, applying theory regardless of the situation. As the participants gain experience within the unit they should begin to modify these context-free rules, adopting a more conscious perspective where specific plans are made to address situations. Tentative support for this was offered by a participant who, as described earlier (section 4.5.1) had struggled applying systemic practice appropriately early in the programme stating they were ‘always trying to be systemic’, whereas later in the programme they felt more confident applying this approach where appropriate.

As Figure 4.3 demonstrates, at T1, six Cohort One participants rated themselves at ‘Beginner’ level and six as between ‘Beginner’ and ‘Competent’. Three participants deemed themselves a ‘Competent’ at this stage. Fewer Cohort Two participants rated themselves as either ‘Beginner-Competent’ or ‘Competent’. This may reflect the increased preparation they had for the programme as well as the manner in which expectations had been managed at the Summer Institute.



	Cohort One	1	Novice
		2	Beginner
	Cohort Two	3	Competent
		4	Proficient
		5	Expert

Figure 4.3: Novice-expert scale - Frontline cohorts one and two in the first few months of placement

By T2, via the two focus groups where 13 of the 14 completed self-ratings, one perceived themselves to have stayed at the same 'Beginner' rating whilst two provided lower ratings, having moved from 'Beginner-Competent' down to 'Beginner'. This may reflect improved situational awareness or growing recognition of the complexities of cases as opposed to a decline in ability (Carpenter *et al.*, 2015). Hence, one had moved to 'Beginner-Competent' and ten were rating themselves as 'Competent' at this stage.

By the final phase, five remained 'Competent' whilst seven noted an improvement to 'Competent' (see Figure 4.4). Two participants perceived themselves as moving towards 'Expert'. It is difficult to make sense of such a small sample, but there was in fact a statistically significant increase in self-perceptions of competence on the novice-expert scale between stage one and stage three (Wilcoxon signed ranks test $z=-1.37$, $p=0.002$). Three of the four CSWs reported an improvement in the Frontline participants' ability over the year, whilst one perceived a slight decline between stages two and three (Figure 4.5).

Corlett (2000) has suggested that students need time to gain enough experience so that they can link theory to practice. One of the criticisms of the Frontline model is the short timeframe compared with mainstream social work education. The more intensive work on bridging academic knowledge and practice which the unit model aims to provide might,

however, in theory reduce the time needed for students to bridge the theory-practice gap and so move towards expert status (Field, 2004). Our qualitative research found that as participant experience increased, they were seen to become more aware of how to apply theory and respond appropriately.

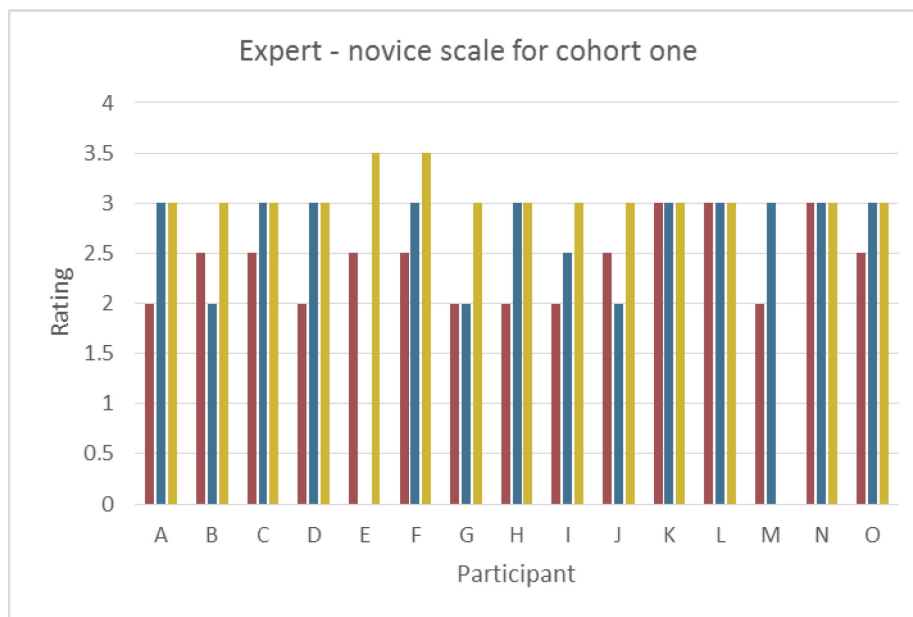


Figure 4.4: Participant novice-expert ratings for Cohort One - T1, T2 and T3

	T1	1	Novice
	T2	2	Beginner
	T3	3	Competent
		4	Proficient
		5	Expert

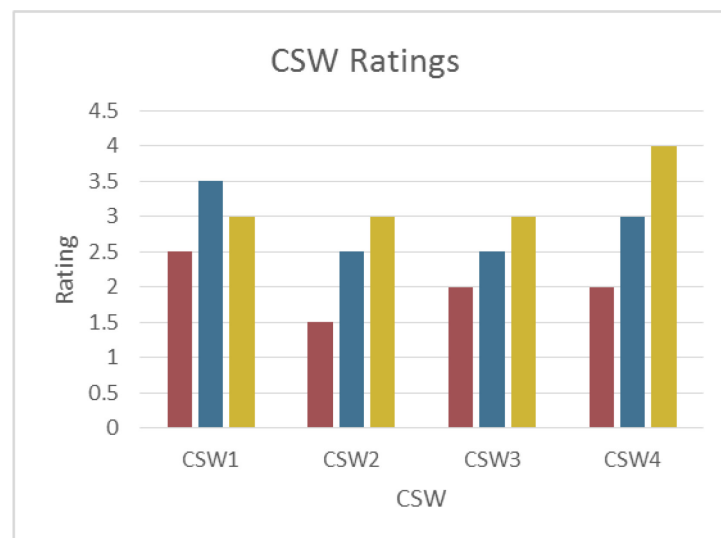


Figure 4.5: CSW novice-expert rating

4.6 Summary of findings from case studies

Participants felt that the Summer Institute had given them the foundation knowledge needed to start learning in the practice setting. The lecturers were thought to be of a very high standard. The Summer Institute was thought to be pitched correctly, especially as participants had a range of different academic backgrounds. The lecturers provided a good level of emotional support to participants. Following feedback from Cohort One that

the days were too long and lacked time for reflection and independent study this was addressed successfully for Cohort Two. There was still scope for ensuring that sessions delivered by different organisations were linked together and brought back to social work. The leadership training was very unpopular with some in Cohort One and although these sessions were very different in Cohort Two, there were still some criticisms.

Consultant Social Workers were seen to have supported and guided participants throughout the process. Manageable levels of challenge were allocated on the basis of the CSWs' knowledge of the individual participant needs. Participants said they benefited from having one point of reference for the year with whom they could learn the professional skills for social work and the organisational skills of time management, ensuring they had emotional support and in some cases ensuring they had time to complete the academic tasks.

The participant unit was perceived very favourably, as a source of both learning and support. Participants were able to learn from each other's work as well as observing each other's practice. This meant that learning was not limited to each participant's caseload but shared across the unit. The unit was also the main source of emotional support for many participants.

Findings from Cohort One revealed slight variations in the induction to the LA where the degree of participant integration appeared related to the degree to which participants shadowed social workers. The most successful induction programme appeared to be that which introduced policies and procedures in week one and then scheduled time for the participants to meet the team and other agencies in week two before co-working cases with colleagues for weeks three and four. This held true for Cohort Two where the induction period appeared vital in enabling participants to become integrated into the teams. Adopting a bottom-up approach of beginning with first referrals and taking each to its conclusion was associated with increased confidence and understanding.

The level of integration varied according to the CSW's approach and the physical location of the team. Regardless of integration, social work staff were seen to be supportive of participants. The CSWs felt confident that the participants were equipped to move into their ASYE year. Generally the Frontline participants anticipated being able to manage the increased workload.

Recall days attracted mixed reviews, largely dependent upon presenter and the relevance of the topic to current assignment and caseload. There was some call for more practice-based knowledge, although in some instances it appeared that participants would have preferred some of the theory to have been operationalised for social work. Modifications for Cohort Two improved the linking of recall days with assignments.

The bespoke curriculum had been improved for Cohort Two in order to ensure consistency across units and that teaching linked with assignments. Academic Tutors

(ATs) were a valued element of the programme and seen as developing theoretical knowledge by delivering sessions and one-to-one email support.

The 'contrasting learning experiences' (CLEs) attracted mixed reviews. Those with direct relevance to child and family casework were highly valued whilst others were perceived as less relevant. Generally, the CLE was viewed as a distraction from the child and family casework. There are tensions here between the generic qualification gained and Frontline's specific focus on child protection. Although there was no consensus about the best structure for the CLE, there was a view that the placement should be completed at the beginning of either phase one and two, as opposed to mid-way over a period of several weeks. Two of the four units had elected to do this but it was too soon to gather data as to the effectiveness of this approach.

All four consultant social workers (CSWs) in the case study units were very positive about the training they had received at the beginning of Cohort One. The strengths included the high standard of teaching and opportunities for role play. Weaknesses included the lack of practical information about the programme (e.g. deadlines) and limited coverage on the practice educator role. Further training offered during Cohort One and at the beginning of Cohort Two was welcomed by the CSWs interviewed.

Improvements to the Frontline Specialist (FLS) role meant that coaching sessions and unit visits were timetabled in advance. Extending FLS visits to the whole day benefitted participants as they had increased opportunity to speak with the FLS should they wish, and in turn the FLS gained increased insight into how the units operated which could then be fed into coaching sessions with the CSW.

The local authority-Frontline interface could be problematic as the two organisations had competing demands. This placed importance on ensuring that the two organisations regularly communicated and were clear about their priorities when preparing their collaboration agreements.

The demands of assessment were managed for Cohort Two so that participants were made aware that the programme was front-loaded with assignments due every month during stage one. Whilst this was still a demanding period, the ATs had an increased role in keeping participants on track. The difficulties in gaining consent from families to observe children over several sessions was less problematic for Cohort Two. The introduction of the skills lab where direct observations were recorded and played to the participant, CSW and AT were perceived as a valuable learning tool for participants.

Frontline participants were positive about the evidence-based interventions they had learned on the programme. They claimed to be using both motivational interviewing and the parenting programme in their practice. With regard to systemic practice, participants saw themselves as having adopted this approach, with some feeling they would like more practical experience to embed the concepts.

The challenge of translating teaching into practice was alleviated by the bespoke curriculum and flexibility of the approaches taught and the development for Cohort Two should reinforce this. The dynamic nature of social work meant that participants varied to a degree in the types of cases and experiences they had gained whilst on the Frontline programme.

The ability to engage with service users was perceived to be participants' main strength, by CSWs, CLE staff and the participants themselves. There was some indication that participants were attempting to embed the evidence-based interventions into their practice as they talked of 'working with resistance' and including the service users' views in their work.

After relationship-building, participants perceived their next greatest strength to be writing assessments. At this stage, confidence was identified as the greatest weakness, although actual confidence ratings showed that most participants rated themselves as good. In order to become better social workers, the general consensus was the need for more experience across a wider range of cases.

Participants reported that they felt confident in the areas where they had experience but less confident in new areas. Participants showed a slight decrease in self-perceptions of competence once in placement and faced with the realities of social work but a statistically significant increase by the end of the first year. Participant perceptions were lower at the start of Cohort Two than at the start of Cohort One, perhaps reflecting greater awareness of the challenges with which they would be faced.

5.0 How well does Frontline prepare participants to be outstanding social workers?

This chapter addresses the third aim of the evaluation: to measure objectively how well Frontline prepared participants to be outstanding social workers. Concern surrounding the extent to which Frontline trainees at the end of the programme will be adequately informed and able to understand the various perspectives in any situation (Croisedale-Appleby, 2014) may only be alleviated with a measure as to how well Frontline trainees perform as compared to students from mainstream courses. A quasi-experimental study was conducted which compared Frontline trainees with two comparison groups, (1) a typical sample of students about to qualify from the full range of mainstream programmes and (2) students in high UG tariff universities. The second group were included because it was hypothesised that, given the reality of the higher education market in the UK, these students might be the most comparable with Frontline participants in terms of academic background. All three groups undertook simulated interviews with actors who took the role of service users in two scenarios (one with a mother with learning difficulties and the other with a teenage boy). Both the recordings and written reflection were independently rated by two experienced practice assessors, according to generic social work practice quality criteria which had been agreed by consensus through a Delphi process. Assessors did not know to which groups the simulated practice participants belonged (i.e. Frontline or mainstream social work programmes).

The simulation method as an approach to professional learning – or simulation-based learning and assessment – derives from medical education and is associated with the provision of a variety of developmental opportunities through which students' competence can be subject to standardised testing. Such opportunities include the use of actors playing the roles of patients in order that students may rehearse a range of interaction and communication knowledge and skills (Aggarwal *et al.* 2010); this is known as the Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE). Rentschler *et al.* (2007) note that the OSCE has increasingly been used within medical education on an international basis over the past 40 years and more recently has been introduced within nurse education. The OSCE has also become used as part of education in dentistry (Brand and Schoonheim, 2009) and in legal practice (Weitzer, 2004). Rentschler *et al.* (2007: 135) describe the OSCE as a method of teaching, learning and assessment which: '... provides students with the opportunity to be evaluated on their interpersonal and interview skills, problem-solving abilities, teaching and assessment skills, as well as basic clinical knowledge.' The OSCE has two key features: typicality in that the simulated practice situation is a typical rather than an unusual one and standardisation in that students are exposed to a controlled patient presentation and a set of circumstances that are played out uniformly rather than variously (Zayyan, 2011). Assessment of student performance is undertaken using a set of competence-based behavioural attributes that are considered to define professional practice within a given situation and an associated

rating scale that measures student demonstration and deployment of these attributes (Adamson *et al*, 2013).

Within pre-qualifying social work education and training, there is a long tradition of the use of role play as a simulation tool for teaching and learning (Miller 2004; Mooradian, 2008), particularly that aimed at developing students' knowledge base and practice skills regarding interpersonal engagement and interviewing. Historically, this has frequently involved student peers taking the role of service users in order to provide an interactional learning opportunity for other students in the social work role (Allen and Langford, 2008). Methods have included video or audio recorded role play encounters which are then reflected upon and evaluated by the participants and by tutors (Koprowska, 2003). There is now a growing interest in building on this more traditional approach through adaptation of the OSCE to social work education and to the standardised assessment of social work students (Miller, 2004; Baez, 2005; Lu *et al*, 2011). Bogo *et al*. (2011; 2012; 2014) are particular proponents of the use of the OSCE method as a relevant and contemporary strategy for social work education and commend it as an effective vehicle for the provision of practice learning opportunities and the scaffolding of student reflection in relation to these, as well as the standardised assessment of student performance.

Social work students on all programmes are, of course, assessed through direct observation of actual practice with service users. Simulated practice clearly does not reproduce the embodied experience of real-life practice in real family homes (Ferguson, 2011). Other criticisms of simulated practice refer to the complex organisation and administration associated with its arrangement and the expense of paying actors to participate (Alsenany and Al Saif, 2012). This method of learning and assessment has been claimed to cause high levels of stress and anxiety for students (Fidment, 2012) and to undermine the concept of holistic practice by focusing on a narrow range of skills and knowledge (Wanstall, 2010; Smith, Muldoon and Biesty, 2012), these skills arguably being different in some respects from those required in real practice (Atkins *et al*, 2016). Nevertheless simulated practice has the key advantage of standardisation. It allows for the direct comparison of some aspects of students' practice quality – those which can be tested in an interview situation and written reflection on this – in conditions where they all have roughly the same encounter with a service user. This kind of standardised comparison is not possible between students' performances in routine practice learning because of the infinite variety of real-life practice.

5.1 Agreeing criteria for assessing practice skills

A Delphi exercise was undertaken with equally-weighted groups of social work academics, practice educators, practitioners and service users, in order to reach agreement about a system for scoring practice quality. The Delphi group considered the assessment tools for generic social work skills developed and validated by Marian Bogo and colleagues (2009) in Canada

(<http://research.socialwork.utoronto.ca/hubpage/resources-2>), slightly slimmed down to

reduce the burden on participants and assessors. They were asked to consider the criteria's suitability for use in UK social work education. As can be seen in Table 5.1, the Delphi group agreed in the first round of consultation that the Bogo et al. criteria were acceptable. Out of the four groups, the group of practitioners were the most positive, with a mean rating across all criteria of 8.8. The least positive group were the service users, with an overall mean rating of 6.4. Three of the criteria were rated as just below the adequacy threshold by this group. A few minor edits were made to the language in the Bogo et al. criteria to ensure they translated well to the UK. The final version used is reproduced in Appendix Three.

Assessment Criteria Rated on 1-10 scale 1 = completely unsuitable 10 = completely suitable 6+ = adequate.	Service users	Practitioners	Practice educators	University educators	Weighted average (all groups)
N	5	9	8	10	32
	Mean score				
The student develops and uses a collaborative relationship (4 criteria)	6.2	8.3	8.1	8.3	7.7
The student conducts an eco-systemic assessment (3 criteria)	5.8	8.6	9.2	8.4	8
The student sets the stage for collaborative goal setting (1 criterion)	5.6	9.3	7.6	7.9	7.6
The student demonstrates cultural competence (1 criterion)	6.2	9.2	8.7	8.4	8.1
Overall assessment of knowledge and skills demonstrated in practice (1 criterion)	7	8.8	8	7.9	7.9
Written Task Questions	8	8.5	9.1	7.6	8.3
The student is able to conceptualise their practice/make use of knowledge (3 criteria)	7	8.7	9.6	8.1	8.3
The student is able to assess their own practice (1 criterion)	6.8	9	8.6	9	8.3
The student is able to think about their professional development (2 criteria)	5.6	8.5	9.1	8.5	7.9
Overall mean rating	6.4	8.8	8.5	8.4	8.0

Table 5.1: Delphi participants' rating of Bogo et al. criteria for use in UK

The simulated practice criteria and scenarios were then piloted with 25 postgraduate students from one high UG tariff university, full details of which can be found in Appendix Ten. To summarise, the pilot exercise concluded that the slimmed down Bogo et al. criteria were suitable for use in the evaluation, mainly on the grounds that they were able

to distinguish between the performance of first and second year students on a social work Masters programme, in the expected direction.

5.2 Simulated practice results for Frontline participants and students on mainstream programmes

Evaluation participants were assessed on the basis of their performance in two simulated interviews with actors - one a parent scenario ('Lisa') and one a teenage child ('Jakub') (see Appendix Six) - and also assessed on written reflections on these interviews. Performance in the simulated interviews was judged on the basis of ten separate criteria, each scored from one to five (lowest to highest). The assessment of the written reflections was scored in a similar way using six separate criteria (see Appendix Three and summary in Table 2.2). As noted elsewhere, the simulated practice assessment does not cover all the qualities required for social work practice. It does not, for example, assess someone's ability to function effectively within an organisation and it does not assess social scientific knowledge in depth.

Each participant in the simulated practice was also asked to complete a questionnaire which asked about demographics, educational background and some other contextual information about pressures experienced during the social work programme. Table 5.2 compares the questionnaire responses across the three groups of participants. It can be seen that the gender profile is similar in all three groups but the age of students on mainstream programmes is higher and this is especially so for the UG and PG students in universities outside the 400+ UCAS tariff group. These students were also the most likely to have part-time work outside of their social work programme and caring responsibilities. PG Students from high tariff universities were also more likely than Frontline participants to have part-time work and child care responsibilities. When educational backgrounds are compared, the Frontline participants have the highest levels of achievement. The PG students in high tariff universities had better A-level results and more A*-As in GCSE English and Maths than the group of UG+PG students in the other universities. This 'other' group, however, had a higher proportion of students with first class degrees than the high tariff group.

In addition to the characteristics in Table 5.2, for each of the participant groups, comparison was made between the final grades of those taking part and the rest of their cohorts, using aggregate data. This was done to assess sampling bias. There was no significant difference between participants and non-participants for either Frontline or high tariff universities. There was, however, a significant difference (Wilcoxon rank sum test $z=2.62$, $p<0.01$) for the other universities. The difference was explained by a higher proportion with first class degrees amongst the simulated practice participants than in the rest of their cohort and – not surprisingly – no fail grades amongst the participants. This suggests some sampling bias in the composition of the participants from other (i.e. non-high-tariff) universities.

Characteristics	Frontline	High tariff universities (PG)	Other universities (UG + PG)
	n (%)		
N	49	36	30
Gender: Female	35 (71%)	25 (69%)	22 (73%)
Male	14 (29%)	11 (31%)	8 (27%)
Mean age	26	29	38
Average weekly hours of part-time work during course	1	5	10
N/A or missing	4 (8%)	2 (6%)	2 (7%)
Found demands of course on top of part-time work difficult	5 (10%)	16 (44%) ⁸	15 (50%)
Primary carer of child	0 (0%)	8 (22%)	13 (43%)
Found demands of on top of caring responsibilities difficult	3 (6%)	9 (25%)	13 (43%)
N/A or missing	2 (4%)	3 (8%)	1 (3%)
Average UCAS points of top 3 A-levels	346	293	235
N/A or missing	4 (8%)	7 (19%)	18 (60%)
1 st class degree	12 (24%)	2 (6%)	5 (17%)
2:1 degree	37 (76%)	30 (83%)	12 (40%)
2:2 degree	0 (0%)	4 (11%)	4 (13%)
N/A or missing	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	7 (23%)
GCSE English A*-A	46 (96%)	47 (17%)	3 (10%)
N/A or missing	2 (4%)	0 (0%)	4 (7%)
GCSE Maths A*-A	34 (69%)	11 (31%)	4 (15%)
N/A or missing	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (10%)

Table 5.2: Characteristics of simulated practice participants

Two different assessors were assigned to evaluate each of the students' performances during the practice interviews based on audio recordings and the associated student written reflections. Performance in the interviews was graded using 10 different items and performance in the written assessment was graded using 6 items. Each item was given a rating between 1 and 5 (worst to best). The assignment of assessors to students was random – although care was taken to ensure that each assessor rated an equal number of Frontline and non-Frontline students and an equal number of student cases overall. Assessors had no knowledge of student's group membership (Frontline or mainstream programmes). In addition, students were asked to rate their confidence in their own abilities in seven different domains, which mirrored the main concepts being judged by the assessors. Ratings for each domain ranged from 0 to 100 (lowest to highest confidence).

5.2.1 Consistency in rating

The intra-class correlation was used to assess the extent to which the ratings were consistent. The ICC measures roughly the proportion of variations in the mean ratings that can be attributed to actual differences in performance between participants. Another

cause of variation would be measurement error or inconsistencies between raters. A value of 1 denotes that all the variations in scores are as a result of real performance differences; a value of 0 denotes that all our variation in scores are simply down to rater disagreement or measurement error.

For the audio assessments, the inter-rater agreement was fairly high: 0.66 for mean ratings in the Lisa interview and 0.49 for the Jakub interviews. Similar results are found for the inter-rater agreement in the written task with 0.62 for Lisa and 0.69 for Jakub. This level of agreement is lower than found in medical OSCEs (Besar *et al.*, 2012) but it should be noted that the OSCE model is much more well established in medicine, whereas it is novel in social work and apart from two assessors who had taken part in the pilot exercise, the other assessors we used, although trained, had not done this kind of rating before. Despite relatively low inter-rater agreement, using the same assessors across all three groups served to minimise any potential bias.

Cronbach's Alpha was used to test the reliability of the scales. This is a measure of internal consistency, so if a participant is scoring badly on one criterion, the scores on other criteria should also be broadly in the same direction. A rule-of-thumb is that a result of more than 0.70 is acceptable. The results were high alphas of 0.92 for the interview ratings and 0.88 for the written reflection ratings.

5.2.2 Actor performances

There were five female actors available for playing Lisa and three male actors playing Jakub. Ideally the same pool of actors should have been used across all three evaluation groups (Frontline, high tariff universities, and other universities). Unfortunately due to unforeseen circumstance only three of the five female actors were actually available to participate in the evaluation with Frontline participants. One concern would be that the evaluation ratings for students using the three actors portraying Lisa who were unavailable for the Frontline interviews could be systematically different from rating for students using the other two actors. This may be because of differences in actors' performances. In order to assess whether using different actors affected students' performances in the simulated interviews, we looked at the results for non-Frontline students. We found no statistically significant differences in rating for the audio and written assessments between different actors using ANOVA ($F[4,61]=1.04$, $p=0.39$ and $F[4,61]=1.32$, $p=0.27$ for audio and written) and the Kruskal-Wallis test ($KW X^2[4]=4.30$ $p=0.37$ and $KW X^2[4]=4.90$ $p=0.30$).

5.2.3 Comparison of interview and written reflection ratings across the three groups

5.2.3.1 Raw results

Results from the three groups were compared in order to ascertain whether Frontline trainees differed from mainstream students with regard to the quality of interview skills

and written reflection. Overall we have evaluation results for 49 Frontline trainees, 36 for PG students from high tariff universities, and 30 for UG+PG students from other universities.

With regard to assessors' ratings of simulated interviews and written reflections, we combine the overall mean ratings for both the Lisa and Jakub interviews (Table 5.3). For the assessments of interview quality, we find that Frontline trainees had higher ratings compared to the other two groups. These groups' differences were statistically significant using both ANOVA and the Kruskal-Wallis test. Frontline participants had mean ratings that were 0.52 and 0.68 points higher than students from higher tariff and other universities.

Since the scores themselves do not have any obvious scale of reference (i.e. is a 10 point difference large or small?) we also report the effect sizes. We do so by using Cohen's *d* to estimate effect size when comparing means in different groups. Cohen's *d* represents the mean difference between groups divided by the pooled standard deviation and Cohen has suggested, with a great deal of caution, that effect sizes of 0.2 could be considered 'small', 0.5 'medium' and 0.8 'large' (Cohen, 1977). The effect size here for interview quality is 1.19 when we are comparing Frontline with high tariff universities and 1.56 for other universities.

Group difference in overall mean ratings for the written assessment was also statistically significant. Frontline participants had mean ratings that were 0.28 and 0.58 points higher than students from high tariff and other universities. This translates to a moderate effect size of 0.55 and a large effect size of 1.12.

It is interesting to compare these results with the pilot exercise (Appendix Ten). Unlike the participants in the actual evaluation exercise, the second year students in the pilot had not completed their programme but took part a few months before the end. The overall mean performance of second year students in the pilot exercise was closely in line with that of the high tariff universities for interview quality and identical to the overall mean for the other universities for written reflection. One of the changes made following the pilot was more time for the written reflection (the pilot students had 10 minutes rather than 15 minutes) and explicit instructions not to leave any question unanswered. The first year students in the pilot, who were only a quarter of the way through their programme, had lower ratings than any group in the evaluation exercise for the quality of both interview and written reflection. This comparison of pilot and evaluation results further supports the validity of the test.

Measure	Frontline (n=49)	High tariff universities (n=36)	Other universities (n=30)	Test statistic (Kruskal-Wallis)
	Mean (SD)			
Overall rating of practice skills by assessors (1-5)	3.77 (0.36)	3.25 (0.43)	3.09 (0.53)	$\chi^2=39.56, p<0.001$
Overall rating of written reflection by assessors (1-5)	3.30 (0.47)	3.02 (0.55)	2.72 (0.53)	$\chi^2=21.76, p<0.001$
Overall self-efficacy (0-100)	70.71 (9.00)	75.84 (9.90)	78.71 (11.57)	$\chi^2=14.98, p<0.001$

Table 5.3: Overall mean scores by participant group

When comparing overall mean scores for Frontline, high tariff and other universities, we find that Frontline trainees had lower mean confidence ratings compared to the other two groups (See Table 5.3). On average, Frontline participants' mean ratings were 5.1 and 8 points lower (on a 0-100 scale) than students from high tariff and other universities. These group differences were statistically significant using both ANOVA and the Kruskal-Wallis test. The effect sizes of the difference in mean confidence levels between Frontline and the two others groups were -0.51 (higher tariff) and -0.8 respectively. This means that the differences in confidence ratings *between* the three groups were quite substantial relative to the random variation in ratings *within* each group.

Tables 5.4-5.8 present the descriptive detail, namely the mean scores by participant group, for each of the assessment criteria, separately for the mother interview (Lisa) and teenager interview (Jakub), and then the self-efficacy (confidence) ratings for each of the simulated practice criteria.

Aspect of practice being rated by assessors (1-5 scale)	Frontline (n=49)	High tariff universities (n=36)	Other universities (n=30)
	Mean (SD)		
Student develops and uses a collaborative relationship:			
- Introduction	3.27 (0.78)	2.75 (0.71)	2.62 (0.70)
- Response to service user: general content and process	4.11 (0.54)	3.40 (0.67)	3.02 (0.72)
- Response to service user: specific to situation	4.08 (0.48)	3.38 (0.81)	3.22 (0.93)
- Focus of interview	4.35 (0.53)	3.61 (0.79)	3.40 (0.94)
Student conducts an assessment of the person in their environment:			
- Presenting problem	4.13 (0.67)	3.49 (0.83)	3.28 (0.82)
- Systemic assessment	3.67 (0.51)	3.15 (0.76)	2.93 (0.64)
- Strengths	3.52 (0.80)	2.68 (0.67)	2.50 (0.71)
The student sets the stage for collaborative goal setting:			
- Involves service user	3.96 (0.71)	3.28 (0.71)	3.18 (0.76)
The student demonstrates cultural competence	3.38 (0.79)	2.86 (0.75)	2.60 (0.74)
Overall assessment of interview performance	3.92 (0.57)	3.29 (0.64)	3.03 (0.71)

Table 5.4: Rating of practice skills for Scenario 1 (Mother – ‘Lisa’) – individual items by participant group

Aspect of practice being rated by assessors (1-5 scale)	Frontline (n=49)	High tariff universities (n=36)	Other universities (n=30)
	Mean (SD)		
Student develops and uses a collaborative relationship:			
- Introduction	3.45 (0.79)	2.72 (0.71)	2.45 (0.78)
- Response to service user: general content and process	4.16 (0.54)	3.57 (0.80)	3.45 (0.74)
- Response to service user: specific to situation	4.02 (0.65)	3.58 (0.81)	3.42 (0.72)
- Focus of interview	4.04 (0.66)	3.78 (0.87)	3.58 (0.95)
Student conducts an assessment of the person in their environment:			
- Presenting problem	3.95 (0.52)	3.49 (0.60)	3.45 (0.79)
- Systemic assessment	3.50 (0.60)	3.19 (0.74)	3.27 (0.76)
- Strengths	3.10 (0.76)	2.94 (0.67)	2.70 (0.79)
The student sets the stage for collaborative goal setting:			
- Involves service user	3.78 (0.73)	3.57 (0.62)	3.58 (0.72)
The student demonstrates cultural competence	3.29 (0.78)	2.89 (0.86)	2.77 (0.85)
Overall assessment of interview performance	3.74 (0.62)	3.42 (0.75)	3.32 (0.71)

Table 5.5: Rating of practice skills for Scenario 2 (Teenager – ‘Jakub’) – individual items by participant group

Aspect of written reflection being rated by assessors (1-5 scale)	Frontline (n=49)	High tariff universities (n=36)	Other universities (n=30)
	Mean (SD)		
The student is able to conceptualise their practice/make use of knowledge			
- How students theoretically conceptualise substantive issues in the scenario and for their practice	3.07 (0.69)	3.19 (0.60)	2.83 (0.70)
- How students conceptualise issues of culture and diversity in their practice	3.54 (0.83)	3.24 (0.94)	2.92 (0.72)
- How students' past knowledge and experience impact their approach to the case	3.58 (0.80)	3.26 (0.93)	2.85 (0.78)
The student is able to assess their own practice			
- What students focus on and talk about regarding their performance	3.32 (0.70)	2.76 (0.86)	2.58 (0.76)
The student is able to think about their professional development			
- What students focus on and talk about regarding their learning	3.15 (0.77)	2.85 (0.74)	2.62 (0.64)
- What students say about how they would integrate this experience into their practice	3.24 (0.69)	2.79 (0.71)	2.63 (0.68)

Table 5.6: Rating of written reflection for Scenario 1 (Mother – ‘Lisa’) – individual items by participant group

Aspect of written reflection being rated by assessors (1-5 scale)	Frontline (n=49)	High tariff universities (n=36)	Other universities (n=30)
	Mean (SD)		
The student is able to conceptualise their practice/make use of knowledge			
- How students theoretically conceptualise substantive issues in the scenario and for their practice	2.99 (0.70)	3.07 (0.90)	2.70 (0.85)
- How students conceptualise issues of culture and diversity in their practice	3.51 (0.75)	3.11 (0.90)	2.92 (0.98)
- How students' past knowledge and experience impact their approach to the case	3.34 (0.77)	3.10 (0.95)	2.85 (0.87)
The student is able to assess their own practice			
- What students focus on and talk about regarding their performance	3.33 (0.71)	2.83 (0.78)	2.55 (0.89)
The student is able to think about their professional development			
- What students focus on and talk about regarding their learning	3.23 (0.69)	3.03 (0.76)	2.60 (0.83)
- What students say about how they would integrate this experience into their practice	3.24 (0.72)	2.94 (0.69)	2.58 (0.67)

Table 5.7: Rating of written reflection for Scenario 2 (Teenager – ‘Jakub’) – individual items by participant group

How confident are you that you can..... (0-100 scale)	Frontline (n=49)	High tariff universities (n=36)	Other universities (n=30)
	Mean (SD)		
Develop a collaborative relationship with service users?	80.63 (10.19)	79.09 (13.31)	82.33 (13.57)
Assess a service user in the context of their environment?	69.79 (11.20)	74.85 (10.64)	77.33 (13.88)
Set goals with service users collaboratively?	70.00 (12.55)	76.97 (12.62)	78.33 (13.41)
Be culturally competent?	65.63 (15.15)	71.52 (15.44)	71.33 (17.17)
Make use of knowledge in your practice?	65.42 (13.98)	71.21 (10.83)	76.33 (14.02)
Reflectively evaluate your own practice?	69.17 (14.85)	77.88 (17.99)	81.00 (13.73)
Identify your own needs for professional development?	74.38 (13.51)	79.39 (17.31)	84.33 (14.31)

Table 5.8: Self-efficacy ratings – individual items by participant group

5.2.3.2 Matched results

Eligible candidates for the Frontline programme had to possess at least an upper second class honours bachelor's degree, C grades in GCSE maths and English (also requirements for mainstream programmes), and 300 UCAS points in their top three level grades prior to entry into HE. As a result Frontline participants differed considerably from students from other social work programmes before receiving any social work training. In practice this means that selection into the Frontline programme was not random, rendering it difficult to evaluate whether any differences in performance in the Frontline evaluation are due to the Frontline programme itself or due to any selection effects. To reduce (although not remove) the effect of Frontline's highly selective recruitment, a matched sample was constructed of Frontline participants and individuals from other programmes. The participants in the sample were matched based on educational qualification and unmatched cases were not used in this analysis. It was also possible to construct comparative samples matched on reported pressures which might affect the experience of social work education, such as caring responsibilities and external employment. Results of the matched analyses are presented in Table 5.9. Once we have matched on educational qualifications we are restricted to comparing only 17 non-Frontline students to 49 Frontline participants. One issue of note: effect sizes for results before and after matching (i.e. in the prior section and this section) should not be directly compared against each other.

After restricting the sample to only Frontline participants and those who would have been eligible for Frontline, we find that the evidence of a difference in confidence ratings between the two groups has borderline significance. Frontline participants on average have lower mean confidence ratings by 4.6 on a scale of 0-100 (effect size: -0.53). There was still strong evidence that Frontline participants had higher mean ratings of interview

quality. The difference in mean ratings was 0.53 on a scale of 1-5 (effect size: -1.39). However there was little evidence that Frontline participants did better on the written assessments. Frontline participants had mean ratings of written reflection quality that were only 0.17 points higher on a scale of 1-5 and this difference was not statistically significant ($p=0.31$, effect size: 0.35).

Further matched analyses were conducted, with non-Frontline students matched on other variables that are expected to potentially affect the student experience of the social work programme. These were caring responsibilities and outside paid work commitments. In these cases only non-Frontline students without these external or domestic commitments were compared with Frontline trainees. Participants were also matched on prior experience of simulated practice, with only those non-Frontline students who reported some prior experience of simulated practice with actors being compared with Frontline trainees. After each of these matchings, Frontline participants still had higher scores for both interview rating and written assessment and all of these differences were statistically significant. Matching participants on all the above variables – educational background and both domestic and work commitments – did not change the findings noted in the previous paragraph, but the numbers were too small for this comparison to be meaningful.

		Academic entry criteria for Frontline			Experience of simulated practice			Caring responsibilities			Paid work during programme		
		n	mean (sd)	test statistic*	n	mean (sd)	test statistic*	n	mean (sd)	test statistic*	n	mean (sd)	test statistic*
Interview rating (1-5)	Frontline	49	3.77 (0.36)	$X^2(1)=24.92$, $p<0.01$	49	3.77 (0.36)	$X^2(1)=34.99$ $p<0.001$	44	3.77 (0.35)	$X^2(1)=24.14$ $p<0.001$	49	3.77 (0.36)	$X^2(1)=24.15$ $p<0.001$
	Other unis	17	3.24 (0.43)		31	3.09 (0.42)		36	3.20 (0.51)		24	3.22 (0.36)	
Written reflection rating (1-5)	Frontline	49	3.30 (0.47)	$X^2(1)=1.18$ $p=0.31$	49	3.30 (0.47)	$X^2(1)=18.21$ $p<0.001$	44	3.31 (0.47)	$X^2(1)=10.43$ $p=0.001$	49	3.30 (0.47)	$X^2(1)=5.24$, $p=0.02$
	Other unis	17	3.13 (0.52)		31	2.79 (0.51)		36	2.92 (0.52)		24	2.96 (0.58)	
Confidence (0-100)	Frontline	48	70.14 (9.00)	$X^2(1)=3.96$ $p=0.05$	48	70.71 (9.00)	$X^2(1)=9.78$, $p=0.002$	44	70.78 (8.95)	$X^2(1)=7.94$, $p=0.005$	48	70.71 (9.00)	$X^2(1)=11.62$ $p<0.001$
	Other unis	16	75.27 (7.57)		30	78.38 (10.37)		34	76.51 (9.82)		22	79.22 (11.01)	

* Kruskal-Wallis test

Table 5.9: Simulated practice results: Matched samples

5.3 Discussion

These findings are clearly very positive for Frontline. The simulated practice exercise did not cover all aspects of the social work role but it does suggest high quality of practice from Frontline trainees in those areas (that were tested). For mainstream students, although their scores were lower than those for Frontline trainees, the findings were also mostly positive. The scores for both high tariff university Masters students and other university students were above the mid-point of the 1-5 scale for interview quality. For written reflection quality, the scores were lower for all groups, including Frontline. For the high tariff university Masters group, the written reflection score was just above the mid-point. Less positively, the written reflection score for the mixed group of other university students (UG and PG) was 0.28 below the mid-point of a 1-5 scale.

An important question remains, namely, is it the selectivity of Frontline that is responsible for the superior performance in simulated practice or is it the training model that emphasises direct practice skills? It is not possible for the evaluation to answer this question decisively. We attempted to get somewhere near it by matching participants on Frontline's minimum academic requirements, but it has to be acknowledged that this is far from a perfect matching. Within the (roughly) 2000 applicants for Frontline Cohort One, only around 1 in 20 were selected. The selection process was very rigorous, involving psychometric testing and simulated interviews with service users which were set up to be particularly challenging. So matching on minimum academic requirements does not account for all the selection effects.

The matched results are nonetheless interesting, however. Interview quality was rated (by objective assessors who did not know which groups the participants were in) as clearly higher in Frontline graduates, whereas the difference in quality of written reflection was not significant. Numbers were small after matching, and this difference may well have been significant in a larger sample. However, the much clearer difference in interview quality could potentially be interpreted as supporting the emphasis on direct practice skills, including the grading of these, in the Frontline training model. It could possibly offer support for other aspects of the Frontline model, e.g. the concentration on one practice model or the quality of practice learning, but it is only possible to speculate about reasons for the difference, given that selection effects cannot be eliminated.

It should be noted that the written reflection task was limited because it was so brief. It did not allow for in-depth reflection and application of theory. On that note, and referring to the descriptive statistics in Tables 5.4-5.7, it is interesting to observe that the only criterion where the Frontline participants were not rated more highly than the comparison groups was the application of theory, namely 'how students theoretically conceptualise substantive issues in the scenario and for their practice'. This was consistent across both scenarios, with these being independently rated – i.e. not by the same assessors. The differences were very small – Frontline participants were 0.12 and 0.08 lower than high

tariff university students on a 1-5 scale, which equates to 3% and 2% difference for the two scenarios, and this apparent difference is not statistically significant. However, it is an interesting finding. It might reflect the fact that Frontline trainees are schooled in one main theoretical perspective, compared to multiple perspectives on mainstream programmes, and that relatively narrow scope was reflected in the assessors' scores.

The lower confidence ratings, or self-efficacy, for Frontline trainees, despite their higher scores in simulated practice, are very interesting to note. It may be testament to their sophisticated qualities of reflection that they have less faith in their own abilities. It may also relate to their experience of being in an intensive practice environment from a very early stage in their training and having trained for only one year, as compared to the two or three of mainstream social work students.

6.0 Overall discussion and conclusion

The Frontline pilot was funded by DfE in the context of some concerns about social work education, namely low minimum entry requirements, some lack of consistency across courses and graduate readiness to practice (Laming Report, 2009, SWTF, 2010, Munro, 2011). The Frontline training model has been the subject of notable controversy amongst many social work educators, who cite its narrow focus on child protection, its short duration, and its delivery costs in a climate of austerity, particularly when the CPD needs of the existing workforce are insufficiently met. Another criticism has, hitherto, been the lack of evidence to support the model. This evaluation does now provide some initial positive evidence. However, much is yet to be discovered about the career trajectories of Frontline trainees, their impact on children's services more generally and their impact on outcomes for children and families. (It should be noted that there is also little robust evidence of the impact on children and families of social workers from traditional training routes.)

6.1 Summary of findings

The majority of the Frontline participants are female, although there were relatively higher numbers than men as compared to mainstream courses. This finding is promising in light of the steady decline in the numbers of men applying for social work courses and the poorer progression rates of men who do undertake social work study (Evaluation of Social Work Degree Qualification in England Team, 2008; Parker and Crabtree, 2014; Schaub, 2015). Frontline participants are more likely to be younger, white, and from higher socioeconomic backgrounds (as described in chapter 3.2.1). It should be noted that there are at least as many BME Frontline trainees as there are BME people in the general population of England and Wales. However, we might expect the proportion to be higher for social work trainees, given the occupational traditions in some ethnic groups (Lewis, 2000).

Frontline participants are more likely to have been awarded a first class grade for their undergraduate degree and to have attended a Russell Group university. They are less likely to have had relevant work experience or to have been employed full-time prior to Frontline. Compared to survey respondents from Masters programmes in high tariff universities, a higher percentage of Frontline participants saw themselves staying as social work practitioners for the foreseeable future.

Frontline participants felt that the Summer Institute had provided the foundation required for learning in practice and commended the calibre of teaching staff, particularly valuing hearing from experts in the field (see chapter 4.1.1). However, the lack of relevant work experience of some Frontline participants meant they struggled to contextualise learning and as a consequence some materials failed to resonate more meaningfully until practical experience was gained. Whilst they quickly overcame this, it is perhaps worth noting that the current requirement that participants undertake two days of shadowing in

the placement LA, with one day in an adult setting, may not be sufficient for those with little or no previous experience.

There were varying levels of satisfaction in relation to the perceived relevance of teaching to current assignments and caseload for Cohort One. Because of this, there had been some modifications for Cohort Two so that both recall days and the bespoke curriculum, delivered by the Academic Tutor, were closely linked to academic output (see chapter 4.1.4). High levels of satisfaction were reported in relation to the Consultant Social Workers and the Academic Tutors, with participants stating they were well-supported and challenged at appropriate levels throughout the year. Of particular note was the participant unit as a source of both learning and support (described in chapter 4.4.1). There was some question as to whether participants would continue to adopt this method of working in the ASYE year when LAs do not operate a unit model, although participants themselves felt that they would endeavour to maintain this model.

The Frontline programme was designed to bridge the academic-practice gap and the findings demonstrated that close links between the Academic Tutor and Consultant Social Worker served to aid the translation of teaching into practice. Following the novice-expert evolutionary model (chapter 4.5.4), in the first few months participants were reliant on their theoretical knowledge, applying theory regardless of the situation. After about a year, participants were able to modify their approach, with more conscious awareness of how to apply theory and respond appropriately to the situation. Hence, participants claimed to be using both Motivational Interviewing and the parenting programme in their practice and they saw themselves as having adopted a systemic approach to their work although some felt that they wanted more practical experience to fully embed these concepts (see chapter 4.4.2).

The extent to which participants perceived the value and benefits of the adult placement varied (discussed in chapter 4.1.5). In many regards this was due to teething problems with the programme where LAs differed in their approach to attendance at the adult placement and the placements varied in their ability to deliver learning experiences in the allotted times. Participants' views varied, with those on placements with perceived direct relevance to child and family casework valuing them highly whilst other adult placements were perceived as less relevant. This reflects a tension between the generic qualification gained from mainstream routes and Frontline's specific focus on child protection. There is a much wider debate about whether social work education would better prepare social workers by enabling specialism. Narey (2014) argues for a specialised undergraduate degree where students are taught exclusively about child social work in years two and three. Croisdale-Appleby (2014), in contrast, sees the development of high professional capability as based on the incremental move from general to specialised knowledge.

The evaluation did not set out to determine the future sustainability of the Frontline programme but nevertheless some comments were made as to the difficulties of negotiating collaborative agreements between LAs and Frontline and the extent to which

LAs could continue to offer Frontline participants a two-year placement in terms of balancing the initial financial outlay with the retention of trainees as future staff (see chapter 4.2.1). Moreover, the question of how Frontline participants will fare in their ASYE year without the level of support yielded thus far, was queried by CSWs and managers. In this regard, findings from a study by the Dartington Social Research Unit, which Frontline received funding from the Queen's Trust to commission, may shed light on how Cohort One trainees fare in their second year.

A simulated practice exercise was conducted to assess Frontline participants' performance on some specific interview skills (audio recorded) and a brief written reflection on the interview, comparing their performance with that of students on mainstream social work programmes. Two scenarios were used – a mother with learning difficulties and a teenage child whose relationship with his parents had broken down (Appendix 6). The assessment criteria, based on the existing work of Marion Bogo and colleagues in Canada, were aspects of generic social work skills and knowledge. Two experienced practice assessors rated each audio recording, with no prior knowledge of whether they were assessing Frontline trainees or students from mainstream programmes.

The results of the exercise were positive for Frontline, because when all simulated practice participants were compared, the Frontline trainees were rated more highly than the comparison groups for quality of both interview and written reflection. Interviewing quality was also more highly rated when Frontline participants were compared with only those mainstream students whose academic qualifications would have made them eligible to apply for Frontline. In this matched comparison, however, the difference in written reflection quality was not significant. Despite being rated more highly for interview and written reflection skills, Frontline trainees had significantly lower confidence levels than the comparison groups. This last finding could be seen to question the use of self-efficacy measures alone for evaluating the outcomes of social work education. Ideally, self-efficacy should be studied alongside objective measures of practice quality.

The findings were also mostly positive for mainstream students. The scores for both comparison groups – high tariff university Masters students and other university students (UG and PG) - were above the mid-point on a 1-5 scale for quality of interview skills. For written reflection quality, the scores were lower for all participants, including Frontline trainees. For the high tariff university Masters group the written reflection score was just above the mid-point. Less positively, the written reflection score for the mixed group (UG and PG) of other university students was 0.28 below the mid-point of a 1-5 scale.

6.2 Limitations of the evaluation

The evaluation does not tell us about a range of key issues. It does not address the concern of whether or not Frontline trainees will stay in the profession, as the DfE commission was for research on the first year and a half of the programme. Ideally some

longitudinal research will be commissioned in future, as was recently done for Step-Up graduates.

The evaluation does not address some important aspects of practice quality, such as how well Frontline graduates will function within organisations, including advocating for service users. It has not assessed their ability to apply more in-depth social science knowledge, as the written reflection task, although considering theoretical integration up to a point, was limited in only giving participants 15 minutes for completion; this decision was taken to reduce participant burden.

The evaluation has also not assessed practice quality in real everyday practice encounters, but only in the artificial environment of a simulated interview. This was necessary in order to standardise the assessment. Ideally, practitioners qualifying from a variety of different programmes would also be observed in real practice, perhaps using consistent assessors to achieve some standardisation. Such a design was not feasible within the funding and time limits of the current evaluation. One of the DfE's objectives was to assess whether Frontline produced 'outstanding social workers'. This was a very ambitious objective and our evaluation design has not been able to fully meet it. To find out whether social workers are 'outstanding' it is really necessary to assess in some depth their practice post-qualification with real service users.

It has not been possible to fully isolate the effects of Frontline's selection and training model, as the Frontline assessment centre involved selection of the students with the best interpersonal skills out of the large number who were eligible for the programme. A possible future study that could shed light on the impact of the training would be a before-after study where practice skills were tested at the start of the programme and then again at the end, perhaps comparing Frontline with other routes to qualification.

6.3 Conclusion

Some criticisms of Frontline can be answered by the evaluation evidence. For example, concerns that Frontline offers a narrow focus on child protection and not other aspects of social work with children and families (Croisdale-Appleby, 2014) were not borne out in what we found. The abilities of Frontline trainees to establish relationships with families were favourably commented on in case study local authorities and the skills that were highly rated in the simulated practice included developing collaborative relationships and goal setting. Any concern that Frontline trainees might practise a more confrontational child protection approach was not evidenced and this would have been wholly inconsistent with the practice model of motivational interviewing.

As for other criticisms, the move away from generic social work is inherent in the Frontline model and the contrasting learning experience in an adult setting was not universally positive in the case study local authorities. The short duration of training is also inherent in the model. It should be noted, however, that the focus in some criticisms

on the five-week Summer Institute (e.g. Henri, 2013) does not take into account the time that Frontline trainees spend on recall days, as well as reading and assignment writing throughout the period of practice learning. The cost of Frontline is being addressed in the separate economic evaluation.

'Elitism' is a term that has been used to describe Frontline trainees. The recruitment of graduates with high prior academic achievement and the best possible interpersonal skills is indeed inherent in the Frontline model. Their practice skills, insofar as they can be tested via a simulated interview, appear to be consistently better than those of other recent social work graduates who took part in the evaluation exercise. Therefore, even if there were to be difficulties in them fitting into local authority teams because of negative perceptions of their elite status, the benefits of improvement in practice quality could be predicted to outweigh the potential disadvantages of Frontline being regarded as elitist.

Frontline has highly selective recruitment criteria. This is possible because of the considerable resources it puts into recruitment at universities (supported by the offer of a stipend to trainees) and selection at an assessment centre. As one of the teaching staff put it during the Summer Institute, a major function of Frontline is to be a very effective 'recruitment agency'. Whether this selectivity means that trainees already have superior interpersonal skills, or whether these stem primarily from the distinctive practice-based training model, cannot be known from our study design. That said, there is room for an optimistic interpretation of the data in support of Frontline's emphasis on practice skills and in particular micro-skills of interaction. It is possible that the positive outcomes were due to well-resourced quality placements and other aspects of the training model such as focusing on one theoretical framework and teaching two specific evidence-based approaches. However this can only be speculation, given that the evaluation design cannot isolate the effect of the training from selection effects.

In-depth understanding of social science and its application has not been tested, but in a short written reflection straight after an interview with a (simulated) service user, Frontline trainees were rated higher than comparison students, albeit the difference was not statistically significant once Frontline participants were matched with mainstream students who met Frontline's minimum selection criteria.

How likely Frontline trainees are to stay in the profession and how their careers will develop remains to be seen. The impact of Frontline-trained practitioners on child and family outcomes is the most important effect of all but this could not be tested in this evaluation. It will be important to consider the effects of Frontline on service user outcomes at some future point. There is a general dearth of robust outcomes research in statutory child and family social work, so the same point can be made about students qualifying from mainstream social work programmes.

Overall, the evaluation results could be taken as a positive message for social work in England, with a cohort of highly skilled practitioners joining the workforce. Their skills include developing collaborative relationships with service users, cultural competence

and conducting holistic assessments. However, we report the findings in a challenging context for mainstream social work education. With sector concerns over funding, the announcement that fast-track programmes will expand may perpetuate concerns about Frontline as a concept.

It is not for this report to suggest some pragmatic rapprochement between Frontline and those social work academics in England who are opposed to the model. Yet, it is the case that Frontline is to be expanded and at government level it appears to enjoy cross-party support. It would therefore be unwise to view it as some short-lived experiment that will somehow fade away if it is ignored. In such a context, universities and Frontline might wish to consider bridge-building with a view to mutually shaping the programme in order to optimise its benefits to students, service users and employers. After all, mainstream programmes will continue to run and universities are the main source of research evidence that is so necessary to underpin good practice in children's services. Without any formal connection to mainstream university research, the extent to which the Frontline programme is evidence-based could substantially weaken in the coming years.

Given the difficult discussions between local authorities and Frontline around staff retention that were noted during the Cohort Two case studies, Frontline may wish to explore ways to address the concerns of some children's services about the opportunity costs of participating without some guarantee of recruiting from the programme.

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Appendix One: Family interview information sheet



Independent evaluation of the Frontline pilot



The Department of Education have asked us to review the Frontline social work training programme. This training programme is new and we are interested in how well the trainee social workers are doing. To do this, we'd like to interview some of the families they work with about what they think of their trainee social worker. We want to interview any family member who has worked with the trainee social worker and is willing to be interviewed. We will interview all members of a family or just one or two if the others do not want to take part.

The information from the interviews will be used to assess the trainee social worker and will have no effect on your family. We will not tell children's services what you tell us about your social worker. Your social worker will not tell us anything about you or your family.

What will an interview involve?

- The interview will be done by Nina Maxwell (project researcher).
- We'll do the interview on the telephone (or skype, if you prefer). If you want to be interviewed, sign the form on the next sheet and say when you would like to be called and on which telephone number. Nina will phone you at that time.
- We'll ask you some general questions about your experience of social workers.
- We'll record the interview. It will take about 15 minutes.
- Later on we'll type up the interview and replace any real names and places with false ones so no-one will know who was interviewed.
- The interview will be confidential (as long as nothing is said which makes us think someone is in danger).
- The recording will be kept safe on the university computer system and only two people will have any access to it - Nina Maxwell and Jonathan Scourfield (research manager).
- After five years the recording will be deleted.

Take some time to think about whether you'd like to take part. You are free to say 'yes' or 'no' - it won't affect the services you receive from children's services or any other agencies.

If you have any questions now or later our contact details are:

Dr Nina Maxwell
Cardiff School of Social Sciences
Cardiff University
Glamorgan Building
King Edward VII Avenue CF10 3WT
Tel: 0770 802 1189 Email: MaxwellN2@Cardiff.ac.uk

Appendix Two: Mapping of Bogo *et al.* criteria for assessing practice quality against English frameworks for social work education

Mapping of the criteria from the work of Marian Bogo and colleagues against:

- The Professional Capabilities Framework (College of Social Work)
- The Knowledge and Skills for Child and Family Social Work Statement (Department for Education)
- The Standards of Proficiency for Social Workers (Health and Care Professions Council)

Assessment of Student Practice

Assessment criteria for simulated interview ⁴	Professional Capabilities Framework (Completion of qualifying programmes)	Health and Care Professions Council: standards of proficiency	Knowledge and skills for child and family social work statement
1. Develops and uses a collaborative relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Intervention and Skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Be able to communicate effectively ● Be able to work appropriately with others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Relationships & effective direct work ● Communication
2. Conducts an eco-systemic assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Knowledge ● Intervention and skills ● Critical reflection & analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Be able to draw on appropriate knowledge and skills to inform practice ● Understand the key concepts of the knowledge base relevant to their profession 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Child and family assessment
3. Sets the stage for collaborative goal setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Values and Ethics ● Intervention and Skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Be able to communicate effectively ● Be able to work appropriately with others ● Be able to draw on appropriate knowledge and skills to inform practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Relationships & effective direct work ● Communication
4. Demonstrates cultural competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Values and Ethics ● Diversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Be aware of the impact of culture, equality and diversity on practice ● Be able to practise in a non-discriminatory manner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Child & family assessment ● The role of supervision

⁴ Derived from Social Work Performance Rating Scale developed by Bogo, Regehr *et al.*, (2009). See <http://research.socialwork.utoronto.ca/hubpage/resources-2>

Assessment of Student Reflection

Assessment criteria for written task ⁵	Professional Capabilities Framework (Level 4: Completion of qualifying programmes)	Knowledge and skills for child and family social work statement	Health and Care Professions Council: standards of proficiency
1. Conceptualisation of Practice/Use of Knowledge (Content and Process of conceptualisation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Diversity ● Rights, Justice and Wellbeing ● Knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Analysis, decision-making, planning & review ● Child development <i>and/or</i> ● Adult mental ill-health, substance misuse, domestic violence, physical ill-health and disability <i>and/or</i> ● Abuse and neglect of children <i>and/or</i> ● The law & the family & youth justice system ● The role of supervision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Be aware of the impact of culture, equality and diversity on practice ● Understand the key concepts of the knowledge base relevant to their profession ● Be able to draw on appropriate knowledge and skills to inform practice ● Be able to reflect on and review practice
2. Self-Regulation (Affective and Cognitive elements)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Professionalism ● Intervention and skills ● Critical Reflection and Analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Relationships & effective direct work ● Analysis, decision-making, planning & review ● The role of supervision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Be able to maintain fitness to practise ● Be able to reflect on and review practice ● Be able to assure the quality of their practice ● Be able to practise safely & effectively within their scope of practice
3. Professional Development (in terms of both Learning and Growth)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Professionalism ● Critical Reflection and Analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Analysis, decision-making, planning and review ● The role of supervision ● Child and family assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Be able to reflect on and review practice ● Be able to assure the quality of their practice

Appendix Three: Criteria used for simulated practice exercise

Adapted from Bogo et al. (2009) and as presented to students a few days in advance

⁵ Derived from Social Work Reflection Questions and Rating Scale developed by Bogo, Mylopoulos, et al. (2009). See <http://research.socialwork.utoronto.ca/hubpage/resources-2>

ASSESSMENT OF PRACTICE IN INTERVIEWS

The simulated practice interviews will be assessed using four assessment criteria. For each of these, assessors will appraise student performance using the more detailed guidance indicated for each of the four criteria and by circling the number corresponding to their view of the student's performance:

● **One: the student develops and uses a collaborative relationship**

Introduction

1	2	3	4	5
Does not introduce self or role	Can introduce self/role, no agency description	Introduces self and role but is general or vague about agency's service	Introduce, self, role, agency some setting of context	Sets the stage by introducing self, role in context of agency's service

Response to service user: general content and process (about communications and feelings)

1	2	3	4	5
Inappropriate or no response to service user's communications and feelings	Responds to service user with cognitive, behavioural or factual comments. No response to feelings expressed or implied	Mainly task and event focused with occasional warm and empathic response to service user's feelings	Frequent warm and empathic responses to service user's concerns, expressed and implied feelings	Consistent warm and empathic responses to service user's concerns, expressed and implied feelings and assists service user in putting feelings into words

Response to service user: specific to situation (e.g. about frustration at parental demands, uncertainty about sexual orientation, frustration concerning the demands of parenting)

1	2	3	4	5
Does not provide realistic reassurance or support or makes negative comments	Occasional realistic reassurance and support on a mechanical level	Some realistic reassurance and support, not consistent, and sometimes mechanical	Consistent realistic reassurance and support with some empathic connection	Effective, consistent and empathic realistic reassurance and support

Focus of interview

1	2	3	4	5
Interview has no coherence or rigidly follows student's own agenda	Minimal direction but still too focused on own agenda and pace too fast or slow	Provides direction but moves too quickly or too slowly to change topic	Provides direction, pace more appropriate; some transitions rough and not always responsive to service user concerns	Provides direction to the interview maintaining focus flow, and smooth transitions while remaining responsive to service user concerns

● Two: the student conducts an assessment of the person in their environment

Presenting problem

1	2	3	4	5
Does not address presenting problem, current situation and/or precipitant event	Sole focus on presenting problem; does not identify current situation and/or precipitant event	Can identify presenting problem; gathers minimal/some information about current situation and precipitant event	After some time identifies presenting problem, precipitant event and situation	Efficiently identifies present problem, situation and precipitant with linkages between them

Systemic assessment: nuclear family, extended family, neighbourhood, friends, employment, school

1	2	3	4	5
Comprehensive systemic inquiry missing	Struggles to focus on more than one system	Identifies some of the most obvious systems but connections between them lacking	Able to identify all relevant systems and some connections between problem and systems	Complete systemic assessment with depths of linkages between them

Strengths

1	2	3	4	5
Focus is exclusively on problems and deficits with no attention to service user strengths	Minimal inquiry about strengths; still mainly problem focused	Begins to explore service user strengths the service user has not presented; less focus on problem	More than beginning at inquiring and exploring strengths in a way service user has not presented	Consistent and effective inquiry exploration and identification of strengths in a way service user has not presented

● **Three: the student sets the stage for collaborative goal setting**

Involves service user

1	2	3	4	5
Does not ask service user what he/she needs	Tells service user what he/she needs	Occasional inquiry about what service user believes he/she needs; no exploration of client rationale	Inquires in a directive manner about what service user believes he/she needs; little exploration of client rationale	Collaborative, consistent and effective inquiry about and exploration of what service user believes he/she needs

● **Four: the student demonstrates cultural competence**

Culture/gender/race/ sexual orientation/age/ability

1	2	3	4	5
Appears uncomfortable with cultural differences	Inconsistent recognition of cultural cues and issues; interest in, and openness to, cultural difference	Displays interest and comfort with exploration of cultural difference	Consistent recognition of obvious cultural issues; asks about, listens to and explores some cultural issues	Demonstrates comfort in consistent effective exploration of cultural cues and content for understanding; appreciate cultural identity

In addition to the four criteria above, there will be an overall assessment of the knowledge and skills demonstrated by the student

Again, practice assessors will indicate their impression of student performance using the following more detailed guidance and by circling the number corresponding to their view of the student's level of competence:

1	2	3	4	5
Inferior	Poor	Needs more training	Good	Excellent
No initiative or response to components of relationship building and assessment, no organisation or cohesion	Very beginning and inconsistent attempts to take initiative, assess and build relationship, inconsistent organisation and cohesion	Some consistent initiative and response to some components of relationship building and assessment, consistent organisation and cohesion	Most often consistent in response to most components of relationship building and assessment, integrated organisation and cohesion	Effective consistent perceptive initiative to all components of relationship building and assessment, efficient organisation and cohesion

ASSESSMENT OF WRITTEN REFLECTIONS

The written reflections will be assessed using three assessment criteria. As for the interviews, assessors will appraise student performance using the more detailed guidance indicated for each of the three criteria and by circling the number corresponding to their view of the student's performance.

● **One: the student is able to conceptualise their practice/make use of knowledge**

Content:

How students theoretically conceptualise substantive issues (e.g. culture, diversity, mental/emotional health, neglect) in the scenario and for their practice

Does not use theoretical concepts to understand the issues. Is descriptive in discussing the scenario and approach to practice.	Uses some theoretical concepts to understand and analyse the relevant issues in the scenario. Some link of concepts to approach to practice.	Uses multiple theoretical concepts to understand and analyse the relevant issues in the scenario and approach to practice.
1	2	3

How students conceptualise issues of culture and diversity in their practice

Seems unaware of diversity issues and their potential impact on the case.	Recognises the relevant diversity issues but unable to effectively integrate them into their approach to the case.	Recognition of complexity in dealing with diversity issues. Dealing with diversity is integrated into practice.
1	2	3

Process:

How students' past knowledge and experience impact their approach to the case

Seeks to inappropriately apply a past solution to solve current case.	Seeks to appropriately apply a past solution to solve current case.	Past knowledge is used as a starting point for exploration of the current case. Knowledge informs thinking about the case, but does not bound thinking.
1	2	3

● **Two: the student is able to assess their own practice**

Cognitive:

What students focus on and talk about regarding their performance

Focus on 'excusing' performance due to examination factors.	Self-assessment of performance, particularly focused on their own reactions and emotions. Explores particular strengths and weaknesses of the performance.	Self-assessment of practice, emphasis on what they can take from this experience and apply to their practice. Reflective conceptualisation of practice strengths and weaknesses.		
1	2	3	4	5

● **Three: the student is able to think about their professional development**

Learning:

What students focus on and talk about regarding their learning

Accrues 'facts' about the case e.g. service user issues, characteristics.	Identifies principles of practice that were in evidence in the case.	Considers how current case informs broader practice.		
1	2	3	4	5

Growth:

What students say about how they would integrate this experience into their practice

Does not consider impact to practice.	Considers ways in which this experience could impact future performance with a similar service user.	Emphasises the role of each new experience in the process of continuous reformulation of practice.		
1	2	3	4	5

Finally, please remember: it is vitally important that you do not discuss or share any information about the evaluation directly with friends you may have on other social work programmes, including the Frontline programme, or on social media. This would compromise the data collection process so we need to ask you to keep all aspects of your experience of the evaluation completely confidential, including the above information.

Appendix Four: Simulated practice information sheet



EVALUATION OF THE FRONTLINE PILOT PROGRAMME

INVITATION TO TAKE PART IN SIMULATED PRACTICE INTERVIEWS - INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

THE EVALUATION

We have been commissioned by the Department of Education to complete an independent evaluation of the Frontline pilot programme. Frontline is an accelerated entry scheme which aims to recruit and train outstanding graduates to be children's social workers. As part of this evaluation we are developing an innovative measure of social work practice using simulated practice interviews, to see whether we can detect any difference between the knowledge and skills of students on conventional social work courses and those on the Frontline pilot.

We are looking for students from mainstream programmes who have a child and family interest to take part in a simulated practice interview. Students may have taken a child and family pathway through their course or had a placement in a child and family setting.

The evaluation has been approved by the Cardiff School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

WHAT WILL IT INVOLVE?

We are setting up a series of simulated practice interviews for students who are about to qualify from Frontline and for also those who are about to complete their social work qualification through other more conventional social work programmes.

In these simulated practice interviews, students will be introduced to cases which will be based on scenarios commonly faced by qualified social workers. Service users will be played by professional actors and students will engage in discussions with the actors on a one-to-one basis. Interviews will be recorded so that their content can be analysed.

Here is what we are planning:

- Students will take part in two 10/15-minute simulated practice interviews, one with a teenage child and one with a parent. They will also spend about 10 minutes completing a short written reflective exercise in relation to each of these interviews.

- The recordings of the simulated practice interviews, with accompanying written reflections, will be divided up amongst pairs of experienced practice assessors for analysis. They will not be told which social work programmes the students in the recordings are from and will be asked to score the student's practice and reflections using an agreed generic assessment criteria. These criteria will have been developed in consultation with educators, practitioners and service users and will have been tested with a pilot student group.
- The criteria will be sent to all those who sign up to take part a few weeks before the simulated practice events take place.
- We guarantee complete anonymity and only the research administrator will know your identity and which type of course you trained as a social worker on. All recordings will be securely handled and will not be used for anything other than the evaluation.
- Student data will only be used for the purposes of the evaluation, unless anything happens which makes us really worried about your fitness to practice, in which case we would have to contact your Programme Director.

WHY GET INVOLVED?

- This is an opportunity to be involved in an important policy evaluation.
- This is a chance to safely rehearse your practice skills in a truly unique way.
- We will share with you your individual score for each of the assessment criteria –only you will see this.
- The simulated practice session will only take an hour and we will pay you £30 for your involvement.

WHAT'S NEXT?

- If there are enough volunteers from your university we will run an event in June, just after you have completed your last pieces of assessed work.

For more information please contact Dr Teresa de Villiers (devillierst@cardiff.ac.uk)

PLEASE PROVIDE US WITH YOUR CONTACT DETAILS ON THE NEXT PAGE IF YOU'D LIKE TO TAKE PART

YOU ARE WELCOME TO DETACH AND KEEP THIS FRONT PAGE

I would like to take part in the simulated practice event in June, as part of the evaluation of Frontline, and I understand that someone from the research team will be in touch with further details

My name _____

My university _____

My course (e.g. BSc, MA) _____

My email address _____

My phone number _____



Appendix Five: Reasons for declining participation in simulated practice

High tariff universities

- I have not signed up because I will not be available on the day
- I am on holiday otherwise I'd of done it. Possible to offer it 2 times a year – winter/summer?
- I have not signed up to this as I will be at Drayton Manor Theme Park!
- I don't agree with the structural conditions and variables of the assessments; I don't think it will give a realistic benchmark in terms of people's social work skills, both assessment and communication. This is because ultimately the simulated scenarios are only ten minutes in duration, and having worked in Child Protection and obtaining a job in Child Protection upon qualification, I believe a significant aspect of a students' capabilities is the extent to which they can manage their own expectations and sense of self day-in, day-out within a child protection setting. Being able to make that transition is contingent on a student's emotional resilience; this cannot be accurately tested within a simulated environment.
- Would love to, but will be back at home! Sorry.

Other universities

- I am tired.
- I do not do well with role play and have other commitments in July. I find reflection very hard and don't think I would be great in that part.
- I would not be able to participate because I am due to have a baby in a few weeks' time.
- I would not like to participate because I think I will be unable to travel back to [redacted] to participate.
- I do not wish to participate due to work commitments.
- All assessed out.
- Due to starting my placement late, this means that I am unavailable for the next 2 months.
- I am unable to participate due to not completing my placement until the end of July and I am located in [redacted]. Also it would cost me over £20 in travel.
- I am not interested in taking part because 1) it is too short notice and at this point in my degree I have no availability. 2) Also after being observed and assessed in my final year and just attending 4 job interviews of recent, I feel all scrutinized out and need a break from being assessed before I start work and start being assessed again for ASYE!
- It was presented that the event would be better suited to students that were achieving well academically; therefore, I feel this is not suitable for me as I have struggled in the last couple of years. I also have confidence issues in interview scenarios.
- Not interested, don't like to participate in roleplay.

Frontline

- Because although I strongly feel simulated interviews are a very useful element of the course, at this point in the year this is not something I would like to do. It would have been better to have scheduled this for earlier in the year, for example as part of a recall day slightly earlier in the year – although I understand that it is being done at the finish of our programme. Perhaps one of our direct observations (eg the last one) could have been simulated and used for the research.
- Have had a lot of evaluation over the last year (from Frontline and from LA) and don't want extra. Not personal to this evaluation, sorry.
- I'm unsure but if you need extra people then please contact me – I'm unsure because it seems like an extra stress on a weekend training thing.

Appendix Six: Simulated practice case scenarios

Parent case scenario:

Lisa is a white woman in her mid-late twenties. She has moderate learning difficulties, including very limited literacy skills. Lisa was initially assessed as having learning difficulties when she was aged 10. She attended a special school throughout her secondary school years and left at 16 without any qualifications. Since that time, Lisa has lived on benefits.

Lisa is the mother of Jimmy who is aged three years. Jimmy's father is a former boyfriend of Lisa's who has not been in touch since the early stages of her pregnancy and has never had any contact with Jimmy. Lisa thinks that he has moved away and has no contact details for him. When Jimmy was born, Lisa was still living at home with her mum and dad and some of her siblings. Lisa was allocated a Council flat when Jimmy was aged six months (her parental home being overcrowded). Jimmy and Lisa often stay over at Lisa's parents' house in preference to the flat. Lisa describes their living arrangements as "back and fore".

Independent living is quite challenging for Lisa. Her family gave her a lot of support when she first had her flat – they gave her furniture and her mum did some decorating. But Lisa does not budget her income very effectively and this has led to her frequently running out of money. She regularly borrows from her parents and siblings for things like fuel bills. Lisa's brother and two of her three sisters have children themselves and have passed on clothes, toys and equipment for Jimmy. Quite often Lisa gives these things away to friends and neighbours, however, or loses things. Lisa's family remain supportive but do get exasperated at times with what they see as her constant need for help.

Lisa has not had a boyfriend since Jimmy's dad. She says that she gets bored and lonely being in the flat with just Jimmy for company and as he has got older she frequently complains that she "can't cope" with him alone. She does not enjoy playing with Jimmy and is unable to read to him. Lisa doesn't really have a routine and Jimmy's mealtimes and bedtimes are often haphazard; she has no real awareness of Jimmy's nutritional needs and usually feeds him sugary cereal or chips. Lisa is happiest when her mum or one of her sisters is around to help with looking after Jimmy. She also regularly leaves Jimmy with different family members for a few days at a time for what she calls "my time out". Over the past few months Lisa has started leaving Jimmy overnight with different friends who live locally. Lisa has a high turnover of friends so the people Jimmy is sometimes left with are not people who Lisa knows at all well.

Jimmy is small for his age and his speech is not very well developed. Other developmental milestones are slightly delayed. For example, he is not yet fully toilet trained and this seems to be because Lisa finds it more convenient to keep him in nappies most of the time. Also, he already has tooth decay because he is not supervised in brushing. Jimmy has become used to being cared for not only by Lisa but alternatively by different family members in their different homes. He also seems used to being left with relative strangers. When in Lisa's sole care, Jimmy often goes unfed for periods,

unwashed and is often without appropriate clothing because Lisa has left this somewhere.

Lisa has had the same health visitor since Jimmy was six months old. To date, Lisa has been accepting of the health visitor's involvement – although she sometimes forgets appointments. More recently, however, Lisa has become rather antagonistic towards the health visitor. She has described her as “a lazy cow” who doesn't do enough for Jimmy and Lisa and is instead “always complaining” and even as “spying on” Lisa.

Lisa's demeanour:

Chatty in an unfocused and distracted way, i.e. ready to talk about herself (her interests, likes and dislikes etc.) but not very interested in talking about Jimmy or his care. Stropky and uncooperative when asked to focus on Jimmy. Not particularly defensive about the deficits in her care of Jimmy (rather disinterested) but cross that people don't seem to realise how put upon she is by the responsibility of parenting and don't take enough account of her.

Verbatim statements to be made by Lisa:

- “I like your top/shirt”
- “I shouldn't have to do it [Jimmy's parenting] all myself. It's too much”
- “What about me? All anyone wants to talk about is Jimmy”
- “If my mates want to take him, why shouldn't they?”
- “I don't know how I'm supposed to afford new shoes for him [Jimmy] and pay for my gas and electric”
- My health visitor doesn't even have kids herself. She shouldn't be in that job. Do you have kids?” [asked directly of student]

Instructions to student/social work role:

This is your first meeting with a lone mother with learning difficulties. The health visitor has asked you to see her because of growing concern about her general care of her three year old son.

Your role is to try and engage the mother, get a sense of how she thinks she should be parenting her son and how well she thinks she is achieving this and to explore her personal resources and support networks as these relate to parenting.

Teenage child case scenario:

Jakub is a 16 year old Polish boy who moved to the UK with his parents when he was aged 12. He is an only child and he and his parents have no other family members in the UK.

Jakub has attended Greenfields comprehensive school since his arrival in the UK. The school population is largely white British and on arrival Jakub stood out as markedly different from other pupils. Initially, his limited English and shy nature meant that Jakub engaged very little with other pupils. He experienced a fair amount of teasing, some of which was quite hostile from pupils whose families are negative towards immigration.

Over time, Jakub has become completely fluent in the English language and reads and writes in English very competently. He has a very good school attendance record and has applied himself diligently to his studies. He is now in his final GCSE year and is expected to do well and certainly to achieve the grades required for entry to the Sixth Form College of the school. Jakub has also developed a small group of friends and associates – although he is not seen as having any particularly strong friendships and does not socialise with other pupils outside of school. Although Jakub's school life is now more settled than when he was younger, he continues to experience periodic teasing. In the last couple of years this has often been of a homophobic nature. Jakub does not associate at all with the girls at school.

Jakub's parents own a small convenience store. This is open for long hours daily and Jakub's parents are massively preoccupied with running their business. As he has got older, Jakub has been required by his parents to spend more and more time working in the store. His parents do not show any real interest in Jakub's educational development other than as this is relevant to his ability to work in the family business. They do not engage with the school at all.

At Greenfields, the teaching staff look kindly on Jakub. They have encouraged him to become involved in after school activities such as the Drama Club with a view to strengthening his social relations at school. However, these attempts have been thwarted by Jakub's parents who insist on him returning straight home after school to work in the shop. The upper school pastoral care tutor has had a number of individual conversations with Jakub in which he has disclosed:

- (i) His growing frustration with the constraints placed on him by his parents
- (ii) His ambition to stay on at school into the Sixth Form
- (iii) A growing sense of confusion about his sexual orientation.

Jakub has come to school today in a state of evident upset. He has told the pastoral care tutor that last evening he had the latest in a series of increasingly angry rows with his parents which culminated in him and his father exchanging blows. Jakub says that his father has told him that he must either put even more time into working in the store – or get out as there will no longer be a place for him at home.

Jakub's demeanour:

Quite flat and down, but also evidencing simmering anger. Reasonably communicative.

Verbatim statements to be made by Jakub:

- “They [his parents] won’t let me live”
- “I can’t stand it there” [at home]
- “I don’t know who I am” [referencing social loneliness, lack of compatibility with parents’ wishes and interests and uncertainty as to sexual orientation]
- “It would be better back home [Poland]. I have no one here.”
- “I can’t see a future”

Instructions to student/social work role:

You have been asked to attend at the local comprehensive school in your area to see a 16 year old Polish male pupil who has come to school upset after a bad falling out at home and who school staff are concerned about.

Your role is to try and engage the boy and find out what is going on in his life, what his current problem is and what he thinks he needs.

Appendix Seven: Simulated practice written reflection proforma

WRITTEN REFLECTIVE EXERCISE

Student name and participant number:

Practice Scenario (i.e. LISA or JAKUB):

YOU HAVE 15 MINUTES TO COMPLETE THIS EXERCISE

PLEASE ENSURE THAT YOU ENTER COMMENTS FOR EACH OF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS. YOU SHOULD USE BULLET POINTS TO SUMMARISE YOUR RESPONSES.

PLEASE REMEMBER that it is vitally important that you do not discuss or share any information about your participation in the Frontline evaluation project with friends you may have on other social work programmes, including the Frontline programme, either directly or using social media. This would seriously compromise the data collection process so we need to ask you to keep all aspects of your participation completely confidential, including any documents that we send you.

1. Bullet point list the main issues the service user was dealing with:

2. Can you think of something that you have learned from social work that influenced your approach during this interview?

3. Are there any ideas from other disciplines/from outside social work that influenced your approach during the interview?

4. Did issues related to diversity impact your approach in the interview? Can you give an example?

5. If you continue to work with this service user, what theoretical approach (es) would you consider using?

6. Reflecting on this case and your practice response to it, what are your key ideas as to how this interview experience can inform your future practice?

7. If you could do this interview again what would you do differently, if anything?

8. As you continue to see this service user, what would your next steps be?

Appendix Eight: Simulated practice questionnaire

About you

1. Please state your gender
2. Please state your age
3. Before you started your social work programme, what experience did you have of working in the social care field?
- | | | |
|--|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| | None | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Voluntary work only | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Paid work for less than a year | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Paid work for 1-2 years | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Paid work for more than 2 years | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Your social work programme

4. Have you had any prior experience of simulated social work interviews with actors?
- | | | |
|--|----------|--------------------------|
| | None | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | A little | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | A lot | <input type="checkbox"/> |
5. Have you had any prior experience of other kinds of role play of social work interviews?
- | | | |
|--|----------|--------------------------|
| | None | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | A little | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | A lot | <input type="checkbox"/> |
6. Have you had any prior experience of being recorded while role-playing or in actual practice?
- | | | |
|--|-------|--------------------------|
| | Audio | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Video | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Pressures you might have experienced during your social work programme

7. How easy have you found meeting the competing demands of simultaneous placement and deadlines for submission of academic work?
- | | | |
|--|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| | Very difficult | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Difficult | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Neither easy nor difficult | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Easy | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Very easy | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | This does not apply to me | <input type="checkbox"/> |
8. Do you have any caring responsibilities?
(tick all that apply)
- | | | |
|--|--|--------------------------|
| | Primary carer of a child/children (under 18) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Primary carer of disabled or ill adult (18+) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Secondary carer | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Prefer not to say | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | None | <input type="checkbox"/> |
9. How easy have you found meeting the demands of the course on top of your caring responsibilities?
- | | | |
|--|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| | Very difficult | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Difficult | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Neither easy nor difficult | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Easy | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Very easy | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | This does not apply to me | <input type="checkbox"/> |

10. Have you had any part-time paid work during the course? (If so, how many hours per week on average?) *Please note your answer is confidential and will not be shared with your lecturers* _____

11. How have you found the demands of the course on top of working part-time?

Very difficult	<input type="checkbox"/>
Difficult	<input type="checkbox"/>
Neither easy nor difficult	<input type="checkbox"/>
Easy	<input type="checkbox"/>
Very easy	<input type="checkbox"/>
This does not apply to me	<input type="checkbox"/>

Your qualifications through school or college

12. What grade did you receive in GCSE Maths (or equivalent qualification)?

13. What grade did you receive in GCSE English (or equivalent qualification)?

14. What grades did you get for your top three A levels/ Scottish Highers?
(If you did an alternative qualification – e.g. access course – please state grade)

Other previous qualifications

15. What is your highest previous qualification and subject (e.g. A-levels in English, History and Drama or BSc Sociology)?

16. If you are a graduate, at which university did you do your undergraduate degree? *(leave blank if this does not apply to you)*

17. What class did you receive for your undergraduate degree?

1 st	<input type="checkbox"/>
2:1	<input type="checkbox"/>
2:2	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 rd	<input type="checkbox"/>
I don't have a degree	<input type="checkbox"/>

Your confidence in your practice

0 = no confidence

50 = moderately confident

100 = very confident

18. At this stage of your social work training, how confident are you that you can	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
a. Develop a collaborative relationship with service users?											
b. Assess a service user in the context of their environment?											
c. Set goals with service users collaboratively?											
d. Be culturally competent?											
e. Make use of knowledge in your practice?											
f. Reflectively evaluate your own practice?											
g. Identify your own needs for professional development?											

THANK YOU!

Please write your initials here so we can match this questionnaire up with your recordings and written reflections

.....

Appendix Nine: Recall Days

Day	Subject	Delivered by
1	Structural Family Therapy	Institute of Family Therapy (IFT)
2	Tilda Goldberg Centre (TGC) – University of Bedfordshire	Tilda Goldberg Centre (TGC) – University of Bedfordshire
3	motivational interviewing and Child Protection 2	TGC
4	Introduction to Social Learning and Behavioural Theories Parent Child Game 1	The National Academy for Parenting Research - Kings College (NAPR)
5	Attending Praise Parent Child Game 2	NAPR
6	Tangible rewards Effective Limit Setting Parent Child Game 3	NAPR
7	Time Out Consequences Parent Child Game 4	NAPR
8	Communication and Problem Solving Review of skills	NAPR
9	Systemic practice: developing shared understanding of reflexivity	IFT
10	Milan approach	IFT
11	Narrative approach	IFT
12	Appreciative Enquiry	IFT
13	Court work, child care law in practice	TGC
14	Systemic practice Inter-professional Working	IFT
15	Working with children in care: more advanced work on permanence planning and options for children in care	TGC
16	Advanced child protection work; substance use and misuse	TGC
17	Enhancing emotional resilience for social work practice	TGC
18	Advanced child protection work; child sexual exploitation	TGC
19	Advanced child protection work; domestic violence	TGC
20	Systemic Practice Dialogical Approaches working with individuals	IFT

Appendix Ten: Piloting the simulated practice test

A simulated practice pilot was conducted with 25 postgraduate students from one high UG tariff university. This group comprised 15 second year students and nine first years. Twenty-one were female and four were male. Each took part in two interviews with actors playing service user roles; one interview was with a parent and the other with a teenage child. These were the same practice scenarios as used in the actual evaluation exercise.

The range of mean scores was between 2.33 and 3.78 for the simulated interview and between 1.38 and 3.25 for the written reflection. This was a fairly narrow range – narrower than the Bogo *et al.* (2014) study with 138 students. However, analysis of the results indicated that even with a small sample made up of volunteers who (we could speculate) might be keener and potentially therefore more able students than those who did not volunteer to take part, the test was able distinguish between sub-groups of students. A non-parametric statistical test (Wilcoxon rank sum) was used to assess possible differences between sub-groups, as the group mean scores were not normally distributed, which was perhaps to be expected with a small sample.

Most importantly, as presented in Table 8.1, there was a statistically significant ($p=0.003$) difference in interview quality between first and second years of 0.45 on a 1-5 scale, which is equivalent to a difference of 11%. There was also a significant difference ($p=0.02$) in quality of written reflection between first and second years of 0.34 on a 1-5 scale, which is equivalent to a difference of 9% if these were marks out of 100. Both differences were in the expected direction – i.e. second year scores were higher than first year scores. Given that second year student should rightly have higher scores, this result was taken to support the use of the tests as valid measures of social work interview skills and written reflection on an interview.

Rating of practice skills from simulated interview					
Year group	N	Mean ¹	SD ¹	z^2	p-value ²
First year	9	2.77	0.34	-3.47	0.003
Second year	16	3.22	0.29		
Rating of quality of written reflection					
Year group	N	mean ¹	SD ¹	z^2	p-value ²
First year	8	2.38	0.29	-1.77	0.02
Second year	13	2.72	0.50		

¹ Scale of 1-5

² Wilcoxon rank sum test

Table 8.1: Comparison of first and second year students in pilot exercise

It is interesting to note that in the pilot exercise, students' self-efficacy in relation to interview skills was not correlated with the independent assessors' scores ($r= -0.12$, $p=0.57$). We received ratings of students' performance on placement from 21 practice teachers. These ratings were more generous than those of the independent assessors (i.e. means >4) and weakly correlated with them: $r=0.32$, $p=0.16$ for qualities assessed in

interview and $r=0.36$, $p=0.12$ for qualities assessed by written reflections. These correlations were not significant at the 0.05 level, though they may well be significant in a larger sample. Bogo *et al.* (2014) also found practice teachers to be more generous in their scores and given these authors' scepticism about the objectivity of practice teachers' ratings of students they have a pre-existing relationship with, we did not think this non-significant correlation fundamentally challenged the validity of the test.

Inter-rater reliability was acceptable for the pilot, with intra-class correlation coefficients of 0.702 (interview 1), 0.732 (interview 2), 0.645 (written reflection 1) and 0.715 (written reflection 2), all with a p -value of <0.001 . Scenario 1 scores correlated with Scenario 2 scores: moderately for the interviews ($r=0.56$, $p=0.004$) and more strongly for written reflections ($r=0.74$, $p<0.001$).

To test whether there was indication of selection bias, we compared the level 1 academic grades for students who volunteered to take part in the pilot, compared with those who did not volunteer. The grades of those participating were 3.3% higher on average than the grades of those not participating, with participants scoring 71.76% and non-participants 68.44%. This offers support for the hypothesis that more able students are more likely to volunteer. The difference in grades was just significant at the 0.05 level ($t=20.2$, $p=0.05$), however a difference of 3.3% could be considered small. It is around half the standard deviation for the whole group – i.e. the average distance of all scores from the mean – which was 7.1%.

In addition to the scoring, qualitative feedback was also received from students, actors and assessors, which fed into fine-tuning the process. Feedback from assessors suggests that the questions asked of participants to prompt the written reflection needed to be modified to more explicitly link to the assessment criteria. Students found the written task difficult to complete in 10 minutes so for the actual evaluation exercises this was increased to 15 minutes. Instructions were modified to further clarify that bullet points are sufficient and that participants should write something in response to every question.



Department
for Education

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Reference: DFE-RR507

ISBN: 978-1-78105-569-4

This research was commissioned under the 2010 to 2015 Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government. As a result the content may not reflect current Government policy. The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.

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